Students' Perception on Online Learning and Job Prospects during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This is a paper based on an exploratory study through different e-questionnaire by finding in the students mind with special focus on Karnataka region to online learning and understanding the fears and dilemma of student in the job market. Since the outbreak of corona virus disease (COVID – 19) brought revolutionary change in education system, and effects to the job market. Globally all the education institutions, both public and private have adopted to online method of classroom learning, this paper is to understand technology adoption effects on students, the short coming in this teaching method, whether the learning process is enough for them to experience and engage towards job seeking fresh graduates and current job market and environment. The current study, a survey has been conducted through questionnaire. Based on feedback of students, a detailed analysis is done, and suggestions are stated. The main objective of this paper is to reflect upon the issues of challenges of online teaching to some extent and to stimulate reflections on effective strategies to enhance academic credibility and future progress of students when they enter into job market. Teaching faculties in higher education must introduce effective learning methods to encourage students to think and engage themselves in active learning and not passively gathering the information from external sources that may not enhance their critical thinking skills. The education institutions policy planners need to emphasize on such course works for students that can make students be job ready after finishing the college, and institutes must focus on career driven trainings, certification programs and provide hands on experience along with the theoretical knowledge.

Keywords: students experience, education system, COVID-19, online learning, job market, job prospects

Introduction

A large number of educational institutions like schools, colleges and universities across the world moved away from regular classroom teaching sessions to virtual classroom sessions because of COVID-19 pandemic that affected every student in last and the current academic year.

COVID-19 lockdown forced the educational institutions to adopt virtual classroom teaching. Virtual classroom learning instilled physical and mental perturbations among the learners and teachers. Disconnection in physical classroom eye contact, severe failure in experiential learning such as laboratory sessions, break in physical ambience of learning are some notable factors. Nevertheless, the technology was transforming the learner and teacher to adopt online mode to continue the teaching learning process. Further, during the lockdown many of the industrial establishments and firms could pay their workers either in installments or with a significant percentage of discount on the total income. This generated a fear on the job prospects among the students who are about in the process of their academic year completion or the crew undergoing training towards their placement.

In line with the above situation, the present study attempted to understand the perception of the students perceiving higher education through online and their view of job prospects.

Students had to do personal transformation in the world of technological transformation, they are learning to ask bigger and tougher questions, bring in that sense of responsibility about why, what, and how in the journey. They are not alone, even the teachers had to face several difficulties and challenges to adapt to this transformation. There were certainly questions around how to effectively manage the classroom, make them participate and bring in the same learning experience as in the physical classroom session. However, with this, came more challenges for students, it is more of one-to-one learning in a session of one-to-many, the loneliness, emotional disconnect, lack of physical interaction, missing of hands-on training and practical knowledge and brought some discontent in students.

As the scientific community is progressing to find a cure for the COVID-19, to get everyone out of this distress situation, but the world and the time was not waiting for it. There were several changes happened

to the global economy, companies went into distress, and several were had to shut off, non-essential went into inexistence, the future of job safety and security was looking bleak for employees as continued and prolonged lockdowns across the world had brought several organizations and companies stand still.

Employment and being employable is one major concern for any fresh graduate student, whose main aim is to shift gears and progress from education to job-sector. The faster the job creation, the faster the fresh graduate employability will happen, and their contributions will be acknowledged in the ever-changing economy and market to shape the world a better place.

Literature Review

- Garrison (2004) discussed the transformative potential of blended learning in the context of the challenges facing in higher education. The conclusion is that blended learning is consistent with the values of traditional higher education institutions and has the proven potential to enhance both the effectiveness and efficiency of meaningful learning experiences.

- Cini, C.K (2018) the article entitled "A Study on the Attitude of Students towards Participatory Learning at Graduate Level". In this paper, the investigator tried to understand the meaning and strategies suitable for learning economics at undergraduate level. The study found that, all participants are active as they set their goals and work to achieve the goal. The study also found that, in the learning process the learners share ideas, knowledge, opinion, materials and resources in order to reach a common agreement or to make joint decisions in a transparent way.

- Higher education is said to impart deepest understanding in the minds of students, rather than a relatively superficial grasp that must be acceptable elsewhere in the system. In higher education, nothing can be taken on trust and the students have to think for themselves so as to be able to stand intellectually on their own feet (Barnett, R.1997).

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- The teacher centered approach mainly focuses on teachers as authoritative figures (Mascolo, 2009). Some of the scholars have described students as "empty vessels" whose primary role is receiving information that is passed through the teachers, and then later is assessed according to the knowledge that was transferred to them (Murray & Hourigan, 2008). Therefore, student learning is measured with the help of scored tests and other types of assessments.

Research method

An online questionnaire was circulated to undergraduate, postgraduate and research scholar students of multi-disciplinary. Upon the receipt of the data, pruning of data was carried out to eliminate the unanswered. Descriptive statistics including the frequency and percentage of response was calculated. A Chi-square analysis was carried out to understand the gender-based variation in the responses at a significance $p<0.05$. All the statistical tests were performed using the statistical software SPSS Ver.17.

Observations and Discussion

Using evolving and communication technologies, an e-questionnaire survey has been conducted using Google forms, and their details are provided in the data interpretation section. The target populations (students here) were pursuing their undergraduate or postgraduate programs and were asked to give feedback on their problems related to online teaching, stress, learning adoption, future prospects and job market. The questionnaire consisting of ordinal style questions and five-point scale was distributed. The choices range from strongly agree to strongly disagree. For analysis and interpretation, we used simple statistical tools. This is a cross sectional study conducting after the phased release of COVID-19 lockdown across India.

The online learning is creating lot of health and mental hazards

A Chi-square test was conducted to distinguish gender-based agreement, if any on their perception of online learning.

Altogether 155 respondents participated in the survey. About 38% of the participants strongly agreed that online learning is adding stress to their physical and mental health status. Invariably, females and male respondents agreed that online learning results in health perturbations. This clearly shows no significant variation ($\chi2 = 5.406$; df=14; p>0.05). in gender could be demonstrated. However, the respondents did not mention the type of physical and mental stress or hazard created through online learning.

The online method of learning has been adapted by academies and institutions to bridge the gap of students learning in the COVID-19 situation, and it going to stay for longer. This though brought the learning into the homes, but sure this is causing immense stress on the students as was as on the faculty. Effective learning happens when peers interact more physically and collaborate.

As shown in figure 72% of students agree that the online learning even from their comfort of homes, is causing health and mental hazards, whereas 8% disagree and 20% of respondents feel neutral. The main reason to this high percentage of students' response could be their homes are not designed or equipped like an interactive physical classroom, or continuous monitoring by family, physical boredom, and strain of sitting in front of small mobile phone or computer screen.
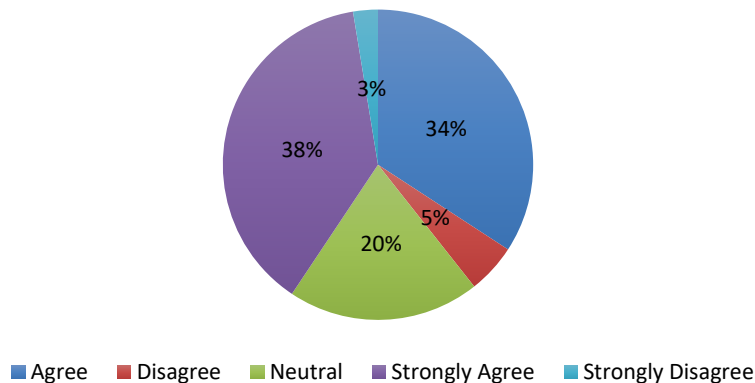
Table 1

The online learning is creating lot of health and mental hazards.

Options	Count	Percentage
Agree	53	34%
Disagree	8	5%
Neutral	31	20%
Strongly Agree	59	38%
Strongly Disagree	4	3%
Total	155	100%

Figure 1

The online learning is creating lot of health and mental hazards.

Agree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Strongly Agree ■ Strongly Disagree

The possible way to overcome such a situation is by following effective management of online classroom session, not to be keen on monitoring but make participatory sessions, ask for student's feedback, and keep out evaluation of student's behavior in class and instead focus of what each student can contribute by making

them engage in meaningful discussions. In short, make the stress experienced respondents come for a discussion.

Learning effectiveness through online is absolutely not up to the mark (exclusively in engineering and science laboratory-based domains)

As physical classes are not available to the students in this pandemic time, it has become tough for students from Science, Technology, Medical, and Engineering backgrounds to explore the laboratory courses more effectively.

Male and female respondents strongly agreed that learning through online is not effective especially for laboratory courses. However, a significant variation ($\chi2 = 10.442$; df=4; p<0.05) could be perceived between gender in their degree of agreement. Their scales of agreement between agree and strongly agree displayed differences. Males applied less weightage to scale agree than females. Overall, the respondents showed a strong agreement in the effectiveness of learning through online is not effective for practical courses.

As shown in Figure 2, a total of 77% respondents feel that learning is not being highly effective, particularly in laboratory-based domains, 10% respondents disagree and 13% are being neutral to the query. Now if we closely observe, in previous query a high number of respondents felt that online learning is causing stress and health issues. And here even more than that percentage of students felt that online courses are not effective to gain practical knowledge, this is true because physical interactions are one of most important things for lab.

Table 2

Learning effectiveness through online is absolutely not up to the mark (exclusively in engineering and science laboratory-based domains).

Options	Count	Percentage
Agree	52	33%
Disagree	11	7%
Neutral	20	13%
Strongly Agree	68	44%
Strongly Disagree	4	3%
Total	155	100%

Figure 2

Learning effectiveness through online is absolutely not up to the mark (exclusively in engineering and science laboratory-based domains).

Legend: ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Strongly Agree ■ Strongly Disagree
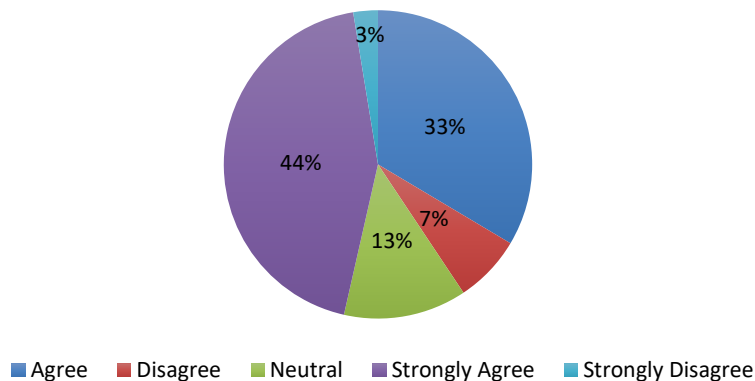
If given the choices that we have, how can the students of Science, Technology, Medical, and Engineering backgrounds can excel, is one big question. Does simulation way of learning on computers, close enough to practical learning? And can teachers bring demonstrable alternatives to online classroom learning that can fill the gap of this learning. Lab practical, which is a hands-on session, a practical before they venture themselves in real world needs to come alive in 3D interaction on digital devices. Experimental learning cannot be replaced by virtual labs, and hence technological infusion on virtual laboratories is a need of the hour.

Employability will become wide and throws multiple opportunities in the global market

The online mode of students learning showed a new perspective of their value and importance in the global market. As students globally are using this method of learning, there is big trend of equality being expected by students when they enter into the job market, but are they equal in terms of learning?

The respondents agreed that the pandemic environment will improve employment opportunities. Significant variations (($\chi 2 = 11.049$; df=4; $p<0.05$) between the gender prevailed in their agreement. Females had their own apprehensions in agreeing the employability opportunities than males for obvious reasons of lockdown restrictions/guidelines.

As shown in figure 67% students responded to agree, 20% disagree, and rest 13% are neutral to this question.
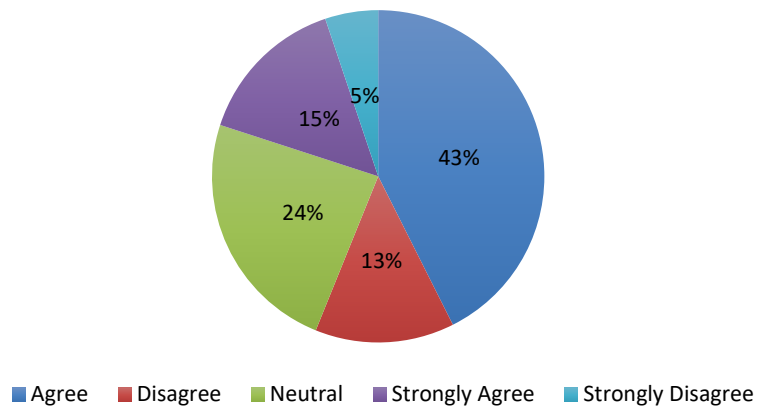
Table 3

Employability will become wide and throws multiple opportunities in the global market.

Options	Count	Percentage
Agree	66	43%
Disagree	21	13%
Neutral	37	24%
Strongly Agree	23	15%
Strongly Disagree	8	5%
Total	155	100%

Figure 3

Employability will become wide and throws multiple opportunities in the global market.

Global economies are merging, and opportunities are coming closer to populations who never been seen them. In these emerging times, students have to grab the opportunities and the educational institutions have to prepare the mindset of students and also make them equipped to work in any part of the world.

Due to pandemic situation my preparation towards placement got disturbed

The most important objective of a student life to get a good job and contribute to the family, economy, and country wellbeing. The pandemic has brought everyone to its knees, now in such situation the finding a job is a tough.

No significant variation ($\chi2 = 6.694$; df=4; $p>0.05$) could be observed between the gender in their preparation towards placement. Although they continue to prepare for their placements, they fear on placement happening. Further, the restrictions, availability of support in technology and disorder are some of the plausible factors for their fear. They agreed that pandemic has a significant disturbance on the preparation for placement.

As shown in Figure 4, a total of 76% students feel that this has affected their job prospects and placements in the college or outside, 12% disagree and the rest 12% are neutral.
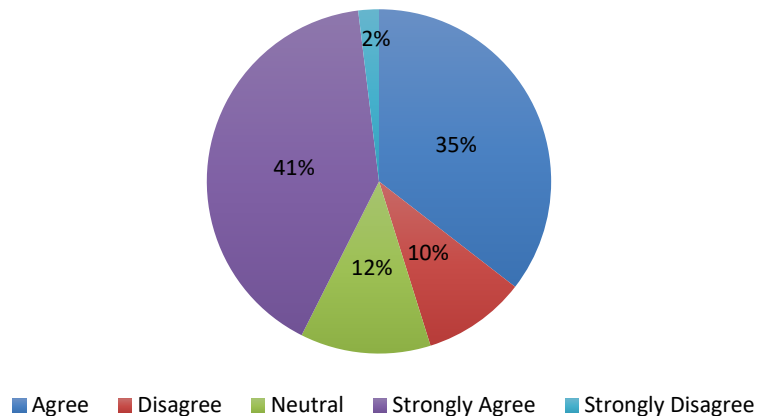
Table 4

Due to pandemic situation my preparation towards placement got disturbed.

Options	Count	Percentage
Agree	55	35%
Disagree	15	10%
Neutral	19	12%
Strongly Agree	63	41%
Strongly Disagree	3	2%
Total	155	100%

Figure 4

Due to pandemic situation my preparation towards placement got disturbed.

Placements in college are like a tense festival atmosphere, the race to find a job and get settled. Now due to pandemic the few of the expected jobs are not reaching to the doorstep of campus, they are either fully moved to online market or not created. Therefore, in such situations it is important for the college administrations to make a bolder step, to bring the students to the notice of companies, their value and contribution and prepare them for better tomorrow.

Job market is abruptly shrinking

The toughest thing to digest for anyone is joblessness after education. The dreams of landing into a job if vanished, causes immense stress and strain for students and their future prospective look bleak. Skilled labor and human resources are an evergreen requirement in every sector. Job prospects shrinking topic urges a valid debate and needs even more effective data and analysis throughout the nation.

All the respondents agreed that job market is abruptly shrinking. Significant variation between the gender ($\chi2 = 10.325$; df=4; p<0.05) in their agreement over the job market could be figured out.

As shown in Figure 5, a total of 74% students agree that the job market is shrinking, relatively 5% disagree, and 21% are neutral to this query.

Table 5

Job market is abruptly shrinking.

Options	Count	Percentage
Agree	70	45%
Disagree	5	3%
Neutral	33	21%
Strongly Agree	44	29%
Strongly Disagree	3	2%
Total	155	100%

Figure 5

Job market is abruptly shrinking.

Agree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Strongly Agree ■ Strongly Disagree
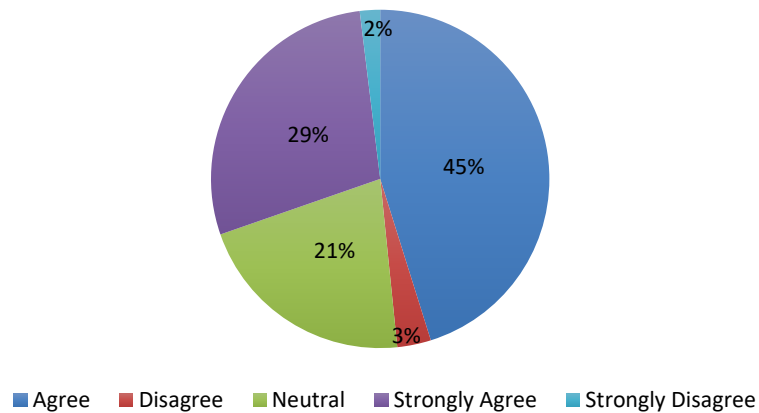
Currently the job markets are changing, evolving, and precisely shrinking to cater only few needs. Due to few market downtrends, there is disappointment among job seekers who are fresh graduates and educational intuitions have to keep interacting with those students, help them mentally to get through this phase, and help them in learning courses and be prepared and not to let them go off the radar after completion of the courses. They might have to play a role of mentor and give vision for what they can do and achieve in their lives.

Conclusion

The shift from traditional classroom based physical learning to online teaching environment is not fully effective for all students. This does cause stress and strain to the students and their learning abilities. Due to low resources, poor facilities, lack of ability and interest, a home environment can never be an equal opportunistic center for all students as a physical classroom in an educational institution. So, in the future, blended learning plays a critical role in education systems.

The students are better informed now because the pandemic has brought the global information much closer to their notice and asking them to adapt and change to the situations. Teachers have to play a critical role in this transformation. They too are in distress, but they have to evolve as role models, give insights, and mentor the students and make them prepared for the life challenges that are ahead of them.

The most important next level for a student is the career goal and how to achieve it. And they know it is a tough journey ahead due to the pandemic, but as a society we need to throw them challenges to solve, give opportunities to resolve them, and encourage them by guiding in right direction, and give them the confidence that they are going to work for one humanity.

Global markets are dynamic in nature, but the ideas that are coming out are not to solve a problem of one economy or country's situation, but to address the global (one world, one economy). Educational institutions have to improve the teaching methodologies and bring one unified access of knowledge to the forefront of students, this way each can seek and contribute towards better progress of this world. This means bring positive effect into the lives of students who are pioneers of next generation, feed the vision, bring change to the approach, and make them the leaders of this change.

Thus, it can be concluded that education plays a key role to the progress of the students' career in job, after completion of education and it provides them the ability and all the skillsets that are required to take challenges in the job market. However, as the quality of education plays a critical role to make them succeed, it is a matter of concern for all the stakeholders as well as the whole nation, and each student not only transforms into a prospective job seeker, rather a nation-building individual for the progress of the nation.

Indian education is now expanding beyond the global horizons, and due to the online education and wealth of resources, that it brings into the lap of students. There is no lack of quality now in terms of knowledge resources, that are being offered to students from both domestic and global in online; but what is required is a strong urge to succeed and turn the low employability and low performance into higher. Students need to be innovative, creative, and hardworking, and use the opportunities provided by the colleges to come out strong qualitatively. Collection of job market trends, analysis, and regular changes in the curriculum to support can strengthen the education system, and make the students prepared to take the change.

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