

Attitudes towards E-learning: A Comparison of Age-groups

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Abstract

Advancement in technology is one of the biggest gifts of the last century. Among other fields, learning was also revolutionized by these technological advancements. The most prominent result was E-learning. E-learning is one of the most popular modes of generating and sharing knowledge in today's world and it is definitely here to stay. E-learning elicits a wide array of responses from different groups. While the supporters highlight the benefits and potential uses of e-learning, the critics vehemently cite misuse and frequently question the utility of this mode of learning. These different perspectives give rise to different mindsets and opinions about the same among the general lot. The present paper has tried to tap into this difference of attitudes among three age-groups (Young, Middle-aged, and Elderly) of people of Indian society. The age range of the participants of "Young" age-group was 15 to 30 years. The "Middle-aged" group included respondents from 30 to 45 years of age, and the "Elderly" group included respondents from 45 to 60 years of age. A sample of 30 participants (10 from each age-group) was administered an open-ended questionnaire which aimed at assessing the attitude towards e-learning. A content analysis of the responses was undertaken to identify the common themes which emerged in different age-groups in terms of positive, negative or neutral attitudes shown by the respondents. Implications of the major findings for society in general are also discussed.

Keyword: E-learning; Attitude; Young; Middle-aged; Elderly.

1. Introduction

Technology has lately progressed with leaps and bounds. No area of human existence has remained untouched by the influence of technology. One domain which has especially garnered the support of technology is the education. The application of technology to the field of education so as to remove the barriers of time and space has resulted in the inception of e-learning. E-learning has been widely defined as the mode of knowledge transmission which combines the principles of learning with the systematic application of information technology. Clark & Mayer (2011) define e-learning as “instruction delivered on a digital device such as a computer or mobile device that is intended to support learning”. Nichols (2003) defines the concept as “the use of various technological tools that are either Web-based, Web-distributed or Web-capable for the purposes of education.” As is reflected in these definitions, use of technology is central to e-learning. With new advancements in technology, e-learning has flourished rapidly. It is especially facilitated by the advent of internet as well as its massive reach across the globe. E-learning has transformed the way we approach teaching and learning interactions (Garrison and Anderson, 2003). E-learning has demonstrated both achievements and failures. A number of advantages shown by e-Learning include facilitating interactions between learners and teachers, or learners and learners, eradicating limitations of time and space, and create virtual classrooms which permit the learners to carry on their respective speeds (Trentin, 1997). E-learning has also received criticism from different quarters of academicians and educationists. As a result, e-learning has elicited a widely diversified spectrum of responses from people and has led to development of notions which range widely. People are becoming increasingly aware of this dimension of information transmission and those with a close brush with this concept harbour different attitudes towards it. This paper strives to elucidate and comprehend these very attitudes. Understanding these attitudes is relevant to predict the extent to which the involved people will choose to make use of this mode of learning and also encourage others to engage in same. The following sections present the methodology and procedure of this study. After the results are discussed, implications of the findings of this study for the society in general and the stakeholders in specific are also presented.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample

For the present study, a total of 30 participants were chosen from Delhi and NCR. Based on their age, the sample was divided into three groups, viz Young, Middle-aged, and Elderly group. These groups were respectively called Group A, Group B, and Group C. Each of the three groups included ten participants. The age range of the participants of Group A was 15 to 30 years. Group B included respondents from 30 to 45 years of age, and Group C included respondents from 45 to 60 years of age. Care was taken to include comparable number of participants from both genders. The respondents chosen for the research were the ones who had at least some degree of

exposure and understanding about e-learning. For e. g. respondents of Group A, being younger and technologically advanced, are frequently exposed to e-learning. Group B mainly consisted of middle-aged respondents whose children are taught through e-learning at school as well as those who actively engage in utilizing the benefits of e-learning for their own selves. Group C included elder respondents who are mostly working and use computers at office and home with internet connectivity.

2.2 Instruments and Procedure

The present research aimed at assessing attitudes of the subjects towards e-learning. For this purpose, an open-ended questionnaire was prepared by the researcher. This questionnaire included questions focussing on domains of e-learning such as, its utility, popularity, proneness to misuse, and the respondents' own opinions about required improvements, constrains with its use and possible disadvantages. Overall, the questionnaire was meant to identify the respondents' attitude towards e-learning as well as the factors which possibly contributed to development of their respective attitudes. The questionnaire consisted of twelve open-ended questions which were specifically designed to elicit target information relevant to the study.

The open-ended questionnaire was administered to the respondents with their consent. Each respondent took around 15-20 minutes to fill it out. After all the responses had been gathered, the data was analysed. A content analysis of the responses was undertaken to identify the common themes which emerged in different age-groups in terms of positive, negative or neutral attitudes shown by the respondents.

3. Results

The content analysis of the responses gathered from the sample enabled the researcher to infer the general attitude of the respondents. Since the purpose was to obtain the information about whether the respondents had a positive, negative or a neutral attitude towards e-learning, each of the response questionnaires was adjudged to fall into any one of the three categories based on the overall response tendency of the subjects. The positive attitude was characterised by a general favourability expressed by the respondents in terms of the advantages of e-learning as perceived by the respondents. A negative attitude was adjudged based on the negativity the respondent expressed towards the utility and spread of e-learning. Those questionnaires which contained more or less equal responses of both valences were classified as neutral attitude. Out of the total 30 respondents of all three groups, 19 respondents (63.33%) demonstrated a positive attitude towards e-learning while 10 respondents (33.33%) demonstrated a negative attitude. Only one respondent (3.33%) showed a neutral attitude. In Group A, 70% respondents, i.e. only seven subjects showed a positive attitude, while remaining 30% respondents have a negative attitude towards e-learning. In Group B, 80% respondents, i.e. eight subjects showed a positive attitude, while remaining 20% respondents have a negative attitude towards e-learning. In Group C, only 40% respondents, i.e. four subjects showed a positive attitude, 50% respondents

demonstrated a negative attitude, while remaining 10% respondents showed a neutral attitude towards e-learning.

4. Discussion

Each of the respondents surveyed for this study responded to open-ended questionnaires which enabled the researcher to not only assess their attitude towards e-learning, but also look into the factors leading to development of their respective attitudes. Group A respondents who are frequently exposed to e-learning attributed their positive attitude to factors such as availability of stimulating ideas, novel and interesting methodology, work with fun, and flexibility. Those with a negative attitude towards e-learning cited extreme performance pressure, competitiveness, and delayed feedback as major contributors to their negative attitude. A majority of Group B respondents showed a positive attitude towards e-learning owing to factors such as extreme usefulness, anytime accessibility from any place, ease of finding new developments from across the globe, and facilitation in research. Those who showed a negative attitude towards e-learning attributed the same to factors such as distraction offered by e-learning and frequent diversion from target topic. Group C consisted of those respondents who are the least exposed to e-learning and hence, showed maximum percentage of respondents with negative attitude. The major contributing factors were reported to be the proneness to misuse, difficulty in comprehension and keep up with as well as requirement of help from others who are well-versed with e-learning. There was also a negative attitude against internet prevalent among this group. Those with a positive attitude cited e-learning as an 'ocean of knowledge' if used properly and extremely beneficial for the young learners.

5. Implications

The findings of this research reflect the general attitude of people towards e-learning. These findings can certainly help in predicting how frequently the stakeholders (learners, instructors, parents/guardians of learners, etc.) would choose to benefit from e-learning. A positive attitude would essentially serve as a precursor to the probability of the involved people to use and promote e-learning. It would also enable the institutions and educationists to overcome potential contributors to negative attitudes, and hence reduce the risk of failure of e-learning implementation. Furthermore, e-learning being the inevitable future of learning and education is in serious need of acceptance by the society as a whole. This would essentially require a positive attitude from all quarters of society. The results of this study can also be used by other researchers as a basis to initiate other related studies in this area.

References

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