

PERCEPTION OF BUSINESS STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY IN SULTANATE OF OMAN TOWARDS ONLINE EDUCATION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Educational institutes across the world have closed due to the Corona virus pandemic frightening the academic schedules. Many educational institutes have shifted to online learning platforms to keep the academic activities going. However, the questions about the willingness, designing and effectiveness of e-learning is still not clearly understood, particularly for a developing country like Oman, where the technical constraints like suitability of devices and bandwidth availability poses a serious challenge. In this study, the researcher focusses on understanding Business Student's perception at one of the Universities in Sultanate of Oman towards the online learning with a sample of 180 students through an online survey. The objective of the study is to understand the problems faced by Business students in pursuing online education and provide suggestions for improving the online education system. Stratified proportionate snowball sampling method is used to collect the data. Spearman correlation and Man Whitney U test is used for analysing the data. Students of both genders have similar opinion that they have technophobia to attend online classes. Students of both genders have different opinion that online learning is stressful during the pandemic. Recommendations are to provide laptops for students with limited income or increase their allowances to buy a laptop and increase the duration of exams due to technical problems.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

online learning, perception, readiness, preferences, academic schedules, technical.

Article History:

Received: 21 Aug 2021

Revised: 11 Sep 2021

Accepted: 28 Nov 2021

Available Online: 05 Dec 2021

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, we have witnessed a huge change and development in the world of education and learning. These changes and developments have brought a huge wave of growth worldwide in the provision of education at all levels. The coronavirus disease COVID-2019 pandemic presents a huge challenge to the education system worldwide, national education systems have never faced before this situation. This COVID-19 pandemic has disturbed the lives of the students in various aspects, depending not only on their level and course of study, but also on the point they have reached in their program. Various institutions, along with teachers and students, have found new opportunities to repair the damage caused and to continue their learning process in digital formats. One of the innovative method of imparting education is E-learning. E-learning have many benefits for students like: Create dialogue rooms and gather students and teachers in them which gives the student greater opportunity to discuss and understand the material, the ease of communication between the teacher and the student at anytime and anywhere even outside the official working hours, and give the student enough opportunity to ask questions regarding the subjects, Use pictures, illustrations and video to explain the material to students etc.

The global impact of Covid-19 is multifaceted and is clearly manifested in almost all sectors, particularly the health, economic and education sectors. Since the announcement of the virus as a pandemic in March 2020. As on 10th March, school and university closures globally due to the COVID-19 has left one in five students out of school. According to UNESCO, by the end of April 2020, 186 countries have implemented nationwide closures, affecting about 73.8% of the total enrolled learners. (UNESCO, 28th April, 2020). According to UNESCO reports, more than 1.5 billion students in about 165 countries have been affected by the lockdown of schools and colleges. As a result, schools, colleges and universities were forced to shift in some way or another to online learning as a replacement for classroom education. Needless to say, the Sultanate of Oman is no exception. The Sultanate of Oman is one of the countries that were relatively being hit hard by COVID-19. As of 17 June 2020, Oman has reported 26,079 confirmed positive cases, 116 deaths and 11,797 recovered cases (Times of

Oman, 2020). Accordingly, the Supreme Committee took strict safety measures, based on which both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education have announced a full lockdown of all public and private schools and higher education institutions in the Sultanate since 15 March 2020. Nevertheless, COVID-19 has been a trigger for educational institutions worldwide to pursue creative approaches in a relatively short notice. During this time, most of the universities have shifted to online mode using Blackboard, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or other online platforms. The primary purpose of this paper is to highlight the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the education system in Oman. More specifically, the paper provides an explanation of the Emergency online teaching at one of the Universities in Sultanate of Oman, in general, and the students' perception about online education in particular.

1.1 Purpose of the study

The coronavirus pandemic has created changes in the teaching-learning process in higher education institutions and has influenced the interaction between teachers and students. As a consequence of the pandemic, universities were constrained to carrying out their activity with students exclusively online. In this regard, many governments took measures in order to avoid spreading the virus and to ensure the continuity of the educational process, and higher education institutes worldwide adopted online learning. Now online learning is considered an option, an alternative to traditional learning, during the Coronavirus pandemic it became an essential element for maintaining the activity of schools and higher institutions. This paradigm shift could generate changes in students' perception of this teaching this way and their perception might be different from the one found in studies previous to the pandemic. Researcher is trying to know whether the online education is acceptable to students for improving their academic performance or they are facing any challenges during online education.

1.2 Statement of the problem

E-learning offers many benefits for students because this type of learning involves student-centeredness, it is more flexible, and it can also improve interaction with students by providing tools such as e-mail, forums, chats, videoconferences etc. Furthermore, internet technologies facilitate the distribution of content at the same time, to a large number of users; E-learning platforms offer many advantages to learners such as control over the content, control over the time spent learning, and thus the process can be adapted according to the learner needs and objectives of learning. When using E-learning platforms there are also some elements that might be considered obstacles in students' process of learning, such as decreased motivation in students, delayed feedback or help due to the fact that teachers are not always available at the time students may need help while learning, or feelings of isolation due to lack of physical presence of classmates. Thus, through this paper, the researcher tried to understand the pros and cons of online education and provide suggestions to improve online education system at one of the Universities in Sultanate of Oman.

1.3 Learning objectives

- To study the online education offered by University to BSD students.
- To understand the problems faced by BSD students in pursuing online education.
- To provide suggestions for improving the online education system at University to BSD students.

1.4 Scope of the study

The scope of the study is confined to students of business studies department at one of the Universities in Sultanate of Oman. It is restricted to the online education system offered at one of the Universities in Sultanate of Oman. The research is conducted between May-June 2021.

1.5 Significance of the study

To understand and evaluate the existing online education system and try to analyse the benefits and obstacles that students experience during online education. The outcomes of the study may be beneficial for policy makers and university administrators for modifying existing online education to be more effective for forthcoming students at one of the Universities in Sultanate of Oman. It is also significant for teachers to initiate necessary changes for imparting online education effectively to the students of University and it gives a learning experience for students to update themselves with the existing system to improve their performance.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chakraborty et al. (2020) in their study opined that the students appreciated the software and online study materials being used to support online education. However, the students felt that online education is stressful and affecting their health and social life. This pandemic has led to a widespread adoption of online education and the lessons we learn now will be helpful in the future. Taylan et al. (2021) in their study revealed that lecturers' preparation for apps, programs, or networks in which they communicate with students has a significant impact on both lecturers' and students' perceptions of online education. In addition to effective online class management, students need an online support desk where they can resolve connectivity or password issues in a timely manner. In the other hand, stated that unprepared instructors have negative effect on the student's perception about e-learning. Where indicated that teachers perceive online education as time-consuming, which would have significant negative effect on the perception of the students. Alaul Alam(June 2020), in his study mentioned that though online education has a number of challenges faced by two main stakeholders; students and teachers, handling all these challenges carefully can have the chance to create a positive atmosphere in the field of education as an alternative

teaching learning resulting in positive outcomes in all regards. Shivangi Dhawan, (2020) Online learning: A panacea in the time of COVID-19 crisis.

The article includes the importance of online learning and Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, & Challenges (SWOC) analysis of e-learning modes in the time of crisis. This article also put some light on the growth of EdTech Start-ups during the time of pandemic and natural disasters and includes suggestions for academic institutions of how to deal with challenges associated with online learning. Mohammed, et al. (2020) in their study 'Perception towards E-Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic in India: The findings of the study reveal students' positive perception towards e-learning and thus acceptance of this new learning system. Manar et al. (2021), examines the ways in which this transition has impacted academia and students and looks at the potential long-term consequences it may have caused. It also presents some of the suggestions made by the studies included in the paper, which may help alleviate the negative impact of lockdown on education and promote a smoother transition to online learning. Agarwal & Dewan, (2020). The findings illustrate that virtual education has emerged as a great tool to deliver education in the current scenario however it is not a substitute for live student-teacher interaction and bonding. Technology has empowered education however deliberation, introspection and planning is required to optimize learning outcomes.

C. Zece (2010) Even though some universities had used E-learning as an additional method before the Coronavirus pandemic, most of them were not ready for a full online experience. Thus, in order to continue to properly deliver education, optimization of the E-learning process is necessary. This optimization should also take into account student-teacher interaction, and the language used in the communication between students and teachers should be clear. Lee & Rha, So & Brush, (2008 & 2009) Instructional Support refers to students' perceptions of techniques by the instructor used for input, rehearsal, feedback, and evaluation. Specifically, this entails providing detailed instructions, designed use of multimedia, and the balance between repetitive class features for ease of use, and techniques to prevent boredom. Instructional Support is often included as an element of Teaching Presence, but is also labeled "structure" Liaw & Huang, (2013) Online Social Comfort refers to the instructor's ability to provide an environment in which anxiety is low, and students feel comfortable interacting even when expressing opposing viewpoints. While numerous studies have examined anxiety. Garrison et al., (2003) Cognitive Presence refers to the engagement of students such that they perceive they are stimulated by the material and instructor to reflect deeply and critically, and seek to understand different perspectives.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study is about perceptions of business students on online education offered at one of the Universities in Sultanate of Oman during Covid. It is an exploratory study and is conducted to evaluate the perceptions of students on online education at university. The data has been collected from the students of business department. To know the intentions of students a questionnaire is administered through google forms. The researcher has collected secondary data from business studies registration department. Determinants influencing the study were tested for its reliability using Cronbach's Alpha test where the respective scores are greater than seven. Hence the validity of the determinants was proved. Out of total population of 947 students in business studies department at one of the Universities in Sultanate of Oman covering all levels, a sample of 281 respondents were planned for research which comprised a mix of different levels. Stratified proportionate snowball sampling method is used to collect data from students of business department at university. The link for Google form (questionnaire) has been sent to the students through the WhatsApp and email. After submitting their responses, they circulated the questionnaire among other students in the business department like snowball sampling. The population is 947 students in business department. Sample size (281) is calculated with 95 percent confidence level. But due to pandemic situation the researchers were able to collect 180 responses and the same was used for analysis.

Table 1. Demographics

Level	Population	Samples	percentage
Diploma-1	363	73	41
Diploma-2	363	38	21
Advanced Diploma	144	40	22
B-Tech	77	29	16
Total	947	180	

Source: BSD-Registration Dated: 16.05.2021

Data is collected from primary and secondary sources. The supportive literature review and the conceptual framework are taken from secondary sources. Primary data is collected with the help of structured questionnaire administered through google forms. The instrument consists of Likert five-point scale to know the perceptions of students and some closed end and open end questions were used to get proper responses. The research is conducted during May-June 2021. The collected is analyzed through tabulation, percentage, graphs and mean, standard deviation, spearman correlation and Man Whitney U test is used for analysing the data.

4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

After collecting the data, SPSS-23 is used for analysing the data by using non-parametric tests like spearman correlation to know the relationship between Technical skills, online classes and University support with performance improvement of students. Mann Whitney U test is used to know the students opinions towards teachers support, stress while attending classes, Internet speed, technophobia and students performance etc. Spearman correlation: Technical skills-Performance improvement. The result shows that there is a positive correlation between technical skills improved by attending online class with the performance improvement through online exams. (Correlation coefficient=.394 and $\alpha=.000$). Online classes-Performance improvement. The result shows that there is a positive correlation between online classes that help them to understand the course materials compared to classroom learning with the performance improvement through online exams. (Correlation coefficient=.484 and $\alpha=.000$). University support-Performance improvement. The result shows there is a positive correlation that the University is helpful for them in offering the resources to learn from home with the performance improvement through online exams. (Correlation coefficient=.414 and $\alpha=.000$)

Table 2. Hypotheses testing results

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	students of both gender have similar opinion that teachers are helpful while studying online	Accept Null Hypothesis
H2	students of both gender have different opinion that their performance is improved through online exams	Reject Null Hypothesis
H3	students of both gender have different opinion that online learning is stressful during the pandemic	Reject Null Hypothesis
H4	students of both gender have similar opinion that they have technophobia to attend online classes	Accept Null Hypothesis
H5	students of both gender have similar opinion that the Internet speed is appropriate to attend online classes	Accept Null Hypothesis
H6	students of both gender have different opinion that Instructor understands the online environment and makes it easy to learn whereas concept	Reject Null Hypothesis

4.1 Mann Whitney U test

Ho-Students of both gender have similar opinion that teachers are helpful while studying online. $\alpha=.061$ which is not significant and their mean ranks are ranging 86.19 and 101.70. Hence, we accept the null hypotheses.

Ho- students of both gender have similar opinion that their performance is improved through online exams. $\alpha=.007$ which is significant and their mean ranks are ranging 84.27 and 106.70. Hence, we reject the null hypotheses.

Ho- students of both gender have similar opinion that online learning is stressful during the pandemic. $\alpha=.014$ which is significant and their mean ranks are ranging 96.19 and 75.70. Hence, we reject the null hypotheses.

Ho- students of both gender have similar opinion that they have technophobia to attend online classes. $\alpha=.654$ which is not significant and their mean ranks are ranging 89.47 and 93.19. Hence, we accept the null hypotheses.

Ho- students of both gender have similar opinion that the Internet speed is appropriate to attend online classes. $\alpha=.895$ which is not significant and their mean ranks are ranging 90.19 and 91.30. Hence, we accept the null hypotheses.

Ho- students of both gender have the similar opinion that Instructor understands the online environment and makes it easy to learn whereas concepts. $\alpha=.024$ which is significant and their mean ranks are ranging 85.27 and 104.10. Hence, we reject the null hypotheses.

The Likert scale data is analysed by using descriptive statistics of the of the respondents' perceptions towards online education at University (N=180) (SDA-1, DA-2, Neutral-3, A-4, SA-5). The result shows that most of the respondents accepts that, fluctuations of internet connectivity during online classes disturbs learning (Mean = 3.79) with S.D. of 1.132, followed by their technical skills has improved while attending online classes. (Mean= 3.70) with S.D. of 1.123 and having technophobia to attend online classes with (Mean = 2.97) with S.D. of 1.116.

5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

Online education is a form of education where students use their home computers through the internet. Online education is electronically supported learning that relies on the Internet for teacher/student interaction and the distribution of class materials. The study is to know the Perception of Business Students at one of the Universities in Sultanate of Oman towards Online Education during Covid-19. First, we collected information about education during Covid-19 in educational institutions. Second, we identify the objectives and significance of study. Third, we collect the relative study. Then, we developed the questionnaire that used for collecting information regarding "Perception of Business students at one of the Universities in Sultanate of Oman towards online education during Covid-19 Pandemic which consist of questions relevant to demographic profile, awareness, understanding and Value addition questions. Then we getting results and findings from all questions that included in questionnaire. Finally, we suggested and recommended many points related to the research. In

this present situation Government, University, families, students, teachers and other stakeholders are joining together and facing this crucial situation. Lot of efforts were taken to continue uninterrupted education to be imparted to the students. In this process the University, teachers and infrastructural facilities faced many challenges and they were able to overcome some challenges and they are improving and finding new ways to minimize these problems. Hence, we can conclude that efforts were taken by all the stakeholders to improve the education system and we expect that the better and improved education system in future days to come which will be competitive in the global world.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

After analysing the data, the researcher proposed some recommendations to improve the education system at university. Best practices introduced during pandemic in similar educational institutions in Oman and other countries should be considered for refining our online education system at university. Develop strategies for training the students and teacher to acquire more self-learning skills to enhance online education. Adopting the Google meet program instead of Microsoft Team because its quality is better, and it is user friendly for students. Providing laptops for students with limited income or increasing their allowances to buy a laptop. Increase the duration of exams due to technical problems. Reducing the duration of classes to preserve the eyes and health of students and teachers as well because of sitting in front of the phone or laptop for consecutive hours leads to serious health issues like obesity, hypertension, diabetic etc. Students, teachers, family, university, industry and other stakeholder are involved in discussions and their inputs should be considered while developing new methods of online education. Online teaching can be improved by using modern techniques that will enhance the capabilities of students in competing nationally and globally. Mid examination and final examination to be conducted in the University to avoid complications and other technical issues. Blended teaching process to be introduced by using online and off line methods for improving the performance of students.

6.1 Scope for further research

Present study is conducted to know the perception of Business students at one of the Universities in Sultanate of Oman towards online education during covid-19. The study can be further extended to all the departments of other Universities for getting better results and to develop appropriate methods to practice during pandemic situation. Further to get broader perspective this study can be conducted at regional and national level to get different opinions and suggestions for improving the online education in Oman.

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