

# Attitudes of Higher Education Students toward Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to assess Higher Education student's attitude toward learning during COVID-19 pandemic. The study also explores the factors affecting student's attitude towards learning during COVID-19 pandemic. The study population consist 344 students and 10 lecturers in Kampala. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed in the study. Demographic data was also collected on the lecturers and students involved in the study. Questionnaire of Attitudes toward learning during COVID-19 Pandemic (QATLCP) was used as the principal quantitative data collection instrument.

The techniques used for analysis of the quantitative data were: descriptive statistics; analysis of variance (ANOVA); test for differences and regressions. In terms of the focus group data, interviews were audio recorded; transcribed and thematic analysis was conducted on the transcripts.

Although the results of the quantitative data analysis revealed that students had generally favorable attitudes toward learning during COVID-19 pandemic, focus group data indicated that a number of factors across three contexts (the environment, school system and society) seemed to be fundamental in shaping students attitude toward learning during COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Coronavirus, Pandemic, Outbreak, lockdown, Higher Education, E-learning, Learning, Students, Attitude.

## I. INTRODUCTION

WHO declared the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak, caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), to be a pandemic on March 12, 2020 (Prof Russell M Viner, PhD. et al. 2020)

Majority of countries have announced temporary closure of schools as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the globe, impacting more than 91 per cent of students worldwide (Jason Mikes and John McIlwaine 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced universities to go into online learning (Paul Leblanc 2020)

### 1.1 The present study

The purpose of this study was to assess higher education student's attitude toward learning during COVID-19 pandemic. Questionnaire of Attitudes toward learning during COVID-19 Pandemic (QATLCP) was used to investigate whether the students found learning during COVID-19 pandemic interesting, hard and useful. It was also used to explore student's attitudes toward traditional learning and to

compare them to the attitudes toward learning during COVID-19. In addition, a qualitative analysis was conducted using focus group interviews to explore the factors affecting student's attitudes toward learning during COVID-19 pandemic.

### 1.2 Research Questions

The main research question was: What are higher institution student's attitudes toward learning during COVID-19 pandemic? Sub-questions were:

Do higher institution students regard learning during COVID-19 as interesting, important and easy?

How do attitudes toward learning during COVID-19 compare towards attitude toward traditional learning?

What are some of the factors which seem to influence higher institution student's attitudes toward learning during COVID-19 pandemic?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Attitude is an individual's way of thinking and behaving. Oppenheim (1966) States that: "it is a state of readiness, a tendency to respond in a certain manner when confronted with certain stimuli. He also said that most of an individual's attitudes are usually dormant and are expressed in speech or behaviour only when the object of the attitude is perceived. He said that it is an expression of an individual's point of view about a belief, a preference, a judgment, an emotional feeling and a position for or against something." (p.174).

According to Itshad Hussain (2007) in his study, students do face some problems such as problems of password, computer vision syndrome (CVS), fingers' joint pain, backache, dizziness & headache and electricity failure with respect to virtual education which affects their attitude towards virtual education

Research conducted by H. Senay (2013) showed that the attitudes of students towards learning can be analyzed from the points of different variables (teacher's attitude, motivation, techniques and methods used etc.). In his study, it shows that the attitude levels of prospective technical teachers towards learning expectations and being open to learning are higher than prospective engineers.

Candeias Adelinda, Rebelo Nicole, Franco Glória and Mendes Patrícia (2010) found in their research, on 'exploratory models

about the effects of factors – context, socio-cultural environment, individual variables – that may interfere with attitudes toward school, and pupils' perceptions about learning, competence and motivation', that attitude towards learning is being affected from different combinations of factors.

According to Gina et al (2020) Student's attitude are usually affected by preconceived notions about the different aspects of the learning process, the environment of the students, their personal observations, the influence of their peers and their own personal judgments.

### III. RESEARCH METHOD

In consideration of the research questions, we have used a quantitative as well as a qualitative approach. In the quantitative method, Questionnaire of Attitudes toward learning during COVID-19 Pandemic (QATLCP) was used for this study. In the qualitative method, focus group interviews were conducted. Participants were selected randomly. Research was conducted in eight schools in three different universities in Kampala. Three hundred and forty four students and ten lecturers participated.

#### 3.1 Survey

QATLCP was used for this study. This instrument has three scales: evaluation, usefulness and difficulty. These scales were designed to measure: students like or dislike of learning during COVID-19 and traditional learning, their perception of learning during COVID-19 and traditional learning, usefulness for the future and their feelings about the level of difficulty in learning during COVID-19 and traditional learning. Each scale contains eight bi-polar pairs with each pair measured on a five point scale.

A three-stage procedure was used to analyze the data:

1. The mean and standard deviations in each of the scales of evaluation and perception of difficulty were computed
2. ANOVA was calculated to determine if there were significant differences between responses made among the two scales; evaluation and difficulty. The significant level was kept at 0.05. The results were used to evaluate these null hypotheses:

*Ho1:* There are no significant differences in students liking of traditional learning as compared to learning during COVID-19.

*Ho2:* There are no significant differences in the students perceived level of difficulty between traditional learning and learning during COVID-19.

3. A stepwise regression was conducted to explore possible reason for significant difference in student's attitude and perception of difficulty in learning during COVID-19. Parent's occupation, parent's education and

location (urban or rural) were used as independent variables

This is the quantitative part of the study designed to determine significant differences, if any, between student's attitudes, and perception of difficulty towards traditional learning as compared to learning during COVID-19. It also examined the degree to which any significant differences are due to the students' Parent's occupation, parent's education and location (urban or rural).

#### 3.2 Focus Group

In order to explore possible reasons for the attitudes determined by the QATLCP, we decided to follow up the use of this quantitative instrument with qualitative focus group interviews with six students, three male and three female in each school. The participants picked a convenient time and date for the interview. The duration of the interview was forty-five minutes and was conducted through "zoom".

We used an audio recorder for each focus group discussion. Data was analyzed by transcribing recorded interviews. After transcribing, major themes were classified. Seven themes were established and the number and type of each reference to a theme were recorded (see Table 1.1)

### IV. FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Students Evaluation of Learning during COVID-19 and traditional learning

Table 1.1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the students evaluation of the two learning procedure. The responses showed a positive evaluation towards the two learning procedure since all the means were above the theoretical mean of 24

Table 1.1 Student's Attitude towards Learning

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attitudes/traditional	334	16.00	40.00	33.6062	4.1297
Attitudes/COVID-19	334	17.00	40.00	32.9701	4.8042

ANOVA was conducted to determine whether the differences among the mean were statistically significant. The result of the ANOVA shows that the differences among the means of attitudes are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in students liking traditional learning as compare to learning during COVID-19 is therefore rejected.

A stepwise regression was performed to explore the possible reasons for the significant difference in student's evaluation of traditional learning as compare to learning during COVID-19. The student's attitude was the dependent variable and the independent were students' Parent's occupation, parent's education and location (urban or rural). The results showed that these variables proved to be a statistically significant

predictor ( $p < 0.05$ ) of students attitudes towards learning during COVID-19.

#### 4.2 Students Perceptions of the Difficulty of Learning during COVID-19 and Traditional Learning

Table 1.2 shows the result of the QATLCP which measured student's perception of difficulty. Since the means are only slightly higher than the theoretical mean, it indicates that the students perceived traditional learning and learning during COVID-19 to be neither easy nor difficult.

Table 1.2 Student's Perceptions of Difficulty towards Learning

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attitudes/ traditional	334	13.00	40.00	29.3817	5.0060
Attitudes/ COVID-19	334	11.00	40.00	27.1329	5.0321

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether the differences among the means were statistically significant. The result shows that the differences in perception of difficulty towards these learning procedures are significant. The null Hypothesis that there are no significant differences in the students perceived level of difficulty between traditional learning and learning during COVID-19 is therefore rejected.

A stepwise regression was performed to explore the possible reasons for the significant difference in student's perceived level of difficulty of traditional learning as compare to learning during COVID-19. The student's attitude was the dependent variable and the independent variable were students' Parent's occupation, parent's education and location (urban or rural). The results showed that students' Parent's occupation, parent's education and location (urban or rural) was a major significant predictor of student's perceived difficulty of learning during COVID-19 pandemic.

#### 4.3 Focus Group Interview

Analysis of the transcripts reveals strikingly similar factors which have shaped these students attitudes toward learning during COVID-19. These include: Lack of e-learning facilities, Conducive environment, Lack of e-learning system, Teacher's Attitude, Parents Attitude and E-learning and Future Prospect. Which we have set in to three contexts: the environment, the school system, and the social factor.

##### 4.3.1 The Environmental Factor

Two clear environmental factors emerged as important in shaping students attitudes towards learning during COVID-19: Lack of e-learning facilities and violence at home.

##### 4.3.1.1 Lack of E-learning Facilities

Lack of e-learning facilities has an impact on student's attitude towards learning during COVID-19 pandemic. Most students pointed out that Lack of e-learning facilities is their

problem. Most of the students stated their challenges as follows:

- No computer in my home
- I don't have smart phone
- We don't have (Constant) power supply (electricity) in my village
- The Internet network in my village is not stable

Three students interviewed stated that they don't like learning during COVID-19 because they are having difficulty accessing the internet. According to the students, Internet connectivity is unstable in their locality and sometimes unavailable. Most of the students complained that computers were expensive and beyond their reach. Some lecturers interviewed confirm that lack of e-learning facilities is a major factor shaping student's attitude towards learning during COVID-19 pandemic. The availability of e-learning facilities such as computers, Internet access, and constant power supply is essential for the effective utilization of e-learning since this mode of pedagogy is computer-based.

##### 4.3.1.2 Conducive Environment

We also discussed if the students home were providing conditions for learning. One of the student interviewed stated that home was noisy during COVID-19 pandemic because the kids were also at home. A female student interviewed stated that she have to attend to the needs of the children at home especially related with the remote school activities plus cooking and cleaning the house. According to the students, it becomes challenging trying to get focus with her own academic works. It appears that student's home have an impact on student's attitude towards learning during COVID-19.

##### 4.3.2 The School System Context

In addition to the environmental factors discussed above, students also identified several systematic factors which influenced their attitudes toward learning during COVID-19. These include: Lack of e-learning system and Teachers attitude

##### 4.3.2.1 E-learning system

Most universities do not have online learning system in their institutions. Most students are not used to e-learning and they see e-learning as a new concept. For instance, Jane: "I'm not interesting in learning during the lockdown because I'm not used to e-learning". One of the students stated: "I think to learn something new in a situation that's an emergency is very difficult. Imagine we were told a year ago 'in a year we'll have a pandemic and you must learn to study online', well then I guarantee that we will be comfortable with learning online. Now, we have to learn in a much more stressful situation." Two of the students interviewed suggested that they would rather have a better well informed ahead of time to learn the skills needed for e-learning platforms.

#### 4.3.2.2 Teacher's Attitude

Teacher's attitude seems to have real impact on student's attitude towards learning during COVID-19 pandemic. One of the students stated: "It is the mass amount of tasks given by the lecturers that are challenging". He said that classes held inside the classroom are still better compared to the home arrangement where tasks and assignments are piled up at the same time. In addition, lecturers tend to be more inclined towards teaching in traditional learning. Grace shares her feelings on the topic: Grace: "One of my lecturers usually disappears fifteen minutes after class has commenced and never returns. I decided not to attend his class any more till we resume traditional learning system". Teaching methodology also has an impact on student's attitudes toward learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most students consider learning during the COVID-19 pandemic as boring because of their teacher's method of instruction. For example: Emmanuel: "We always feel sleepy during lecture because the lecturer keeps on lecturing sitting on the chair".

It appears that teacher attitude have an impact on student interest towards learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students seem to pay more attention to learning depending on teacher's attitude.

#### 4.3.3 Social Factors

Focus group interviews revealed two most important social factors that influenced the student's attitude towards learning during COVID-19: parent's attitude and e-learning and future prospect.

##### 4.3.3.1 Parents Attitude

We enquired about the degree to which their parents supported their education during this COVID-19 pandemic. Some student's attitudes were influenced by their parents, especially those with some educational background. They insisted their children focus on e-learning because of its perceived usefulness in the future. One student declared e-learning is my favorite. Some parents were more concerned about the economic impact of COVID-19. For example: Robert: "My father always insists for me to go with him to the farm". A number of parents encouraged their children to give more importance to other duties: Esther: "My mother always wants me to do the house chores and take care of the kids". Most parents lack formal education and do not seem to influence students attitudes toward learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, some do prefer to have their children do well in learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

##### 4.3.3.2 E-learning and Future Prospect

Most students are not used to e-learning and they see e-learning as a new concept. Jane: "I'm not interesting in learning during the COVID-19 pandemic because I'm not used to e-learning". The students were found to be very concerned about completing their course work in the traditional learning settings. One student's stated: "I don't like

learning during this COVID-19 pandemic, I don't think there is good future besides only to keep us busy in this lockdown". In explaining the data, it appears that students are neither aware of the real importance of continuing their studies during the lock down nor are they informed of it by their lecturers or encouraged by their parents. Kenneth: "I don't like learning during this COVID-19 pandemic because it is neither interesting nor useful. We study just to get busy". Despite the evidence presented thus far, the findings show that there were a few students with positive feelings toward learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example: Grace: "I enjoy learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, it will help us cover our syllabus".

## V. DISCUSSIONS

In order to determine the student's attitude towards learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, a survey questionnaire was used. The most important question is: what were the factors that influenced the student's attitudes towards learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? It was the view of this researcher that insights into this question could be obtained through focus group interviews. In addition, the lecturer's demographic data added more information about the factors affecting the student's attitude.

When considered on its own, QATLCP scale indicates positive feelings towards learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the means on the scale were above the theoretical means of 24. However, the rankings from the focus group interviews indicate a relative dislike of learning during the lock down as compare to traditional learning. The study identifies three important factors which contributed to student's attitude towards learning during the lock down. These factors are: the environment, school system and society.

One of the problems with teacher's attitude is learning new concept. Teachers will have to adapt to online learning. For many teachers, teaching online will be an easy adjustment if they've experienced it as a student, whereas others with no experience will have a hard time learning new technology and using it effectively. As lectures do not place a great deal of importance in learning during the pandemic, the students follow their example. Adopting and institutionalizing e-learning will encourage lecturers as well as students to place more importance on it and Lecturers will be more motivated and interested in lecturing using e-learning platforms.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

Evidence from the study suggests that student's attitude towards learning during the lockdown is influenced by a number of factors such as: Lack of e-learning facilities, Conducive environment, Lack of e-learning system, Teacher's Attitude, Parents Attitude and E-learning and Future Prospect.

The study shows that there is a need for co-ordination and co-operation between the parents and the school in regards to the importance of learning during COVID-19 pandemic. There is also need for Government and Higher Education Institutes to

put plan in place to support students who need extra support. It's important that people have access to digital literacy programs, e-books and online learning. There should be provision of enhanced digital and connectivity services by expanding Wi-Fi capabilities, offering community digital literacy training and enhancing online library programs. Finally, there is need for government and institutions to adopt and institutionalize e-learning which will help to close the gap in school emergency situations.

#### GLOSSARY

*Traditional Learning:* Face to face learning.

*COVID-19:* Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus.

*Learning during COVID-19 pandemic:* Learning during COVID-19 pandemic is taken to be all aspects of electronically supported learning during the period of lockdown and isolation due to COVID-19, whereby the learner is interacting with teachers, content and other learners regardless of place and time.

*Lockdown:* Is an official procedure usually preventing people from leaving an area. It is usually initiated by someone in a position of authority.

*Thematic analysis:* is a method of analyzing qualitative data. The researcher closely examines the data to identify common

themes – topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly

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