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### ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE EFFICACY OF ONLINE TEACHING

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#### ABSTRACT

A new era has dawned, exemplified by the online education revolution. Because of the advent of the internet and new technology, attending a classroom is no longer the only way to study. Nowadays, you can acquire a high-quality education anytime and wherever you choose if you have internet connectivity. This paper examines students' perceptions toward the efficacy of online teaching in distance learning programs of Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan. The study falls under the descriptive paradigm. All students of the B.Ed Program in the session 2020–2021 were the population. A convenience sampling technique was applied to a sample of two hundred students. A researchers-designed instrument having fifteen statements was used in this study. The validity and reliability of the instrument were confirmed before its execution. Data were collected using an online instrument created in Google Forms. SPSS version 24 was used to analyse the data. Frequencies were used to compare quantitative data's mean, standard deviation, and percentages. The t-test was applied to find out the significant differences on the basis of students' gender. The results of the study showed that the majority of the respondents agreed regarding the efficacy and quality of online teaching in distance learning programs. The majority of the students agreed that they feel happy to attend their online classes in distance learning programs; they lose much information if they remain absent; online teaching boosts their knowledge, tutors teaching online classes and classmates support them; they can manage time to attend online classes quickly; the online environment of classes was good; their expectations of teaching and university services were excellent, and students of distance learning programs were highly motivated. Moreover, this investigation revealed that students of both genders equally agreed regarding the efficacy of online teaching in distance learning programs. This study recommended that the online tutors of distance learning programs provide more support to the students through various online activities and innovative teaching methods to enhance their learning.

**Keywords:** Students; Perceptions; Efficacy; Online teaching; Distance learning.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Distance learning is a mode of learning in which the teaching and learning processes are carried out by mail rather than attending a school, college, or university, and where students and professors are separated in both time and distance. Students in this style of education communicate with the institution by mail. As technology has advanced, remote education has transitioned to an online style of instruction using video conferencing, television, and the internet (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2016; Anderson & Rivera, 2020). Nowadays, distance education is referred to as online education, with learning supported by technology (e-learning) (Anderson & Rivera, 2020). According to Ural (2017), the first open university was founded in England in

the 1970s and played a significant part in the development of the distance education system. It has been quite successful in delivering flexible and technologically advanced learning settings. The UNED (Spain) and UNED (Costa Rica), Athabasca University (Canada), and the CCTU are also included alongside the Open University (UK) (China). This trip was delayed and did not live up to the expectations of Arab students. Al-Quds Open University in Palestine is one of the pioneering institutions. It was founded in 1985 in response to the Palestinians' rising need for higher education in the context of occupation (Nashwan, 1997).

According to Kilani (2011), more universities are now using open learning systems than there were in the past. There are 900 universities and other educational institutions that fit this description. The advantages and qualities of open learning over traditional learning are the driving force behind this rise. According to Jauhiainen et al. (2017), open university practice gives a second opportunity to individuals who cannot complete their higher education, such as women. Tunckan, (2017) stated that one of the key features of open learning is its capacity to accommodate many students. Due to the increased need for higher education in a rapidly developing globe, this system offers options for people who wish to participate in a higher education system but cannot afford it. In contrast to traditional universities, the open university is able to address the issue of large student populations that require physical spaces, furnishings, libraries, research labs, and most importantly, a large number of qualified faculty and staff by utilising technological advancements like the internet and multi-media equipment. Anadolou University, with over 1,100,000 students enrolled in 28 Associate's Degree and 7 Bachelor's Degree programmes, is a notable example. Ural (2017) agrees with Tunckan (2017) when characterising Anadolou University's capacity to accommodate a large number of students in need of higher education. Because the university provides 34 different programmes in a variety of areas via written materials, television shows, and academic counselling, the expected number of students enrolled last year was 800000.

Distance learning is a concept that refers to a variety of alternative educational methods and has been known in various forms, including the following: (Al-Quds Open University, 2014). Distance learning is the first type, frequently used to replace open learning. Dooley et al. (2015) define it as a style of education that appeals to learners whose duties prevent them from using traditional and face-to-face techniques. These students are typically people with children, full-time and part-time employers who live in remote locations and cannot afford a full-time study, or military members who desire the freedom to attend courses that are not restricted by time or location. The second kind is called "external studies," an Australian term for a system of education that offers two types of education: traditional and distant. In addition to its on-campus, face-to-face programmes, the university or institution offers remote learning courses. The third and oldest type of education is correspondence education. The instructional material is mailed to pupils in this sort of distant education. Finally, according to Hajji (2013), independent study is an American model that allows students to pursue higher education without the constraints of time, location, cost, or any other limitations imposed by the traditional system.

Distance education is a planned learning experience or instruction technique distinguished by the instructor's and learner's near-permanent separation (s). Information and communication within a remote education system are exchanged via print or electronic communications mediums (Keegan, 2018; Bandalaria, 2018). Distance education is likewise a broad strategy with a great deal of variance. Examples of such variation include the types of media or technology used (print, radio, computer); the nature of the learning (workshop, seminar, degree program, supplement to traditional classroom, degrees of assistance); institutional contexts; themes addressed; and levels of interaction support (face-to-face, online, blended, none) (Fillip, 2016; Isik et al., 2018). Moreover, the extensive use of information and communications technology (ICT), which has replaced the traditional method of content delivery by postal correspondence, allows for the facilitation of distance learning and independent learning in the modern era through electronic educational technology (also known as e-learning). The emphasis is transferred to the

educational transaction in the form of a virtual community of learners sustainable through time, where instruction can take the shape of synchronous and asynchronous online contact in an interactive learning environment or virtual communities (Garrison, 2011).

Ural (2017) researched PhD students' perspectives on using remote education systems, technology, and autonomous study in Turkey, where there is a huge demand for higher education. According to the study, there is a considerable demand for higher education in Turkey, but the employment of distance education methods and technology in traditional colleges is uncommon. He further stated that conventional institutions might employ distance education methods and technology in specific lectures to cope with the burden of an expanding number of students. They can have a beneficial impact on the vast Turkish education system. He stated that his research findings revealed that doctorate students have a negative attitude regarding the usage of distant education systems and technology, and they do not agree with the premise that distance education systems can encourage autonomous learning.

Mashhour (2017) provided an empirically supported distance education strategy for Jordanian students. In his study, the researcher addressed the need for such instruction at the national level on a sample of Jordanian students enrolled in the remote education system. His sample's responses revealed that distance education provides a feasible and suitable option for people unable to participate in traditional residential schools. The study also shows that the application of new technologies might solve the shortcomings of traditional and contemporary forms of distance education. Nartgun (2017) conducted a diagnostic investigation of Open University students' perspectives on the distance education application challenge. The open faculty students (n = 45) who attend its courses are the topic of this study. Data was gathered through interviews, which revealed that students valued open learning the most since they worked in different workplaces. They also stated that most students had favourable sentiments regarding the efficacy of online teaching. They did; however, they reported having trouble studying independently and believing they would have difficulty obtaining work in the future.

Mutlu (2015) offered a descriptive analysis of E-learning service design and development in Turkey's open education system. The researcher concluded that the structure of the Open Education E-learning services is flexible to the extent that students can study efficiently while adhering to distance education regulations, following books, television programmes, and practice software, asking academic facilitators questions and receiving responses, and taking trial exams to evaluate all of their efforts. Darwazah (2016) conducted a study to evaluate characteristics influencing university academic accomplishment in online education versus traditional education settings. The study's findings revealed that similar variables significantly impacted university academic achievement in both types of education; however, these variables, work responsibility and university academic level, had no significant impact on university academic achievement in either type of education. Furthermore, gender considerably influences university academic success in distance education but not in traditional education settings, favouring females. Jauhiainen et al. (2017) examined and assessed the history and aspirations of Finnish open university students. According to the quantitative study, a typical university student is a female between the ages of 25 and 30, unmarried, childless, working in a service sector with a low salary, a secondary school graduate, and residing in a town in southern Finland. Students were grouped into four groups based on their autobiographies: job-oriented, graduation-oriented, change-seekers, and learning as a way of life. Their research also revealed that students had positive attitudes towards the online teaching tactics used by their teachers. Bandalaria (2018) discovered that distance education enhances students' technical capabilities needed for online learning. Wildana et al. (2020) found online learning to be effective as it facilitates the use of various applications such as 'Whatsapp', 'Zoom' and 'Google Classroom'. Furthermore, online learning is the best medium to ensure the continuity of students' learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mansor et al., 2021).

## **Statement of the Problem**

Distance education is becoming popular day by day in the 21st century due to its flexibility and low cost. In this busy world, most students are adopting the distance mode of education due to its flexibility and ease of use. But the quality and efficacy of online teaching in distance education are low and have failed to develop contemporary knowledge in students. Therefore, this study aimed to explore students' perceptions towards the efficacy of online teaching with the following objectives: (a) to explore students' perceptions towards the efficacy of online teaching in distance learning programs, to discover students' attitudes towards distance learning programs, and (c) assess students' opinions towards the quality of distance learning programs?

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the students' opinions towards the efficacy of online teaching in distance learning programs?
2. What are the attitudes of students towards distance learning programs?
3. What are the opinions of students towards the quality of distance learning programs?
4. Is there any difference between the opinions of male and female students about the efficacy of online teaching in distance learning programs?

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was a descriptive type, and the population comprised all the students studying in B.Ed programmes offered in distance learning education by the Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad. A sample comprising 200 students was selected by using a convenience sampling technique. Researchers developed a questionnaire based on the five-point Likert scale used for data collection through the Google form online method. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were confirmed through experts' opinions and pilot testing. After collecting the data, SPSS software was used for its analysis. Mean scores, standard deviation, percentages, and t-test were computed. The following results appeared in the analysis.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Results of Table 1 indicate that 100% of participants displayed their perceptions towards an agreement about statement number 1, "My teachers taught me according to course contents", with a favourable mean score of 4.86. Results revealed that 53% of participants agreed with statement number 2, "My teachers used various teaching and learning activities", with a favourable mean score of 3.04. Results uncovered that 73% of participants disclosed their perceptions to an agreement about statement number 3, "My teachers used various assessment techniques," with a favourable mean score of 3.51. Results disclosed that 60% of students disclosed their perceptions and agreement about statement number 4, "Teaching methods in online class boosted up my knowledge", with a favourable mean score of 3.113. Results revealed that 87% of students agreed with statement 5, "I am satisfied with the efficacy of online teaching", with a favourable mean score of 4.00.

Results of Table 2 demonstrate that 87% of students indicated their perceptions in agreement about statement number 6, "I got support from my online tutors", with a favourable mean score of 3.90. Results concluded that 87% of students agreed with statement number 7, "I got support from classmates," with a favorable mean score of 4.16. Results concluded that 86% of students disclosed their perceptions to an agreement about statement 8, "I find it easy to manage my own time and ensure my attendance in online classes", with a favorable mean score of 4.32. Results concluded that 87% of students agreed with statement number 9, "Distance learning education enhanced my motivation" with a favorable mean score of 4.30. Results concluded that 95% of students agreed to statement number 10, "Tutors of distance learning programs supported me always", with a favourable mean score of 4.51.

Table 1. Students' responses about the efficacy of online teaching in distance learning programs.

No.	Statements	Mean	SD	Responses in %				
				SDA	DA	UD	A	SA
1	My teachers taught me according to course contents	4.86	0.340	0	0	0	13.3	86.7
2	My teachers used various teaching and learning activities	3.04	1.083	7.3	34.7	4.7	43.3	10.0
3	My teachers used various assessment technique	3.51	0.936	0	26.7	0	68.7	4.7
4	Teaching methods in online class boosted up my knowledge	3.11	1.236	13.3	26.7	0	55.3	4.7
5	I am satisfied with the efficacy of online teaching	4.00	0.8951	0	13.3	0	60.0	26.7

Table 2. Students' responses about attitude to distance learning programs.

No.	Statements	Mean	SD	Responses in %				
				SDA	DA	UD	A	SA
6	I got support from my online tutors	3.90	0.406	0	0	13.3	82.7	4.0
7	I got support from classmates	4.16	0.637	0	0	13.3	56.7	30.0
8	I find it easy to manage my own time and ensure my attendance in online classes	4.32	0.696	0	0	13.7	41.3	45.0
9	Distance learning education enhanced my motivation	4.30	1.347	4.0	1.3	7.3	46.7	40.7
10	Tutors of distance learning programs supported me always	4.51	.686	4.7	0	0	26.3	68.7

Results of Table 3 show that 88% of students indicated their perceptions in agreement with statement number 11, "The online environment of the classes is pleasant", with a favourable mean score of 3.90. Results concluded that 90% of students agreed with statement number 12, "The learning environment of the classes are good", with a favorable mean score of 4.176. Results concluded that 86% of students disclosed their perceptions to an agreement about statement number 13, "My expectations about the quality of online program are good", with a favourable mean score of 4.32. Results concluded that 67% of students agreed with statement number 14, "My expectations about university programs are best", with a favourable mean score of 3.80. The results table concluded that 95% of students agreed to statement number 15, "Students in online learning programs are highly motivated", with a favourable mean score of 4.51.

The result of Table 4 demonstrates that there was a non-significant difference between Male ( $Mean=3.70$ ,  $SD=.169$ ) and Female ( $Mean=3.77$ ,  $SD=.173$ ),  $t(198) = -.335$ . It is clear from the ( $p=.739$ ) value that the outcomes were not significant. It confirms that students of both genders equally agreed regarding the efficacy of online teaching in distance learning programs. These outcomes concluded that students belonging to both genders showed the same attitudes and participation regarding the efficacy of online teaching in distance learning programs.

Table 3. Students' responses about quality of distance learning programs.

No.	Statements	Mean	SD	Responses in %				
				SDA	DA	UD	A	SA
11	The online environment of the classes is pleasant	3.90	0.406	0	0	12.3	83.7	4.0
12	The learning environment of the classes are good	4.17	0.637	0	0	10.3	56.7	33.0
13	My expectations about the quality of online program are good	4.32	0.696	0	0	13.7	41.3	45.0
14	My expectations about university programs are best	3.80	1.347	4.0	31.3	7.3	36.7	20.7
15	Students in online learning programs are highly motivated	4.51	.686	4.7	0	0	26.3	68.7

Table 4. Gender wise comparison about efficacy of online teaching.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	p-value
Male	100	3.70	.169	198	-.335	.739
Female	100	3.77	.173			

Based on statistical outcomes, this study has found that 100% of students displayed their perceptions agreement that their teachers taught them according to course content; 53% of participants agreed that their teachers used various teaching and learning activities, 73% of learners agreed that their teachers used various assessment techniques; 60% of students agreed that teaching methods in online classes boosted their knowledge; 87% of students agreed that they were satisfied with the quality of online teaching. Furthermore, this investigation revealed that 87% of students agreed with the statement that they received support from their online tutors; 87% of students agreed that they received support from classmates; 86% of students agreed that they find it easy to manage their own time and ensure their attendance in online classes; 87% of students said that distance learning education enhanced their motivation, and 95% of students agreed that tutors of distance learning education enhanced their motivation. In addition, this exploration has discovered that 88% of students indicated their perceptions to agreement with the statement that the online environment of the classes is pleasant; 90% of students agreed that the learning environment of the classes is good; 86% of students agreed that their expectations about the quality of online programmes are good; 67% of students agreed that their expectations about university programmes are best, and 95% of students agreed that students in online learning programmes are highly motivated. The results also found an insignificant difference between males ( $Mean=3.70$ ,  $SD=.169$ ) and females ( $Mean=3.77$ ,  $SD=.173$ ),  $t(198) = -.335$ . It is clear from the ( $p=.739$ ) value that the outcomes were not significant. It confirmed that students belonging to both genders agreed equally regarding the efficacy of online teaching in distance learning programs (Table 1,2,3 & 4).

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concluded that the majority of the students of distance learning programs of Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad agreed that their tutors taught them according to course contents; used various teaching and learning activities during online teaching, used various assessment techniques; teaching methods in online classes boosted their knowledge; and they are satisfied with the efficacy of online teaching. Most of the students agreed that they got support from their online tutors, support from classmates; they can manage their own time and ensure their attendance in online classes, and distance learning education enhances their motivation. This research has discovered that most of the students agreed that tutors of distance learning programs supported them; the online environment of the online

classes is pleasant, the learning environment of the classes is good, the quality of online programs is good, their expectations about university programs are the best, and students in online learning programs are highly motivated. Moreover, this investigation revealed that students of both genders equally agreed regarding the efficacy of online teaching in distance learning programs. This study recommended that the online tutors of distance learning programs must provide more support to the students through various online activities and innovative teaching methods. Students of distance learning programs are also required to participate and ensure their attendance in online classes whenever tutors arrange workshops, seminars, or lectures.

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