

An Investigation of the Impact of Undergraduates' Perception of Online Learning among Distance Learners: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

The educational system across the world has been immensely affected due to the outbreak of COVID-19 as it forced the shutdown of educational institutions, which adversely affected student fraternities across the globe. Due to its contagious nature, COVID-19 demanded containment and enforced isolation, which tremendously affected the personal interaction of teachers and students. The best alternatives for distance learning were strengthened. Therefore, the study investigated the impact of an undergraduate's perception on online learning among distance learners during the global disaster. The factors of social interactions, administrative issues, technical problems, technical skills, learner motivation, and academic skills were selected for the study. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire. A random sample of 65 undergraduates who are currently studying in their third year at the University of Colombo was taken, and the data were analyzed using SPSS Software. Reliability was tested with a Paired Two-Sample Test. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The finding reveals a positive and significant impact of undergraduates' perceptions of online learning among distance learners. The R² value is 0.769. Out of 65 undergraduates, 54% of respondents were from the Department of Geography, 28% from the Economics course, 12% from the IT, and the remaining 6% were from international relations subjects. Therefore, fairly various groups of students have been included in the study to express their views. Undergraduates actively joined online education, achieving a 71% participation rate. More than half of the students participated in online education every day and around 29% of respondents attended online learning only once a week. Results revealed that administrative issues, instructor issues, financial problems, technical issues, and skills are the most influential and high-impact aspects of online learning for university students. Most students still had concerns over the affordability and stability of internet access. Furthermore, social interactions and academic skills have less impact on online learning. In contrary, previous findings, undergraduates were generally satisfied with online learning. Nevertheless, combining face-to-face learning with e-learning models may help distance learners cope better with their studies.

Keywords: *Financial issues, e-Learning, technical problems, undergraduates*

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