

# Students' Perception on E-Learning – A Study of Online Certificate Courses

P. Kalyanasundaram and C. Madhavi

**Abstract---** *With the advent of development in information and communication technology, higher education institutions are turning their attention towards course offerings in the online mode. With the opportunities and challenges, organizations are seeking to understand the perspective of the learners. This paper attempts to study the perception of learners of value added courses offered to students. Eight certificate courses like Forex Management, Operations Research, Medical Law and Genetics, etc. were offered as an add-on value added courses during the graduation through online mode and student perceptions were studied with regard to usability, user friendliness, course content, test friendliness etc. Results show that students who embraced online learning felt positive about e-learning.*

**Keywords---** *E-learning, Online Mode, Perception, Usability.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

According to Drucker (1993) ICT pervades every dimension of our lives. Among various other fields, education also experiences this trend. By harnessing the potential of ICT we can positively impact the knowledge levels of students, which can result in elevation of their knowledge levels by imbuing them with skills and techniques to solve problems that require analytical and logical thinking that are required by the fierce corporate world. Among the many beneficial impacts of ICT is the ability of it to hone critical reasoning among learners. In many developed nations university education is offered even on a mobile phone and India too is not far behind and the impact is there to be witnessed. The opening up of the economy and the access to the World Wide Web has thrown open a plethora of opportunities to learners. The web has had an intense effect on the present day instruction situation and has changed the manner in which how innovation is utilized for instructive purposes. The higher education sector is undergoing a metamorphosis in terms of knowledge transfer and assessments. Though online offerings have not found their way into the mainstream education in India, there had been a phenomenal change in the way Colleges and Universities are adopting online platforms and resources. Changes will continue into the future and the use of online technology is here to stay. India is in the midst of a technological revolution with ICT permeating every walk of life. It is a fact that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can ensure and expand the reach and quality of education in India. Currently available online learning opportunities in India have their own challenges that are faced by higher education institutions that offer these opportunities and there is a need to understand learner perception on e-learning and the researcher discusses these in this paper. This study is an attempt by the researcher to study the perception of students about online learning who underwent an online certificate course during their undergraduate study as a value-added program along with their regular course.

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## **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The definition of e-learning as per Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development is the dynamic moving from non or trifle online presence to blended methods and lastly ending with totally on-line instruction embraced as a replacement to expert learning.

E-learning as it is currently called was first referenced by Jay Cross , CEO of e-learning Forum, a 1200 member research organization and support gathering, in 1998. As per Urdan and Weggen (2000), e-learning is the transaction, obviously, by means of electronic media, for example, web, intranets, extranets, satellite communicate, sound/video tape, intuitive TV and CD-ROM was viewed as e-learning. It is their inference that led to the thought that terms like Web-based, technology based and electronic learning are characterized and utilized distinctively by various associations and client groups.

E-learning offers competitive advantages in many ways. Whereas the traditional learning works on the premises that the instructor owns the knowledge that is passed on to the students, E-learning authenticates and facilitates the spread of knowledge.

Traditional learning suffers from “narration sickness”, but interactive web-based learning offers scope for the learner to learn in a participative learning environment where the focus is on ‘learning by doing’. While educating in a conventional set-up has its own confinements and a customary instructor can never give 24 x7 guidance to learners, an e-learning set-up can offer support round the clock throughout the year. Fry (2001) is of the opinion that embracement of technology, for example e-learning, is basic so as to contend in advanced education industry all around and such vital approaches are useful in business and instructional practice advancements. E-learning has its very own advantages, for example, it gives numerous possibilities to exchange ideas and information among the learners and the staff in many forms, including talks, discussion forums, and messages, which results in an inspired learning environment.

Eric Ansong et al (2016) in their study on determinants of e-learning adoption in Universities found factors like IT infrastructure, perceived ease of use, expected benefits, organizational compatibility, competitive pressure, educated partners, content of the course, E-learning curriculum and these were statistically significant. Any online program should be evaluated on the basis of its learning outcomes by comparing it with a similar onsite program (Consolacion Fajardo, 2011).

## **III. METHODOLOGY OF STUDY**

Sampling method was used to select respondents. A sample of 120 students was considered for the study. The objective of the study was to find out their perceptions towards online learning versus class room learning. A structured questionnaire was used for the purpose of the study. A 25 item instrument was used for this purpose. 16 questions gathered data about perception statements favoring online learning and 9 questions collected data about perception statements expressing concern over online learning. SPSS software was used for the purpose of analyzing the data collected. Students enrolled in the following programs were contacted for the purpose of this study: 1. Bio-Informatics; 2. Medical Genetics; 3. Food and Wine Preparation; 4. Fashion Art and Accessories; 5. Operations

Research and Media Management; 6. Animation and Multimedia; 7. Medical Law and Ethics; 8. Forex, Immigration and Tour Operations Management. For offering the program the institution had tied-up with a private vendor for offering one year certificate program on the above mentioned subject areas. The content was developed by the college and the online hosting and test administration was done by the vendor.

The assessment was done in three stages in the form of Initial Assessment Test a mid-term assessment called Module Test (MT) at the end of first year of graduation and a final assessment called Final Evaluation (FE) at the end of second year. The students had the choice of opting or not opting for the course.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data gathered was tabulated. Out of 120 students surveyed 56 were female (46.7%) and 64 were male (53.3%). With regard to the awareness about the online courses 71 students were completely aware about the online courses (59.2%). 40 (33.3%) students were somewhat aware and 9 students (7.5%) were not aware about the online courses. Therefore we can say that awareness level about the online courses is good. 101 (84.2%) out of 120 of students had enrolled for the online courses.

Table 1: Students Enrolment for In-house Online Programs

CATEGORY	RESPONDENTS	%
COURSE TAKEN	101	84.2
NOT TAKEN	19	15.8
TOTAL	120	100

Out of the enrolled students, 16 (15.8%) students have not completed the course by taking the test. The course completion rates are pretty good 85%.

Table 2: Online Test Taken

	TEST TAKEN	TEST NOT TAKEN	TOTAL
COURSE TAKEN	85	16	101
NOT TAKEN	0	19	19
TOTAL	85	35	120

A t-test was conducted to find out if there is any difference in the mean scores of students perception toward e-learning between the students (101) who underwent the online courses and the group of students (19) who did not pursue the online courses. The mean score of students who took the course was 84.7525, SD=7.63205, SEM=.75942. The mean score of students who did not take the course was 74.2105, SD=4.82561, SEM=1.10707. An independent sample t-test yielded results that showed students in the Opted out group ( $M = 74.2105$ ,  $SD = 4.82561$ ) had significantly lower perception scores than students in the online study group ( $M = 84.7525$ ,  $SD = 7.63205$ ),  $t(118) = 5.795$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Learner responses to five key items that relate to the course content and presentation along with six items that relates to learner engagement and motivation in the data collection instrument were analyzed and the analysis is presented below in Table 3.

Table 3: Item-wise Students Perception regarding Online Learning with reference to Course Content/Presentation and Learner Engagement/Motivation

ITEM	STRONGLY DISGREE	%	DISAGREE	%	NO OPINION	%	AGREE	%	STRONGLY AGREE	%	TOTAL
MY COURSE HAD RICH MULTIMEDIA	1	0.99	18	17.82	27	26.73	49	48.51	6	5.94	101
COURSE PROVIDES IMMEDIATE FEEDBACK	0	0.00	5	4.95	23	22.77	61	60.40	12	11.88	101
COURSE HAVE GOOD NAVIGATION FACILITIES	2	1.98	2	1.98	26	25.74	61	60.40	10	9.90	101
COURSE MAP IS CLEAR	0	0.00	5	4.95	24	23.76	62	61.39	10	9.90	101
LEARNERS CAN REPEAT THE LESSONS	1	0.99	5	4.95	25	24.75	57	56.44	13	12.87	101
ONLINE TEST ENVIRONMENT IS CONVENIENT	1	0.99	5	4.95	22	21.78	53	52.48	20	19.80	101
ONLINE STUDY GIVES POSITIVE EXPERIENCE	0	0.00	6	5.94	24	23.76	56	55.45	15	14.85	101
TEST IS USER FRIENDLY	1	0.99	4	3.96	16	15.84	63	62.38	17	16.83	101
PREFER ONLINE COMPARED TO OFFLINE	0	0.00	16	15.84	19	18.81	52	51.49	14	13.86	101
ONLINE COURSE WORK IS MODERN	1	0.99	3	2.97	11	10.89	56	55.45	30	29.70	101
LESS TIME IS SPENT ONLINE	1	0.99	10	9.90	14	13.86	64	63.37	12	11.88	101

As seen from the above Table. 3, the overall perception of the course takers is positive towards e-learning. With less than 5% opinions highlighting the drawbacks of e-learning, a majority of the students who take online courses have a positive opinion about the benefits of e-learning. The areas of improvement would be multimedia content and time consumed where respondents opined that better multimedia content needs to be there in place and time spent online is no different than the off line mode.

Table 3 also presents the opinion regarding learner engagement and motivation. With regard to preference of online over off line, 16 respondents (15.84%) disagreed that online is better than offline offerings. With regard to the learnability of the course covering multimedia content, feedback, navigation, course map, repeatability respondents

recorded favorable opinions. About 55(55%) students agreed that the multimedia content was good. 73(72%) of respondents appreciated the immediate feedback. 71(70%) learners said the navigation facilities were good. 72(71%) of students said the course map was clear. 69% liked the repeatability of lessons. All the above findings vouch for the usability of the online courses.

## V. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

The above study covered a small segment of students who opted for the online courses and those who did not opt for the courses. The completion rates are good (85%). However we need to find the reasons for why 15% of the learners did not complete the course. World over the completion rates for massive open online courses are very less hovering around 7%. In this study the completion rates are good because these were paid courses and limited to one module. A study on compelling reasons to pursue and motivation to complete is essential in this context. One should also note the need for rich multimedia content as required by the students. Those respondents who opted out of the online courses do not have a favorable opinion about online programs. To make them understand the benefits of online learning one may give them free access to some modules to give them a feel of online learning and its benefits. Further studies on learning outcomes on practical courses like food and wine preparation, fashion arts and accessories may be conducted to understand whether these skills are really mastered as these courses cannot be offered only in online mode. They need blended learning as compared to other theory courses that should include theory as well as practical instructions.

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