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Attitude of students of SAUs towards online teaching during COVID-19

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Abstract

Teaching across a range of institutions had been hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in traditional agricultural colleges. As a result, internet based teaching-learning (online teaching) replaced traditional classroom instruction which is adopted as core approach for continuing education due to closure of schools, colleges, universities etc. The central aim of any higher education institution is to nurture the higher order thinking among students to attain mastery in their respective fields. Therefore present study was undertaken to know the attitude of students of State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) of Uttarakhand viz. GBPUA&T, Pantnagar and VCSG UHF, Bharsar towards online teaching. From both SAUs two colleges were selected purposively and a total of 359 students (both UG and PG) were selected randomly for investigation. For collecting the data, a validated attitude scale comprising of 44 statements was used and questionnaire/Google forms were administered to the selected sample. Findings of study revealed that in overall majority of university students had favorable attitude towards online teaching followed by less than one third (28.69%) of students who had not favorable attitude and rest of students had shown highly favorable attitude towards online teaching i.e. 25.35 percent.

Keywords: Online teaching, attitude, students, classroom instruction

Introduction

The worldwide, COVID-19 spread was declared as global pandemic by WHO and every nation has implemented health protocols to prevent its spread by staying at home. Due to this, each and every sector was significantly impacted across the world. The implementation of these health protocols has also compelled governments to close educational institutions both public and private, from preschool to university, and has mandated learning at home or distant learning using a variety of e-teaching platforms. In India, the first case was officially recorded on 30 January 2020 and cases were increasing day by day therefore Indian Government took the strict action for full lockdown on 24 March, 2020 all over the country. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported that more than 1.37 billion students (80% of the global student population) have been affected by the crisis (UNESCO, 2020). All educational institutions in India were temporarily closed in March 2020 and in April 2020 and Ministry of Education presented Alternative Academic Calendar (AAC) guidelines on continuing the formal education via online mode. This transition from face-to-face to distant mode of learning has shown the vast inequalities within the education system between and within states. COVID-19 has changed the complete teaching pattern and forced the students to relocate from physical university campuses and adapt to new online educational settings.

Online teaching has numerous advantages but there are certain limitations also as its introduction at campus-based universities worldwide has increased loneliness, fear and uncertainty regarding exams, classes/ practical, researches and jobs among the students (Jain, 2022) ^[10]. It was very difficult to depend totally over distant mode of education especially for agricultural universities where the more emphasis is given on the field based experiments and classroom instructions (Thapa *et al.* 2020) ^[9]. Some research studies found that teaching learning takes place better in physical classrooms which is more inspiring (Chakraborty *et al.* (2020) ^[2], Abbasi *et al.* (2020) ^[1] and Khalid and Wahab (2021) ^[3] because the course curriculum mainly meant for conventional teaching pattern and it can be partially replaced by online mode of teaching as reported by Olmes *et al.* (2021) ^[6]. Since, all the students irrespective of their level and type of institution were willingly or unwillingly required to participate in teaching-learning process in online mode and have to play the role of a student.

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Although this was the only alternative to keep the teaching-learning process functional, but during this situation students' feeling, comfort and resources availability were not taken care of. Therefore, this study was undertaken to get in depth understanding regarding the attitude of students of SAUs towards online teaching so that if desired, in future appropriate strategies can be formulated for online teaching by keeping in view the attitude of learners and to meet quality standards and addressing the academic goals.

Objective: To assess the attitude of Students of State Agricultural Universities of Uttarakhand towards online teaching during COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology

Present study was conducted in state agricultural universities of Uttarakhand viz. Govind Ballabh Pant University of Agriculture and technology, Pantnagar and Veer Chandra Singh Garhwali University of Horticulture and Forestry, Bharsar. Further, two colleges i.e. College of agriculture from Pantnagar University and College of Forestry, Ranichauri from Bharsar University were selected purposively on the basis of high strength of faculties and students. All registered students (Both Undergraduate and Post-graduate) of year 2019-2020 were considered as the population of study. From both colleges, 25 percent of total students from each program (UG and PG) were selected randomly. Therefore, the final sample was comprised of 359 students in which 225 students were from Undergraduate program and remaining 134 students were from Post-graduate including Master and PhD

both. Data was collected through online and offline survey method to get hundred percent responses from the students by developing a self administered questionnaire and Google form which was administered to selected sample via mail and whatsapp. To assess the attitude of students towards online teaching an attitude scale developed by Nu'man, M. & Al-Musaw in 2014 was used. There were a total of 44 statements and the responses were categorized under five point continuum ranging from strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree with assigned scores of 5,4,3,2 and 1 respectively. The scoring pattern was reversed for negative statements. Data was analyzed by using frequency and percentage and overall three appropriate categories were made using maximum and minimum value to categorize the respondents.

Results and Discussion

Data regarding attitude of students towards online teaching have been presented below in Table 1 and figure 1. It was clearly shown that about half (50.67%) of UG students had favorable attitude towards the online teaching. Further, the data revealed a difference among the UG and PG students who showed not favorable attitude towards online learning i.e. 17.33 percent of UG and majority (47.76%) of PG students respectively. Moreover, nearly half of PG students showed their favorable attitude towards online teaching. In addition, less than one third of UG students (32 %) and only 14.18 percent of PG students had shown highly favorable attitude for online teaching.

Table 1: Distribution of students according to their attitude towards online teaching

Sr. No.	Category	UG (n=225)		Category	PG (n=134)	
		f	%		f	%
1	Not favorable (<98)	39	17.33	Not favorable (<124)	64	47.76
2	Favorable (98-151)	114	50.67	Favorable (124-169)	51	38.06
3	Highly favorable (>151)	72	32.0	Highly favorable (>164)	19	14.18

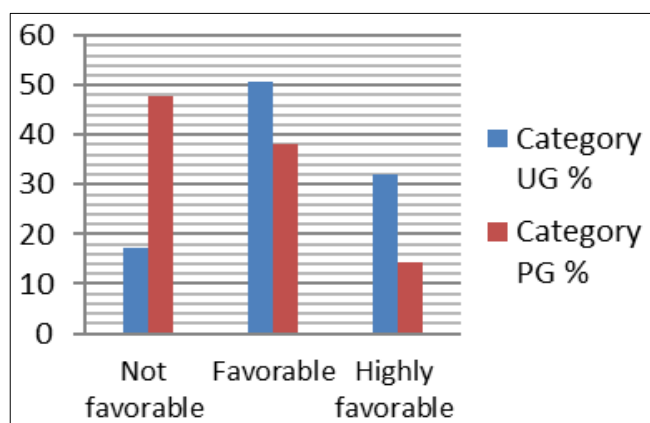


Fig 1: Attitude differences among UG and PG students towards online teaching

Overall attitude of students

By calculating the overall attitude of students it was found that majority of students (45.96%) had favorable attitude followed by not favorable attitude (28.69%) and 25.35 percent of total students had highly favorable attitude towards online teaching. It implies that students may be enthusiastic, much active to take classes online, self-confident and may have good handling of ICT tools or applications.

Table 2: Distribution of students according to overall attitude towards online teaching (n=359)

Sr. No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Not Favorable	103	28.69
2	Favorable	165	45.96
3	Highly favorable	91	25.35

The attitudinal difference among UG and PG students may be due to the size of class, differences in course structure, curriculum offered and mainly research work and field work as the students were from agriculture discipline. Moreover, personal factors such as accessibility of ICTs, geographical location, technological readiness might be affecting their attitude. Similarly, Singh K. (2020) [7] reported that majority of students who were living in urban areas, had favorable attitude towards online learning and the reason behind not favorable attitude of rural living students may be non-availability of technological resources, limited income sources especially in pandemic situation.

In align with present findings, Tamta and Ansari (2015) [8] also found favorable attitude towards e-learning among B.Sc. agriculture students which calls for a paradigm shift in education. There was not much difference in the perception of Graduate and Post Graduate students towards online learning as found by Muthuprasad *et al.* (2020) [5]. Further, in the same

line, Kumar *et al.* (2021)^[4] also reported that more than half of college going students had positive attitude and found a significant association between their attitude towards online classes and socio-demographic and psychological variables.

Conclusion

With the emergence of new technologies, online learning has increasingly become the promising solution for emergency time period to continue educational process across the country. Advancement and development in learning sciences is also providing the opportunities to create well-designed, learner-centered, interactive, affordable, efficient and flexible environment for students. Thus, the study aimed to assess the agricultural students' attitude towards online teaching for strategic and effective implementation of courses over online platforms in future. In conclusion with present study, majority of students (UG & PG) showed the favorable attitude towards online teaching. Besides that a large proportion of students had unfavorable attitude which means that students are in favor with online teaching but needs some improvements. Hence, it can be recommended that in the post COVID-19 era, higher education system need to move to blended mode of teaching because fully online teaching mode found less appealing due to its limitations mainly with respect to practical aspects.

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