



Relative Effectiveness Of Online And Offline Evaluation Methods In Relation To Academic Stress Of The Students

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Abstract

This research aims to analyse the relative effectiveness and importance of online and offline evaluation methods to understand the academic stress in students' life. Academic stress is the impermanence state of anxiety, stress and pressure while achieving academic goals. It is one of the biggest causes of unease, angst and depression among students. Offline evaluation methods, along with the pen-paper, need physical presence of students and teachers in the classroom whereas, online evaluation methods include digital testing via an internet connected device. Both evaluation methods are important in reducing academic stress, but research in this area is divided into two groups. Some researchers view offline evaluation methods as traditional and reliable because those were the only options available in the past and others have different opinions. However, online evaluation methods got a hype after the outbreak of COVID-19 because of lockdown circumstances. Although, online evaluation methods are always seen with an eye of doubt but we can ensure their effectiveness via many ways. All evaluation methods are judgemental in nature and with the help of these methods we judge the learning of students which in a way increase that impermanence feeling of anxiety. Statistically, academic stress is a primary cause of increasing suicidal rates among students and certainly effective evaluation methods can significantly reduce academic stress. So, with the integration of effective online as well as offline evaluation methods in the field of education, we can pave a wave towards the reduction of academic stress. No doubt, sometimes it is difficult to ensure the effectiveness of both these evaluation methods but definitely it is not impossible. In this regard, our study aims to analyse the relative effectiveness of online and offline evaluation methods towards the minimization of academic stress.

Keywords

Academic Stress, Online Evaluation Method, Offline Evaluation Method, COVID-19

Introduction

Human is a social animal and what makes us different from other animals in animal kingdom is "Education" which shows us the importance of education in human life. In fact, Indian Constitution which is the lengthiest written constitution of world, explicitly included "Right to Life" in Article-21. While interpreting this article Supreme Court of India in 1993 judgment in the case Unnikrishnan JP vs State of Andhra Pradesh & Others mentions that "the right to education flows directly from the right to life." This landmark judgement laid the foundation for the incorporation of Article 21A (Right to free and compulsory elementary

education) and also emphasized the fundamental importance of education. Now, in current scenario, we have 'The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009' which makes it obligatory to state that every child in the age group of 6 to 14 has a fundamental right to get 'Free' and 'Compulsory' education. Till now, we are majorly focused on the academic aspect of education. This major focus of parents and teachers on academic aspect becomes a major cause of stress among students. As this stress is because of academics pressure on students, so it is considered as Academic stress.

Academic stress is one of the biggest causes of stress, anxiety, and depression among university students. In India, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) statistics (2022) has shown a consistent, concerning rise in suicide rates from "9.9 per lakh population in 2017 to 12.4 per lakh population in 2022." Major area of concern is the persistently elevated rate of suicide among students over the years 2017–2022, with numbers remaining consistently high. Primary cause of suicide among students is Academic Stress. In student's life, there are multiple situations which lead to academic stress and these include heavy workloads, difficult exams, increasing competitive spirit among peers and the pressure of expectations, sometimes internal expectations (high expectation of students from themselves) and sometimes external expectations (high expectations of parents, teachers, society etc.). Nowadays, examination mode is also considered as one of the factors contributing to academic stress. Majorly there was only offline mode of evaluation prior to COVID-19 but evaluation mode took a turn during the COVID-19 pandemic and online mode of evaluation came into the picture.

Literature Review

Academic Stress has become a very common problem among students' life. Students are dealing with stress either because of internal expectations i.e. high expectations from themselves or external expectation i.e. high expectations from parents, teachers, school, society etc. Parents expect high grades from their children but nobody understands that this grading and evaluation system cannot define a child's all capabilities. Even, fear of evaluation is also one of the factors contributing to academic stress. Reddy et al. (2018) employed a quantitative study "Academic Stress and its sources among University Students" with the help of Academic Stress Scale, developed by Rajendran and Kaliappan (1991), which stated that academic stress continues to be a pernicious problem that affects the well being and mental health of students. Meanwhile, this study also points out some techniques (like yoga, mindfulness, meditation and psychotherapy), which are effective in stress reduction of students atleast to some extent. Different studies show different sources of academic stress e.g. as per Ang and Huan (2006), increased expectations are increasing stress levels; Agrawal and Chahar (2007) reported the vastness of syllabus as a main source of academic stress; Awino and Agolla (2008) included overcrowded lecture halls, inadequate resources and facilities, semester grading system as main sources while Deb et al. (2015) stated long hours and expectations of rote learning as main factors, which increase academic stress in students.

Evaluation can be done in many ways but majorly it is divided into online and offline modes. Pakdaman et. al. (2019) evaluated the cost effectiveness of both traditional and virtual education models in their study "Evaluation of the Cost-Effectiveness of Virtual and Traditional Education Models in Higher Education: A Systematic Review" where they concluded that majority of studies show that either the virtual education alone or in blended (in combination with traditional one) form is equally or more cost effective than traditional models. They considered the predominance of web based method and recommended to use it in educational settings. In 'A Comparative Analysis of Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Learning', Pikhart et. al. emphasized on the careful use of mobile and online tools because students are sensitive to the implementation as they are more familiar to face-to-face classes where human interaction is more effective. Castells et. al. (2022) pointed out the major benefits (immediate feedback, cost & time effectiveness, encourage high-order thinking) as well as challenges (poor technical infrastructure and unfamiliar student with computer) of using e-assessment in learning. Kamalia et. al. (2022) conducted a study "Comparative Study of Student Learning Outcomes in Online and Offline Learning during the Pandemic", which stated that students' learning outcome from online learning is higher than that of offline learning.

Identified Gaps

The above mentioned studies emphasize either on effectiveness of online and offline teaching learning and evaluations methods or about academic stress. However, to the best of our knowledge, limited exploration is there in the literature regarding effectiveness of online and offline evaluation methods in relation to

academic stress. Therefore, the present study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing the effectiveness of both online as well as offline evaluation methods with respect to academic stress.

Objective of the study

Herein, reported research focuses on the analysis of relative effectiveness of online and offline evaluation methods in relation to academic stress in students' life.

Online and Offline Evaluation Methods

There are various methods for the evaluation of students but here we are going to discuss about online and offline evaluation methods. Offline evaluation methods, along with the pen-paper, need physical presence of students and teachers in the classroom whereas, online evaluation methods include digital testing via an internet connected device. Both evaluation methods are important in reducing academic stress, but research in this area is divided into two groups. Some researchers view offline evaluation methods as traditional and reliable because those were the only options available in the past and others have different opinions. However, online evaluation methods got a hype after the outbreak of COVID-19 because of lockdown circumstances. Although, online evaluation methods are always seen with an eye of doubt but we can ensure their effectiveness via many ways. All evaluation methods are judgemental in nature and with the help of these methods we judge the learning of students which in a way increase that impermanence feeling of anxiety. Let us discuss some key features of both these evaluation methods.

➤ Key Features of Online Evaluation Methods

There are some characteristics of online evaluation methods which are needed to discuss for the relative analysis with offline evaluation methods.

- ❖ **Cost, time and resource effective:** Online evaluation methods are cost and time effective as use of these methods directly reduce the cost of printing and distribution of exam papers. As we say 'Resources saved is resources earned' i.e. we are saving paper, ultimately saving trees.
- ❖ **Eco-friendly technique:** There is no use of paper in online evaluation methods which makes it friendly for environment.
- ❖ **Secure and convenient:** Data is secured on encrypted servers. Additionally, anti-cheating features can ensure the integrity and quality. Meanwhile, some exams specially formative ones can be taken by students from anywhere they want which make this method convenient as it remove the need of travelling to exam centre.
- ❖ **Technology involvement:** These methods involve the use of technology and innovation and can be user specific i.e. these can cater to individual needs of the students.
- ❖ **Immediate feedback system:** Online evaluation methods provide immediate feedback to the students which can be used by students to improve their learning. Teachers can use it for formative evaluation.
- ❖ **Automatic grading system:** In addition to the immediate feedback, online evaluation methods give an automated grading also and thus, can be used for summative evaluation.

➤ Drawbacks of Online Evaluation Methods

Everything in this world has its pros and cons. Similarly, online evaluation methods, despite its remarkable advantages, have a number of issues as explained below:

- ❖ **Connectivity issues:** For smooth online evaluation process, both the supervisor as well as students need a properly working internet connection. Although, many places in our country are well equipped with services of internet, however, connectivity issues or lack of sufficient speed are still a major challenge to resolve.
- ❖ **Reliability issues:** Online evaluation methods are quite different as indirect observation is there which involves a number of factors that can not be controlled irrespective of the efforts made to do this evaluation successfully and thus responsible for its low reliability.
- ❖ **Accessibility issues:** Many places specially villages lack internet connection. Furthermore, most of the people living at these places also don't have accessiblity of electronic devices such as mobile phones, computers etc. to access the internet.

❖ **Infrastructure related issues:** Some online evaluation methods come with a requirement of proper well designed physical infrastructure with the availability of electronic devices as well as a good speed internet connection. This involves various competitive exams including UGC NET/JRF, GATE, IIT-JAM exams etc. So, many of the times, lack of proper infrastructure becomes a major challenge to resolve.

➤ **Key Features of Offline Evaluation Methods**

Like online evaluation methods, offline evaluation methods also have some characteristics which are mentioned below:

❖ **Familiar:** Offline evaluation methods are traditional ones which are being in use since ages, thus, making students and teachers become familiar of this evaluation method.

❖ **Strict and direct supervision:** These evaluation methods help in direct and strict supervision of the students as it involves physical presence of the supervisor/s and students in the examination centre, which make these methods more reliable as compared to online evaluation methods.

❖ **Practicality:** Sometimes, for the evaluation of students with respect to practical knowledge, only offline methods are helpful as the same can not be evaluated via online evaluation methods.

➤ **Drawbacks of Offline Evaluation Methods**

❖ **No immediate feedback:** Offline evaluation methods do not provide immediate feedback or results as manual checking is a time taking process.

❖ **Time consuming:** These methods consume a lot of time as these involve travelling time of students to reach to the examination centre. In addition, paper distribution and collection also requires time.

❖ **Less convenient:** Offline evaluation methods are less convenient in comparison to online evaluation methods.

❖ **High resource requirement:** Offline evaluation methods require more resources such as printed papers, answer sheets, infrastructure and other services etc.

❖ **Lack of technology involvement:** As we know that everybody and everything should evolve time to time but these traditional methods of evaluation do not include technological innovations.

Relative analysis of Online and Offline Evaluation Methods in relation to Academic Stress

Among various causes of academic stress, students encounter some prominent and most significant ones are excessive homework, final grades, term papers, examinations etc. Overall evaluation too is a major reason of anxious behaviour in students.^[12] Exams nowadays are plagued by controversies of corruption which include the allegations of paper leak. This is not only limited to school or college exams but can also be seen in case of competitive exams like recently we saw headlines in the newspapers regarding NEET paper leak and multiple similar instances happened in the past.^[15] These paper leaks come with a huge negative impacts on student's academic performance, psychological well being. In fact these things develop a feeling of mistrust about education system in students.^[11] In these circumstances, effective evaluation methods can give students a sigh of relief with the belief that the evaluation will be fair with no discrepancy, which will ultimately lead to fair results. Some students who are confident all the time suddenly become nervous and anxious during exam time. In fact, because of this, they are not able to sleep properly. Additionally, because of this paper leak scenario, a hard working student may get anxious and may feel demotivated while preparing for the exams. So, effective evaluation method is need of the hour.

As we know that nothing is full-proof in this world. So, either the exam is online or offline these paper leaks possibility and corruption history is always there.^[14] Definitely we can take certain measures to curb these practices like Electronic protection for exam paper leakage^[10,19] which will ensure the effectiveness of offline evaluation methods.

When students are indulged in online evaluation methods then diversion is a major factor where students start diverting themselves to various other creative activities.^[8] On the contrary, sometimes, environment during examination (specially of traditional or offline examination) is also the reason of nervousness. Nowadays, we also have online evaluation methods for formative and summative evaluation where students have a flexibility to attempt the exam from wherever they want or find feasible. This gives them the freedom of choosing a comfortable place to sit and write the exam which directly removes the anxious feeling of exam environment and hence can lead to reduced pressure on them. So, if we can achieve an effective online

evaluation method ensuring the solutions of its drawbacks like accessibility, reliability, infrastructure & connectivity, then we can surely achieve a great reduction in academic stress in students.

Role of Institution to ensure the effectiveness of evaluation methods in relation to academic stress

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tion can ensure an electronic protection for exam paper leakage ^[9,18] which will ensure the effectiveness of offline evaluation methods.

✧ Anti-cheating software should be used while building the application for online evaluation to make it effective.

✧ Institution can establish a committee including teachers, students and administrative staff and parents to keep a check on the effectiveness of evaluation methods as well as academic stress.

Role of Teachers to ensure the effectiveness of evaluation methods in relation to academic stress

✧ Te
achers

can avoid excessive home work and other academic related assignments while evaluating the students via project method.^[22]

✧ Teachers can motivate students to reduce their fear of failure which will help in academic stress minimization.^[5]

✧ Teachers can provide a conducive environment not only during teaching but also while evaluating to make the students feel relaxed.^[21]

Students can also take self measures to reduce their academic stress like physical exercise on daily basis, use of time management tools etc.^[21]

Educational Implications

This analysis of relative effectiveness of online and offline evaluation methods with respect to academic stress will be helpful to students in many ways. There will be:

❖ **Increased reliability:** Effectiveness of evaluation method definitely affects the reliability of it, not only in terms of standardization but also in the eye of students.

❖ **Less academic stress and better mental health:** When teachers will make an evaluation method effective in one or the other way then students will be less anxious and will feel relaxed.

❖ **Better results:** When a student is relaxed by knowing the fact that there will be fair evaluation then s/he can put more hard work towards the particular work and can give her/his best which will lead to better outcomes.

Conclusion

Here, we can conclude and understand that neither online nor offline evaluation methods can do better in terms of minimization of academic stress single handedly. Both evaluation methods will go hand in hand because COVID-19 has already proved that only offline evaluation methods are not enough and we can't replace teachers by online methods because of consequences of online evaluation methods. So, indeed blended mode is better for learning as well as for evaluation purposes because each mode of evaluation comes with its advantages and disadvantages, which we have discussed and analyzed in this paper. So, effectiveness of online and offline evaluation methods is circumstantial. Meanwhile, these two modes of evaluation can complement each other. Although evaluation itself is the reason of anxious behaviour in students but mode of evaluation also contribute to academic stress. If evaluation either online or offline is not valid and reliable then it will definitely influence the academic stress. No doubt, sometimes it is difficult to ensure the effectiveness of both these evaluation methods but definitely it is not impossible. Certainly, further field research in this area will be helpful in finding more effective ways to reduce academic stress.

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