Distance Learners' Attitude Towards A Multimodal Approach To Instruction

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ABSTRACT

Distance education is quickly becoming a more popular option to traditional classroom settings, which will enhance access to higher education both domestically and globally. Using a multimedia approach to training, distance education sets itself apart from traditional teaching-learning methods. The goal of the current study is to investigate how distant learners feel about using multimedia to teach. The Indira Gandhi National Open University accepted participants into a variety of its programs. Out of the 1200 pupils that were given an attitude scale (Thurstone type), only 243 of them answered. A mean attitude score of 7.17 was found through data analysis, suggesting that respondents had a favorable propensity to learn using a multimedia approach. Additional investigation is necessary in this domain to examine the mindset of students in diverse remote learning environments. It would assist remote educators in motivating students, lowering attrition rates significantly, and extending the reach of education via distance learning.

Key words: attitude of distance learner, attitude scale, multimodal approach to instruction

In response to the evolving demands of education, a new system known as distance education has arisen. Its goal is to democratize education, which developing nations desperately need. In order to serve a sizable portion of the population, distance education is a non-formal educational system that incorporates modern communication and instructional technologies. This alternative education system, which is both affordable and sustainable, is essential to addressing the issues of the future.

With the use of all available communication channels, distant education is an advancement over the correspondence schooling system. Home study is made possible by the addition of learning materials through a variety of other technology, such as computers, audio, and video. In order to promote self-learning, an attempt is made to incorporate the teacher within the course materials themselves. When a teacher and student are separated from direct, immediate, physical contact, technology is employed to close the instructional gap (Willis, 1993) (Hassenplug & Harnish, 1998).

Diverse learners who are unable to participate in traditional classroom settings are served by distance education. Therefore, students that choose this method of instruction are very motivated. To be able to assist distant learners as effectively as possible, it is crucial to assess their attitude.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

First, let's look at the idea of attitude. When we inquire about someone's attitude toward anything, our main goal is usually to find out about their thoughts, preferences, and dislikes regarding the subject matter. Murphy (1931) has noted that an examination of a child's early development shows that attitudes initially show up as basic acceptance or rejection postural reactions. Following reactions akin to these initial ones, these ultimately turn into traits of the person's orientation toward nearly every circumstance he comes across.

The "Mental and neural state of readiness organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects with which it is related" is what Allport (1935) defined as attitude. To put it simply, an individual's attitude is based on their feelings or beliefs. However, it is challenging to gauge people's attitudes. Researchers frequently have to rely on people's statements or expressions of their opinions and emotions (Best and Kahn, 2001).

Studies on learners' perceptions of distant learning have been done in the current setting. Since distance education uses a multimedia method to deliver instruction, it's critical to investigate how beneficial media use has been for both distant educators and those who benefit from it. According to Katz (2002), a few theoretical empirical research have looked at the psychological effects of using information and communication technology. According to these studies, assessing students' psychological attitudes regarding ICT use is crucial for determining how well remote learning methodologies are used for instruction and learning. The same psychological dispositions that are known to be associated with other effective ICT applications for learning and instruction appear to have an impact on distance learning at the postsecondary level via ICT. Katz's study looked at the interactions between two ICT-based designs for remote learning. The findings show that the psychological attitudes of the distance learners have a differential facilitation effect on the efficiency with which distance learning methodologies are used.

Students' preferences for structured remote learning are positively influenced by psychological characteristics such as study motivation for distance learning, degree of control over the learning process, and pleasure with learning. Conversely, a student's propensity for internet use is positively correlated with their level of independence in the classroom.

According to Ashby (2002), the Internet is the most often used technology for remote education, and most students who use it are enrolled in business, humanities, and education-related courses. Additional research has indicated a rise in the number of students enrolled in online courses. According to a Srivastava (2002) research, 54% of Canadian universities and 68% of community colleges offered distance learning programs. Ninety-four percent of Canadian universities that had not yet implemented distant education had plans to do so within the next five years. According to the same study, 76% of online courses were offered in the United States in 1998, making it the country leading the world in remote education. Australia made up 3%, Canada made up 19%, and other nations made up hardly 2%. On the other hand, distance learning rose from 2.6% to 20% in India between 1975 and 2001.Compared to the formal education system, which is predicted to develop by just 5 to 10% annually, the distant education system is expected to grow by 30 to 40% annually. Tucker (2003) looked at the profile of distant learners in higher education in another study. Among the many traits examined was the attitude of the students. A survey consisting of eighty-one items was utilized to ascertain general contentment with online learning programs. Based on a five-point Likert-type rating scale (agree to disagree), scores were determined. The things that were evaluated were:

i)   High ratings indicated strong resistance to web-based training

ii)   Strong procrastination habits

iii)   High scores suggested high perceived quantity learnt

iv)   high degree of satisfaction with the instructor

v)   high contentment with web-based training

vi) high self-efficacy.

Students were generally enthusiastic about using courseware as a tool for learning in the classroom, with many of them endorsing its motivational appeal and educational value, according to an investigation into the students' reactions to its use, which involved young students. Even with the generally positive outlook, the data revealed a significant difference between the responses of male and female students to the course materials. Male students were more comfortable using computers as a learning tool than female students (Geoff Ring, 1991).

According to a research by Joan Robson (1996), students who get math instruction via remote learning have access to a versatile medium thanks to the use of teleconferencing. The technology can facilitate teacher-student engagement that is comparable to that which occurs in a traditional classroom, according to the results. According to the investigation's findings, teleconferencing can be used to teach math remotely, providing students with access to instruction that, while distinct from that provided in traditional classrooms, is yet an integral part of a productive teaching and learning environment. It also emphasizes how important it is to deal with pedagogical learning concerns in order to optimize engagement in this setting.

NJagi, Smith, and Isbell (2003) conducted a study to evaluate students' attitudes on web-based learning resources. The study evaluated the following:

a) disparities in students' altered attitudes toward the Western Civilization course between those utilizing online resources and those utilizing traditional text books

b) variations in students' attitudes toward computer technology between those who use traditional text books and those who use web-based resources

c) whether factors such as age, gender, college level, personal computer ownership, internet accessibility at home, daily internet usage, etc. were associated with attitudes

d) whether computer literacy level predicted students' attitudes toward Western Civilization classes and computer technology. The groups' attitudes did not significantly differ from one another, according to the results. On the other hand, attitudes on computer technology and computer literacy were positively and significantly correlated. Gender and the amount of time students spent online for assignments were shown to be among the demographic factors that predicted positive attitude.

In 2000, Nasser and Abouchedid looked at the attitudes and worries that exist in Lebanon regarding distant learning. The purpose of the study was to investigate how school administrators and instructors in Lebanon felt about the benefits of establishing a remote learning program. The idea that distant education may satisfy school instructors' training requirements was met with disapproval by school directors. Furthermore, they saw the purchase of expensive technology for distance learning and expensive training as unthinkable. Teachers, on the other hand, had a more favorable opinion of remote learning. They indicated that they were prepared to make the effort to become acquainted with novel technology and procedures

The majority of research has shown that distance learning has advantages over in-person education. Nonetheless, certain research indicates that technology has not succeeded in completely transforming the educational process. This has been emphasized in a research by Robert B. Hannafin and Wilhelminac Savenye titled "Technology in the classroom: The Teacher's New Role and Resistance to It." They claim that the audacious claims made about how instructional television (ITV), movies, and video could transform education and enhance learning have not come true. Teachers and scholars are looking for an explanation for the disappointment that followed each of their inventions.

As a result, technology is having a significant impact on education at all levels, but especially in higher education. Because of the growing use of technology in higher education, it's critical to comprehend how

technologically advanced surroundings and instructional technologies are affecting students' attitudes toward learning (Njagi, Smith, & Isbell, 2003).

THE STUDY

Methodology

A descriptive survey approach was used for the current study. The study's primary audience was Indira Gandhi National Open University students.

A stratified random selection technique was used to choose a sample of students enrolled in different IGNOU programs. The programs were divided into four categories for the purpose of selecting a sample: courses leading to a certificate or diploma, graduate degrees, postgraduate degrees, and postgraduate diplomas. For the study, 1200 pupils were chosen. (Hema, 2003)

Tool Employed

Students' attitudes regarding the multimedia approach were measured using an attitude scale (modified from Menon M.B. 1984's PhD project). Thurstone's equal appearing interval method was chosen to gauge students' attitudes on the use of multimedia in the classroom. This method's primary justification is that it doesn't require the creation of any norms in order to interpret a person's attitude score. A final set of twenty-two statements were chosen to make up the scale. The participants were instructed to carefully review each of the twenty-two statements and indicate with a tick mark if they agreed with the statement or with a cross mark if they disagreed. The complete student sample had access to the attitude scale. The used attitude scale is displayed in Table 1.

ADMINISTRATION

Students were given the modified attitude scale to gauge how they felt about using multimedia for remote instruction and learning. Nevertheless, not every respondent returned the completed attitude scale. There were 243 respondents (20.25%) who returned the attitude scale properly completed.

Table-1. Attitude Scale: To measure the attitude of students to multimedia approach to instruction. (Menon M.B., 1984)

S.No.   Statements

1.   I feel, I would have done better in my earlier examinations if I had learnt through multimedia approach (0.62).
2.   I would like to learn some other subject also through multimedia approach (8.87).
3.   Like any other approach, multimedia approach has some good points and also some limitations (6.09).
4.   Multimedia approach is the best solution for all problems of classroom teaching (11.00).
5.   I am not for multimedia approach to instruction (1.50).
6.   It takes very long to cover every topic through multi-media approach to teaching (3.93).
7.   Multimedia may be a good approach to teaching but I do not think we can afford it as it involves a lot of resources (4.95).
8.   I think a lot of students would like to be taught all the courses through multimedia approach (9.73).
9.   There are several good ways of teaching, multimedia approach is just one of them (6.50).
10.   Multimedia approach to teaching is quite interesting as different methods and media are used (8.30).
11.   I don't I have much faith in multimedia approach to teaching as its quality depends on the teacher who develops it (3.50).
12.   Without great efforts on the part of the teacher it may not be possible to utilise effectively a well developed multimedia approach to teaching a given subject (4.50).

13. Learning through multimedia approach is very tiresome for the learner, as it demands great efforts on his part (2.17).
14. Multimedia approach is the best available approach to teaching (11.00).
15. Due to elaborate efforts needed for development, multimedia approach may not gain much popularity (4.75).
16. As a teacher I would prefer teaching through multimedia approach to teaching through lecture (9.22).
17. I do not mind learning through any approach to teaching including multimedia approach (6.00).
18. I would not like to waste my precions time to learn another subject through multimedia approach (1.14).
19. Any teacher can effectively teach through multimedia approach if an orientation is provided to him in the approach (8.10).
20. I would have scored better marks if I was taught through a single method (2.63).
21. If you want me to stop studying further, teach me another course through multimedia approach (1.09).
22. Multimedia approach is alright for learning certain subjects (7.17).

Note: Figures in parenthesis against each attitude statement indicate the scale value of that statement.

DATA ANALYSIS

According to Thurstone's equal seeming interval approach, a person's attitude score is determined by calculating the median score of all the scale values for the statements on the scale that they have approved of. An assessment's attitude is evaluated by comparing its score to the eleven-point rating system, and interpreting the results accordingly. Six on the eleven-point scale represents neutrality; above six to eleven represents varying degrees of favorability; below six to one represents varying degrees of unfavorability.

As a consequence, a mean attitude score of 7.17 was determined by calculating the attitude scores of 243 IGNOU respondents.

INTERPRETATION

Any result above 6 implies varying degrees of favourableness, which suggests that respondents had a positive attitude towards the multimedia approach to teaching, according to the study above. Despite the inaccessibility of audio-visual materials, learners have indicated a preference for learning through multimedia approaches (Pant, 2003). Therefore, the university should work hard to improve multimedia as an educational tool to help with remote learning and make it more relevant, engaging, and helpful for students.

DISCUSSION

The heterogeneous background of distant learners is a defining characteristic. Their value systems are immediately impacted and shaped by it, which leads to their divergent attitudes (Rathus and Nevid 1987). A person's attitude toward technology is based on his or her values and beliefs (Paneer, Gebobotys 1992: Gardner, Duke & Discenza, 1993). The teaching-learning process as a whole has benefited from technology, which has changed students' attitudes toward learning. A greater variety of learning goals, objectives, projects, learning activities, and exercises have been made possible by the intervention of communication and information technology as well as web-based learning compared to the traditional classroom system. As a result, the learners' motivation and level of interest have significantly enhanced. Both students and professors are as enthusiastic and driven as ever, and teaching has become more dynamic. Instructors approach their work with creativity. "If ICT is combined with appropriate pedagogy, online classrooms would yield desired results," states Bill. Because learning resources are interactive, students can participate more actively in the creation of the content and help create a more real-world learning environment. For example, students have global access to virtual libraries. As a result, they have access to a wealth of knowledge and resources that are not available in a single learning environment. [Bill, 1997 in UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok, Thailand, ICT in Education for Asia-Pacific 2002].

When interpreting the study's findings, it is necessary to take into account some limitations. First off, the study's participants were students from India's sole open institution, Indira Gandhi National Open institution in New Delhi. Second, the population of the university consisted of just 1% of all enrolled students. Third, participants in a limited number of programs who fit into any of the four categories were chosen at random for the research. Generalizations about the study can be drawn while keeping these restrictions in mind.

In conclusion, it can be claimed that a range of technological, instructional, and pedagogical advancements in the modern era have had a significant impact on the teaching and learning process (Bonk & King, 1998; Marina 2001). One such technological breakthrough that combines new communication technology with outreach to broader populations is distance education. Both educators and students must adopt a more positive mindset, and the use of instructional technology helps to accelerate this process by inspiring both parties. More extensive and comparable research ought to be conducted in order to get relevant information about the effective integration of current and emerging technology into different educational levels.

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