

Understanding Social and Emotional Intelligence Skills Development of Undergraduate Students Through Virtual Classes: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic swept the whole world like a storm and greatly affected the mankind on various fronts, especially on economy, psychological and social aspects, health, and education. One of the badly affected areas is education system across the world which had undergone several changes. The pandemic has forced the academic sector to a paradigm shift from the offline learning to the virtual learning. Though, the virtual learning is not a new to the world, the implementation of the forced learning has several gaps to be discussed and addressed. At this point, the present study focused on the impact of virtual learning to develop soft skills such as social and emotional intelligence skills. The present paper aims to analyse the learning behaviour of the students and their opinion towards virtual learning related to socializing and developing emotional intelligence skills during the online classes. The study found that soft skills can be effectively learned and improved in the classroom environment rather virtually (Thi Thu and Hong, 2021). The findings of the study suggest to review about impact of the teaching and learning process; especially in soft skills through virtual learning is questionable because the soft skills are as a part of socializing and emotional intelligence skills rather information sharing. As a result, the students opined that they need more interaction with trainers and peers to understand and develop their socializing and emotional intelligence.

Keywords: emotional intelligence skills, students' opinions, virtual and offline learning, social interaction.

1. Introduction

The sudden outbreak of the Covid-19 has changed the entire scenario of the world. The pandemic has stalled physical activities of almost all business across the world; such as public services and education sector. Due to the pandemic, governments responded with strict lock downs and restrictions to save the lives of people. And the world shifted quickly to virtual working and learning method. The impact is very visible on the education sector; after

the lockdown of the schools, colleges, and universities; millions of the students and teachers (UN, 2020) around the world try to adopt new learning reality i.e., virtual learning or online learning. Since the pandemic outbreak, teachers and students prepared for virtual experience for long hours to avoid the infection. Virtual platform such as Zoom, Micro Soft Teams, Webex, Google meet, etc is very popular for the community of teachers and students. To transfer the knowledge, virtual learning is regarded as flexible and user friendly and it is recognised as necessary transition for the beneficiaries.

Despite benefits of the virtual learning to teach and transfer knowledge to the students; there are practical problems such as difficulty in conducting online examination and assessing the performance of the students and practical assessment in laboratories found to be impractical with virtual flat forms. Moreover, a course like Soft Skills cannot be taught virtually because students need social interaction and sharing their emotional intelligence in Group Discussions, SWOC Analysis and JOHARI window. According to Vygotsky "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). It emphasizes child's knowledge and psychological development are connected with interaction in peers.

2. Review of Literature

Soft skills are gaining momentum in the 21st century than hard skills; the skills are highly required for any undergraduate and post graduate students of universities to succeed in their career (Pew Research Centre, 2017; Dellot, 2017; Chute, 2012; Ellis, Kisling, & Hackworth, 2014; Rasul, Rauf, & Mansor, 2013; Robles, 2012; Wahl et al., 2012). At corporate level, companies are expecting the graduates professionally trained and ready to join on a job at entry level. Recognising importance of the soft skills; Universities across the world incorporated soft skills as a course in their curriculum and training their students intensively to acquire certain soft skills and etiquettes and to enhance their job opportunities. Some of the soft skills, such as, group discussion, JOHARI Window, SWOC analysis, and team building tasks need peer and trainer support and interaction to get feedback to enhance their skill set.

Generally, group discussion requires certain complex skill set like reasoning, analysing and critical thinking regarding the society and world. Knowledge also plays a crucial role in this regard. In addition to this, students require to exhibit appropriate body language and facial expressions appropriately and effectively. JOHARI window and SWOC analysis need introspection and retrospection of individuals and peers to reflect on others and self to receive and share feedback from them.

However, the unexpected outbreak of covid-19 forced the students' and teachers' community caused self or social isolation forced them to learn through virtually. Apart from

the benefits of virtual learning, there are practical problems to enhance soft skills. The problems are lack of sensory immersion to interact with one and other, feeling isolation, lack of opportunity to understand emotional intelligence, lack of individualised attention from the trainer, virtual distractions and other potential problems may not be suitable to enhance students' social and emotional intelligence skills with virtual mode.

Kunal Shah (2022), the founder of fintech company CRED, rightly said that “Impact of work from home on youth is the same as the impact of children who study at home. No real bonds. No real social or network skills. Illusion of understanding and learning. No osmosis. Comfortable but damaging in the long run.”

According to Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory, social interaction is inevitable to between the various capacities of the children. It is an opportunity for the children learns from one and other than isolation or individualised learning. Essentially, virtual learning cannot provide better opportunity for the students to interact and understand their emotional intelligence unless they provided face to face facilities.

3. Research Questions

The following research questions are framed in order to understand the impact of virtual learning on the students' social, communication and emotional intelligence skills. Further, the present study tries to understand their opinions and experiences during the virtual learning.

1. What extent does the virtual learning impacted on the UG students to develop social and emotional intelligence skills?
2. What are the students' opinions and experiences towards soft skills learning through virtual method?

4. Objectives of the Study

The present study aimed at analysing the impact of virtual learning on the students' social, communication and emotional intelligence skills. In this regard, the study directed to understand specific objectives of the following:

1. To analyse emotional intelligence of the students through feedback: Self awareness, recognizing strengths, self-confidence, emotional balance through JOHARI window and SWOC analysis topics
2. To find out students' social skills development: communication, discussion and decision making and teamwork
3. To understand students' opinions towards learning soft skills through Online Learning flat form

5. Method and Tool

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Internet survey method using Google forms well suits to carry forward this study and get the information from the students. A survey questionnaire was prepared as a tool collect the responses from the sample students. Later, the questionnaire was administered to the students through Google forms where the students responded immediately.

6. Sample Description

The samples of the study are under-graduates, studying 3rd year Bio-Technology Engineering at Vignans' Foundation for Science and Research Deemed to be University. Due to the Covid-19 in the first and second waves, the students underwent virtual learning mode and completed their course work. Apart from their regular subjects, the students also study one credit Soft Skills course. After completion of the Soft Skills course, the researchers collected the sample responses. About 43 students participated in the survey, consisting of both male and female students.

7. Questionnaire

The present study followed a survey method to understand the research problem. The questionnaire consisted of 11 questions classified into three parts which reflects objectives of the study.

Part-1 consists of four questions and probes enhancement of the students' emotional intelligence skills through JOHARI window and SWOC analysis topics in virtual method

Part-2 framed with four questions and tries to analyse students' social and communication skills through Group Discussion activities.

Part-3 is dealing with three questions to understand students' opinion towards virtual learning.

8. Data Description and Analysis

The data was obtained and analysed diagrammatically in the following areas:

- Emotional Intelligence skills: Self-awareness through JOHARI Window and SWOC Analysis Topics
- Communication skills, discussion, decision making and feedback through Group Discussion
- Students' opinions towards virtual learning

In addition to the above information the students were asked to share 'Any other points/issues' in order to get students' opinions related to virtual teaching and learning environment.

9. Findings of the Study

1. The students' response for the Questions 1 and 4; elevate that virtual mode is effective to understand the Soft Skills topics such as JOHARI Window, SWOC Analysis and Group Discussion. 97% of the students were positive towards their teacher explanation of the topics and found to be effective. In this regard, it was understood that virtual mode has created broader understanding of the topics. And the students were also comfortable to learn through virtual mode. However, the students strongly felt that virtual learning is not suitable to develop social, communication and emotional intelligence skills such as interaction with the classmates, getting feedback from the peers as well as teacher. Further, students also felt that virtual flat form is not a good choice to share their opinions and improve their communications skills. Because, a lot of confusion, and lack of personal care and attention from the teacher to learners. As a result, the students lacked attention, self recognition and interaction in the Group Discussion.
2. Though majority of the students were positive towards virtual teaching; 95% students opined that application part of building relations and social interaction through JOHARI Window has been missed out. Additionally, technical glitches and limitations such as one way communication and one person at a time are reasons for not receiving appropriate feedback from their classmates. In this regard, 97% of the students responded that they did not get enough time to interact with their classmates in order to get feedback from the peers.
3. Generally, group discussions are meant for understanding and to improve the students' body language, team, and communication skills and to receive individualised feedback from their teacher. However, 98% of the students felt that virtual learning did not help them to build their team skills and improve their body language as well as to maintain emotional balance in group discussion. As a result, students looking for sensory immersion to improve their emotional intelligence and social skills.
4. Finally, 97% of the students opined that virtual learning not suitable for the soft skills which can learn to improve their skills in the classroom with the support of the peers and teacher. 95% of the students felt that they were isolated from their friends and learning environment in the classroom.

10. Conclusion

From the responses of the students, it was found that that virtual method is suitable to transfer knowledge rather to teach Soft Skills to improve students' social skills such as decision making, team skills, and communication skills in Group Discussion.

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