

E-LEARNING: THE LEARNER'S PERCEPTION (OPPORTUNITIS AND CHALLENGES DURING COVID -19 PANDEMIC)

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ABSTRACT:

COVID-19 has impacted almost every sector of the economy especially service sector and the education sector are no exception. Schools, colleges, and institutes are all close and students are at home with the least contact with teachers and friends. Everything is virtual, with no physical movement. The interference in the education system due to the pandemic is a reminder that there is a need for transformation. Digital transformation is the need of the hour to battle against the twist and turns of undefined future. E-learning and teaching have become inevitable. It is now the new normal. In this context this paper tries to analyze the perception of students on e-learning methods. This research is a qualitative and exploratory research in which primary data is used which is collected through an online survey from 140 students who are undergoing e-learning experience at IBRA College of Technology, Oman. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the responses. Pilot study was conducted to identify the factors that influence effective learning. Statistical tools such as factor analysis and multiple regression was used to draw meaningful conclusion. SPSS and AMOS 21 statistical packages were used to analyze the data. This paper becomes significant because the results of this study will enable the policy makers and educators to understand the perception and expectation of the students and to formulate strategies accordingly. This understanding will help to improve the quality and experience of virtual learning process.

Keywords: Perception, e-learning, effective learning, Agreeableness, assertiveness

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Introduction:

The impact of Covid 19 pandemic has brought drastic changes in human life across the globe these days. The spread of this disease has disrupted all walks of daily life including education. It has rapidly affected our businesses activities, dislocated the world trade and movements. Educational institutions have been closed all over the world since the outbreak of this pandemic interrupting learning for more than 1.58 billion learners in 192 nations and prompting all educational institutions to rely on online learning programs and distance learning solutions¹. The impact of the disruption of education is unprecedented mainly in terms of its reach and transformative nature. The exceptional nature of the current situation has demanded a drastic transformation in the current education practices necessitating the wide adoption of technology, distance and virtual learning and teaching practices to mitigate the impact of closure of educational institutions. Teachers and educational institutions have been creative in adopting various technology based strategies as alternative to the

traditional classroom. Various online platforms have been using to reach the learners including video conferencing, google class rooms, Microsoft teams, zoom meetings and other messaging applications including WhatsApp's. Radio programs and national television channels are being used in some countries to broadcast lessons and sending educational materials to students. It is a fact that E learning is the only possible option during this period of crisis to continue learning. At the same time, it is not a perfect substitute for actual class room learning as there are various constraints in implementing the system. In order to understand the actual situation, perceptions of both learners and instructors have to be studied. This paper tries to analyses the perceptions of learners on online learning and teaching. The study is conducted among the students of Ibra College of technology in Oman. In Oman educational institutions are remaining closed since the mid of March and all the educational institutions including universities are following online teaching methods to mitigate the loss of teaching days in the academic calendar.

Literature review

Markus Dell Girik Allo (2020) investigates the perception of learners on online learning in the midst of covid -19 among the students of English study programme of Universities Kristen Indonesia Toraja, Indonesia. The researcher collected data from respondents through an interview method using Whatsapp application. The study reveals that students feel that online learning is very helpful in the midst of covid pandemic. At the same time, the learners point out the difficulties they face during online classes such as lack of network connection, financial issues in arranging such facilities and problems in the implementation of online learning methods. Most of the respondents have the opinion that the teachers should use voice notes effectively while providing instructions for the students. **Emmanuel Aboagye, et al (2020)** examine challenges of students in tertiary institutions in e-learning during covid -19. This study shows that there are lot of challenges facing by the students due to sudden shift from regular classes to online classes. Thus the study suggests that educational institutions should consider the business environment, content, technology, training procedure, human resources and financial consideration while implementing online leaning methods. **WeiBao (2020)** studies the effectiveness of online teaching during covid 19 at Peking University, in Beijing, China. Universities in China have been witnessing the shift from traditional in-class face to face education system to online system since the beginning of covid 19 disease in China. Due to the outbreak of covid 19, Peking University launched live online programme of a total of 2613under graduate online courses and 1824 graduate courses in order to ensure normal teaching operations. However, this study shows that due to sudden emergence of Covid 19, most faculty members are facing the challenges of lack of online teaching experience, early preparation and support from educational technology teams. The study also reveals that university students in China have various difficulties due to lack of good learning attitude, lack of self-discipline, absence of suitable learning materials and good learning environment when they are isolated at home. The study also discusses the role of faculty members in implementing effective instructional strategies to prevent negative learning attitude of

college students and ensure the effectiveness of online teaching. **Sahar Abbasi and Tahera Ayoob (2020)** studies the perceptions of students regarding E-learning during covid-19. The study was conducted at a college of medicine at Pakistan. A total of 382 MBBS students participated in the survey. The study shows that more than 76% of the students use mobile phones for e-learning. The study discloses that despite gaining popularity, digital technology has still not been accepted by the students in Pakistan and hence students did not prefer e-learning over face to face teaching and learning. Students are still motivated towards face to face learning rather than e-teaching. **Bareq Raheem and Amirulla Khan (2020)** studies the role of E learning in covid-19 crisis. The study reviews the concept of E-learning, features of E-learning and its role during covid -19. This study reveals that -learning using various platforms such as Zoom, Teams, Veev ,Google classroom etc. is very useful for the students specially during covid -19 crisis. **Bali.S and Liu M C (2018)** have studied the student's perception towards online learning and face to face learning in the context of social presence, social interaction and satisfaction among the students of National Dong Hwa University, Taiwan. The result reveals that face to face learning perception is higher than online learning in terms of social presence, social interaction and satisfaction. The study also found that some students were very comfortable in online learning because online learning provides a chance to become innovative by using technology. **La Vonne & Karen Sue et.al (2015)** have studied the perception of graduate students regarding online learning. The study reveals that interaction between students and the instructors has a major role in determining the satisfaction of students. The study emphasis the need for varying instructional design and delivery to facilitate students desire to learn. **Dr.David A and Armstrong Ed.(2011)** have studied the undergraduate students experience and perception of online courses and instructional tools. The study reveals that there is a great role for communication in determining and shaping student's perception and approach towards online learning. The study also reveals that the perception of students towards e-learning is shape by both the structure of the learning environment and the nature of assessment used in

online learning environment. **Mahanadi Vinayak & Kalpana. R (2018)** have studied the student's perception of online learning in the context of fast development of information and communication technology and greater exposure of students to it. This study reveals that students have greatly benefitted from e-learning and it has a positive influence on their performance with better understanding of their lessons. It has also a positive impact on student's career. **Cynthia Barnes (2017)** studies the perception of the quality of learning and course satisfaction of online courses. The study also enquires whether the perception of students towards online learning is same for all students regardless of their age, gender and the number of online courses taken. The study reveals that there exists statistically significant difference in perception of learning in online versus face-to-face classes by students with different characteristics.

Research Gap

The Outbreak of Covid 19 has affected the functioning of educational institutions all over the world. As a result, educational institutions have shifted from conventional teaching learning methods to online / e- learning methods. This transition took place since the beginning of 2020 and more than 5 months over after the world is experiencing this change. The literature review reveals that, there are various studies conducted in different countries including China and India to study the effectiveness of online learning and the perception of learners and instructors towards this shift especially after the emergence of Covid 19, but only few studies have been conducted in Oman and other Middle east countries in this context. Higher educational institutions in Oman have been making use of various online platforms like Moodle as a part of their regular teaching methods in Colleges and Universities, but this is the first time after Covid 19 that they have shifted to a full time online teaching/ learning practice. Thus, the researchers feel that there is ample scope for studying the effectiveness of this practice by exploring the perception of learners towards this practice.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the effectiveness of E –learning /online sessions during covid 19period.

2. To study the perception of the students in higher education institutions towards online learning and its quality during Covid -19 pandemic period.
3. To study the challenges and problems faced by the students in the online session during pandemic period.
4. To offer constructive suggestions and strategies to enhance the quality of E-learning experience.

Research Methodology

The study was qualitative and explorative nature as the researcher has tried to explore the factors from the survey. This study uses primary data, which was collected from the students of Ibra College of Technology that constitutes the population of the study. The researchers have circulated a structured questionnaire online, to collect the primary data from the students. 140 students from Business studies stream were randomly selected and online questionnaire were forwarded to collect their response. The structured questionnaire contains 36 items and its reliability was tested with 30 samples taken for the pilot study. The output shows that the thumb rule has been satisfied. Factor analysis has been used and five independent factors are identified namely, Assertiveness (8 Items), Challenges (4 Items), Perception (4 Items), Agreeableness (4 Items) Comparableness (5 Items) and the dependent factor Effectiveness contains (6 Items). These items were considered the factor loadings more than 0.5. Finally, the researchers have applied multiple regression (path analysis) using AMOS 21 . The reliability of these factors were also good.

Factor	Reliability	No of Items
Assertiveness	0.887	8
Challenges	0.792	04
Perception	0.793	04
Agreeableness	0.701	04
Comparableness	0.603	05

Effectiveness	0.809	06
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Hypothesis of the Study:

- Hypothesis 1:** E-Learning Factor Assertiveness is positively influences the learning effectiveness
- Hypothesis 2:** E-Learning Factor Challenges is negatively influences the learning effectiveness

- Hypothesis 3:** E-Learning Factor Perception is positively influences the learning effectiveness
- Hypothesis 4:** E-Learning Factor Agreeableness is positively influences the learning effectiveness
- Hypothesis 5:** E-Learning Factor Comparableness is positively influences the learning effectiveness

Analysis:

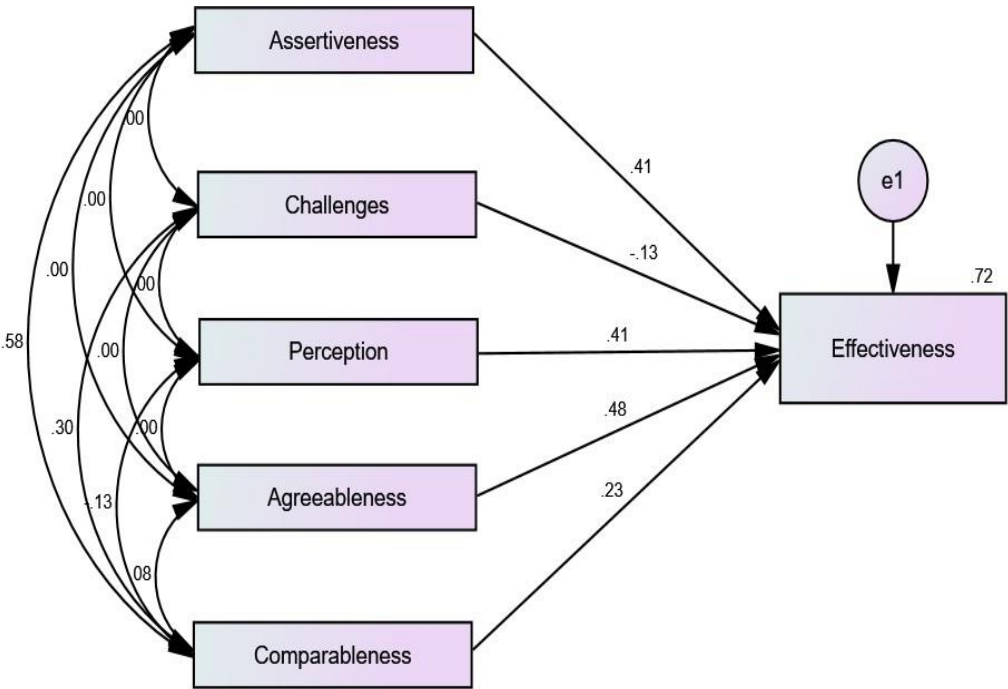


Fig 1: Path Analysis

Table 1: Regression Weights:

Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Hypothesis
Effectiveness <--- Assertiveness	.407	.055	7.428	***	Significant/ Accepted
Effectiveness <--- Challenges	-.134	.047	-2.875	.004	Significant /Accepted
Effectiveness <--- Perception	.409	.044	9.348	***	Significant /Accepted
Effectiveness <--- Agreeableness	.480	.043	11.062	***	Significant /Accepted
Effectiveness <--- Comparableness	.227	.058	3.895	***	Significant /Accepted

Table 2: Standardized Regression Weights:

Path			Estimate
Effectiveness	<---	Assertiveness	.407
Effectiveness	<---	Challenges	-.134
Effectiveness	<---	Perception	.409
Effectiveness	<---	Agreeableness	.480
Effectiveness	<---	Comparableness	.227

Table 3: Squared Multiple Correlations: (R²)

	Estimate
Effectiveness	.716

Results and Discussions

Multiple regression is used to predict the single dependent variable with the multiple independent variables whose values are known. The above outputs show that all five independent variables Assertiveness, Challenges, Perception, Agreeableness and Comparableness are entered simultaneously for the analysis in enter method. It is also seen that the R square value is 0.716 which shows that the five independent variables have significantly influenced the effectiveness of learning and they account for changes in dependent variable Learning effectiveness by 72.0%. It is evident from the results that; this is a fit model. From the coefficients table which shows the values of regression coefficients, explain the amount of changes made on the dependent variable effectiveness. The results show that, all the five independent variables significantly influence the dependent variable effectiveness as the significance values are less than 0.05% and the construct Challenges has negatively influenced the dependent variable effectiveness, also with the help of standardized regression weight, it can be inferred that the construct Agreeableness has the highest influence on effectiveness (0.480), followed by Perception (0.409), assertiveness (0.407), Comparableness (0.227) and Challenges (-0.134) respectively. The students have agreed that the recorded and uploaded videos have supported them to enhance their ability to learn and also, they feel that their teachers and advisors have motivated them to attend the online classes. Their perception towards E-learning reflects the feeling of cost effectiveness and affordability. They feel the process of E-learning involves usage of

expensive learning tools and also, they feel it is difficult to attend the online classes continuously as there is interruption in the network connectivity. It is also observed in the analysis that the students feel that their self-confidence has improved after attending the online classes. e-learning provides better learning opportunities, it provides flexibility to the students and makes the process simple. It is felt that this system has improved and strengthened the communication and interaction with teachers and tutors.

Managerial Implications

As the digital transformation is the need of the hour it is necessary for the government take measures to increase the accessibility and affordability of network to all parts of the country. This will enable the students to get engaged in the process of e-learning effectively. It is also suggested to the policy makers to reformulate the curriculum which will enhance the technical skills of the students and teachers as well. Orientation on usage of technology and applications is required to be given to the teachers so that the virtual teaching becomes more effective. From the study it is also evident that the e-learning process has helped the students to boost their confidence level, which means innovative methods teaching can be introduced in teaching analytical and complex subjects which in turn will boost the morale of the students.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the process and experience of E-learning is more comfortable and student friendly. E-learning provides them better learning opportunities and has improved the communication and interactive skills of students with their teachers and tutors. Over and above, there are few challenges in this transformation such as difficulty in understanding the analytical subjects, lack of internet connectivity, interruption in attending classes at home

and affordability. It is suggested to the policy makers that necessary steps have to be taken to redress these issues and provide the opportunities for better learning experience to the students who face the above said challenges. This shift may take some time for the students and teachers to settle down but this is going to be the new normal in the days to come and where the future is uncertain. So this is right time for the policy maker's educators, learners, educational institutions and all other stake holders to think and act strategies that will enhance the quality of the virtual teaching and learning methods.

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