Learning Mode Preferences of the Studentsin the Business Schoolsin Pandemic Scenari

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020 has compelled the students as well as the institutes to embracean online mode of learning. Techsolutions from IT majors to cope with such setbacks in the learning eco-system have been in place right on time, for example, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, WebEx,etc.,have wired the students with their faculties. Some of these tools had been operative much before the pandemics but their importance and spread grew exponentially, like a wildfire, during the pandemic period. In this study, the respondents from B School have been chosen as there is least lab involvement in their curriculum,which also ensures a fair degree of homogeneity. The study, apart from examining the effectiveness as well as the preferred mode of educationexplores in clear terms the degree of acceptance of each of these modes. There has been a collection of data from respondents through Google Forms as well as a field survey. Data analysis and findings in some instances pointed out the value of online education. Observation of outcomes makes one surmise some abysmaldismal experiences,neverthelessfew of its benefits cannot be ignored. Precisely speaking, despite its murky association, respondents did not altogether denigrate the generosity of online services. On the other hand, the offline mode of education still seems to beclose to their hearts. The study concludes with the most preferred blends of online and offline substantiated through validation of the research hypotheses.

Keywords: e-Learning, COVID-19, LSI, VARK Model, Kinaesthetic Perceptual Style

1. Introduction

Online classes emulated the work-from-home approach of business organizations and academic sector was no exception to this model. Although machine-based learning and tests were not uncommon in the pre-pandemic scenario, nevertheless the major examinations were conducted in physical presence that was mandatory during pre-pandemic conditions.But to prevent the spread of COVID, online exams were introduced with a strongly monitored system. In the context of the academic sector, the impacts of online classes are important to understand from students' viewpoints. The study has endeavoured to gather and analyse responses of students from different institutes about their perceptions of the pros and cons of online and offline learning processes adopted by the institutions during the pandemic period. To maintain a fair degree of sample, members' homogeneity in terms of experience, the study has been conducted taking only the respondents from business schools. Besides, the study has been conducted during the full lockdown as well as when institutes operated in the blended model.

2. Literature Review

In the traditional learning model,Kolbe's Learning Style Inventory (LSI) (Kolb, 1985), Fleming's (2001) VARK inventory, which incorporates visual, aural, read-write, and kinaesthetic perceptual styles, and therefore the specific inventory measuring learning preferences across four bipolar preferences, active-reflective, sensing-intuitive, visual-verbal, and sequential-global, are well-known examples. derived from the models.

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the method of teaching and learning in instruction and interaction between the scholar and teachers (Juliana, Saffardin & Teoh, 2021). As a result of this pandemic, universities are limited in completing exclusive activities (Sobiah, Hasanein & Abu Elnasr, 2020). Many countries have taken steps to forestall the broader spread of the virus (Teoh, Gan & Seow, 2021). The institutions make a shot to stay the education process and education around the world continuity going, by using online learning (Ali, 2020; Teoh & Kee, 2020). The information is going to be collected employing a survey form from various colleges and universities in various countries to work out the efficacy of study through online learning and offline learning. Literature Review in step with Allo (2021), the impact of the pandemic on education has become a vital topic for researchers, considering things caused by the COVID 19. Besides, students gave positive perceptionsof e-learning and found it useful. Allo (2021) conducted a survey

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involving 424 universities around the world, which showed that education has been laid low with the COVID 19 pandemic situation, and online learning is incredibly necessary to hold out educational activities (Suresh et al. 2018). Teachers must be ready to adapt to technological developments within the educational processand convey knowledge by e-learning (Sun, Tang, & Zuo, 2020). Studies have also found that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, self-confidence, and material norms have a big positive effect on the employment of e-learning in students.

Kaur et al. (2020) observed through their research studies the specific impacts of learning through web technology, communication, skills, and knowledge in medical students by conducting a typical cross-sectional survey from a sample size of 983 and analyzing the results using mean and variance. The results of the paper were that online learning is equally effective compared to offline learning in some parameters. Research on students' engagement and learning through the adoption of technology and teaching through an interview conducted with a sample size of 20, reveals category engagement is healthier online than offline (Shenoy et al, 2020). A similar study was conducted on the effectiveness like convenience, flexibility, freedom of usage, skills and technical enhancement, and barriers like administrative issues and lack of interaction/motivation of the net learning platforms that affect the intention of the scholars of using online platforms. The survey results led to the conclusion that some technical loopholes within the online learning platforms exist. (Rohatgi et al. 2021).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Gap

Although research has been conducted to determine the superiority of one over the other, those studies did not reveal clear empirical evidence of the choices per se. There were also findings that online education ends up in the somewhat lower performance of scholars (Trawick et al. 2009). Further explored was the existence of marginal evidence on whether the delivery of education through online and offline modes has any specific role in the completion of courses by students (Olson,2002). There were opinions that the performances of scholars do not seem to be determined by imparting education either by online or offline mode (Huh et al. 2010). Whereas, there were suggestions that online education provides a better learning experience (Detwiler, 2008). Most of the studies are conducted within the western countries where the condition and network connectivity is nice with significantly less population and geographical coverage after we compare with India.

However, on a survey of pieces of literature related to the research problems, some gaps have been identified, and those can be a) sample members are heterogeneous, rather generalized, and not focused on a particular group. For example, students who are undergoing business studies in the evenings find it more conducive to attending the online sessions from home than coming in the evenings and attending the classes. In one of the surveys, medical students were covered b) Instead of focusing on the experience, the existing studies have been critical about merits and demerits c) Complete disapproval of online classes or full approval of offline can lead to an impression, irrespective of their statistical significance or insignificance, may not be a right one. The study undertaken had undertaken an unbiased approach to the fact-finding exercise.

3.2 Research Objective

To understand the Learning Mode Preferences of the Students in the Business Schools in Pandemic Scenario.

3.3 Research Hypotheses

Following four sets of research hypotheses can be stated to frame the study

H1: Online classes saves time and energyfor the students

H2: Online classes provide excellent study materials with recordings to the students

H3: Continuous Online classes lead to monotony and mental fatigue

H4: Offline classes are thought-provoking and promote deeper involvement

H5: High degree of faculty connect in online classes

Statistical analysis has been undertaken concerning the response furnished by the several groups of respondents in selected business schools. A schematic diagram of the inferential options from different hypotheses testing results is furnished in Figure 1.
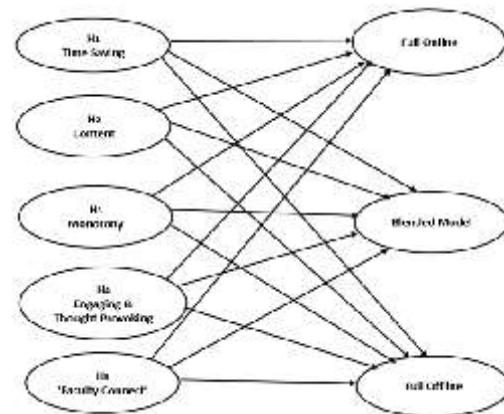

Figure 1 – Schematic Diagram from Hypotheses to Inference

3.4 Research Design

As regards the backdrop for deciding the research design, the preferred option for the research problem is the exploratory research design. Exploratory research is usually qualitative naturally (Ahuja, 2010) and is undertaken firstly for its feasibility, secondly, it helps the generation of recent ideas, views, and the opinions for the correct understanding of the matter, and thirdly for familiarising the researcher with the social context of the difficulty, that is, details about the relationship, values, standards, and factors associated with the research topic (Sarankatos, 1998).

Creativity coupledwith excellent insight drivesthe spirit that is instilled within the exploratory research. Social science exploration could be a broad-ranging, purposive, systematic prearranged undertaking designed to maximize the invention of generalizations resulting in description and understanding (Stebbins, 2001). Although some theoretical works encourage qualitative works without having much recourse to hypotheses and focusing on an inductive system (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, some studies offer freedom from the contraption to the inductive approach (Casula et al. 2020). This research study has elicited an exploratory approach as well as an empirical analysis of data and arriving at inference based on the stated hypotheses.

About the sample profile, a total of 131 respondents have been considered in the study in business schools located in the metro city of Kolkata andthe students from the metro and non-metro locations have enrolled.

An online survey was applied using Google Form because the questionnaire is the best- suited way and can effectively gather information or data.The basic goal of the questionnaire is to grasp the respondents' views on the effectiveness of online learning and offline learning. The Likert scale questions were generally wont to get the responses on the effectiveness of online learning and offline learning through instruction. Since the information set gathered from the study is non-parametric, the chi-square test has been considered for testing the hypotheses.

4. Data Analysis & Interpretation

Analysis of the input data has been done in the following tables where the first few tables describe the respondents' profile and the rest of the tables highlights diverse response to the subject matter of the study.

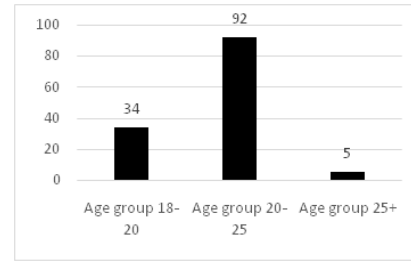Figure 2 - Respondents' Gender Profile Analysis in Numbers

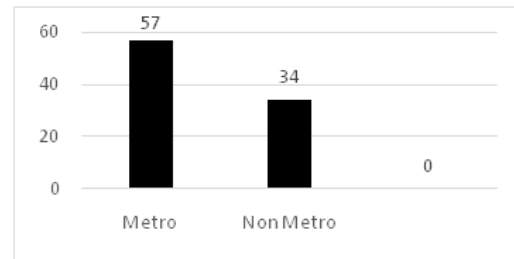Figure 3 - Respondents' Age Profile Analysis in Numbers

Figure 4 - Respondents' Location Analysis in Numbers

Table 1 – Attention Span in Online & Offline Class
All figures are in % of the respondents

The longest period of attention in onlineand offline class	% of responses
Online class Max 45 mins or less	81
Offline class Max 45 mins or less	61

Table 2 – Overall Perception towards Online Class
All figures are in % of the respondents

The perceived blend of offline and online sessions from experience	% of responses
Discontinuance of online classes after the pandemic is over	51
Attending online classes is a kind of compulsion but always prefer to be	57

Table 3 – Perceived Entity Association of Online Class
All figures are in % of the respondents

Perceived Entity Association of Online Class	% of responses
Relieves Physical Stress	62
COVID	32

Table 4 – Overall Perception of Online and Offline
All figures are in % of the respondents

The perceived blend of offline and online sessions from experience	% of responses
100% Online	12
75% Online and 25% offline	11
50% Online and 50% offline	38
75% Offline and 25% online	21
100% Offline	18

Table 5 - Response Summary of Different Hypothesis

Hypotheses	Description	Mean Response (%)	Standard Deviation	Co-efficient of Range
H1	Time Saving (online)	75	7.28	0.10
H2	Better content & visibility (online)	49	14.6	0.39
H3	Monotony & mental fatigue (online)	50	8	0.16
H4	Thought provoking and engaging (offline)	71	10	0.19
H5	'Faculty-Connect'(online)	42	17.7	0.58

Table 6 - Results of the Chi-Square test on each Hypothesis

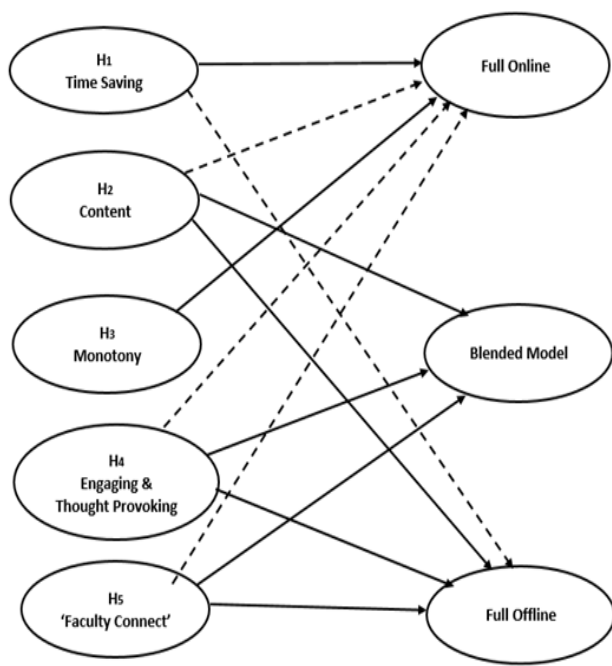| Hypotheses	Degrees of freedom (df)	Chi-Square value at 95% confidence level	Observed value	Accept/Reject
H1	2	6	1.45	Accepted in favor of online
H2	5	11	21.4	Rejected
H3	2	6	7.19	Rejected
H4	6	13	9.75	Accepted in favor of offline
H5	6	13	14	Rejected

Figure 5 - Schematic Diagram from Hypotheses to Observed Inference
(The dotted arrows depicts weak connectivity with the inference bubbles)

5. Findings

From Hypotheses 1, 3, and 4, the point of view of the students, although the majority of the students do not prefer 100% online or offline, the blended mode of learning is the most acceptable experience for them. Comparing the observed values and expected values in table 10, it can be concluded that Hypotheses 2 that is online classes provide excellent study materials with recordings to the students, and visibility of content is not accepted by the students. One of the major reasons could be the availability of network services, and technical barriers in communications, particularly for the large section of students hailing from non-metro locations where uninterrupted network services are a big challenge. Students are quite consistent in their response when asked about their preference for offline classes and they strongly feel that offline classes are more thought-provoking and able to generate deeper involvement in their learning process. This confirms the assumption of Hypotheses 5.The overall response indicates a high 'feel-good' factor toward offline mode. Students feel that the attention span offline is much more than the online. There is an expression of forced confinement due to the pandemic scenario. Everyone agrees about the time and energy-

saving benefits of online classes. Apart from the positive aspect of time and energy-saving criteria of online classes, the negative aspect of online classes is their association with the pandemic which makes them feel that they are somewhat constrained to attend the online classes more for their hygiene and safety than a learning experience.They grossly miss the physical presence of faculty which dominates over the benefits provided through online delivery. This establishes that students are somewhat uncomfortable with faculty connect through online mode. The overwhelming response in favor of concentration and focus in offline class. Summarily the responses present a unique scenario of cognitive consistency or dissonance of most students who reluctantly endorse online classes succumbing to the 'fact-of-the matter' logic of time and energy saving. Online classes restrict the freedom of their natural presence in the physical learning environment even while enjoying the comfort of attending class from home. As opposed to their imagery of a learning place, stay-at-home classes might have resulted in some psychological agony. Like any other natural associations, students and classrooms are inseparable entities just like lions cannot hunt in the oceans or sharks cannot hunt in the jungle.

6. Conclusion

Pandemic brought a sea change in every walk of life and the academic vertical was no exception. During that period the students had no option other than going for online classes which initially dampened their interest in their learning spirit, all the more because many of them had to put up with disturbing experiences around them. The students had been missing the classroom environment while attending classes from home which offered a zone of comfort in their long-standing learning habits leaving aside the ordeals of the journey. Also evident is the fact that many of the students are residents in non-metro locations where the uninterrupted service of the Internet remains a challenge. Besides, there are some reservations about the student's perceptions of online because apart from the time and energy-saving factors, namely, retention of focus and attention beyond a certain period, natural disturbances at home, and similar other causes. However, they disapprove discontinuance of online classes even after the pandemics are over, and to sum up, they have accepted online if not fully but unhesitatingly as and when required to be seamlessly coupled with offline.

7. Future Scope and Limitations of the Study

With all the efforts exerted in meeting the objectives of the study, there remain some limitations that future researchers would be able to address. The following limitations can be cited:

1. The study has made a genuine attempt to explore the perceived benefits or flop side of experiential learning by the students in two diverse modes. Biasness towards a particular model in the questionnaire may inadvertently prevail, nevertheless, future researchers are expected to work out the questionnaire with adequate deliberations.

2. The study is focused on the students of selected middle-tier business schools located in Kolkata where a mixed group of students is available. This could be undertaken for institutions of a higher tier.

3. Researchers conducted the study during the full lockdown and post lockdown when the COVID scenario was improving, and normalcy was gradually prevailing. There is every likelihood that the changed scenario might have some impact on the answers leading to a slight margin of error.

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