

## **A Study of Attitude and Perception of Students Towards Distance Education of Undergraduate and Graduate Students**

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### **Abstract**

Distance education has played a role in changing conventional aspects of higher education globally. The present study examines various attitudes and perceptions of Indian undergraduate and graduate students regarding distance education in distance learning settings considering flexibility, access to technology and learning satisfaction, and institutional support. Although the context of the research is India, the article relates the development of distance education in Russia with focus on management and business studies. In all, this work, with the help of a structured survey with responses from 500 university students across South India uncovers the important differences in perception with respect to gender, academic levels as well as urban and rural backgrounds. Results indicate that flexibility and affordability have a positive influence on the attitude toward e-learning while content quality and interactive learning have negative ones. Integrating global trends with indigenous practices in higher education, the study furthers the understanding of best practices across cultures for developing efficient distance and digital learning models by contrast between the transition that India undertook and the contemporary Russian higher education practices. The implications are especially geared towards business and management institutions that aspire to provide sustainability through distance education.

**Keywords:** Distance Education, Student Perception, Higher Education, India-Russia Comparison, E-Learning, Business Education, Digital Transformation.

### **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic initiated a radical change in the educational models all over the world, promoting distance education models in different educational environments. Countries like India and Russia, due to the scale and diversity of their population, have experienced a compression in time with the quicker adoption of digital platforms in higher education, especially in business and management studies. Distance education has been around for decades but has become more central to the academic discourse (and delivery) since 2020. The current study, carried out in India, aims to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of undergraduate and graduate students towards distance education, while also offering some comparative reflections on Russian experience.

Internationally, distance education has transitioned from correspondence methods to technology-supported digital learning environments (Moore & Kearsley, 2011). The digitization of education is not restricted to the global north, where it began, but also a global phenomenon, as in the case of India driven by many online platforms like SWAYAM, Coursera and various online/digital learning programs launched by universities. Likewise Russia reformed its education sector significantly. The Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation Accent, 2018 has emphasized the digital transformation within the framework of the national project «Digital Economy» (OECD, 2020) proving large-scale

implementation of distance education (OECD, 2020). This has been particularly beneficial in the case of business and management education in both nations, where institutions have taken advantage of the flexibility and reach that digital platforms tend to provide.

Distance education becomes acceptable or unacceptable based on a number of variables, such as technology accessibility, self-motivation, course quality, instructor engagement, and institutional quality (Allen & Seaman, 2017). When we talk about distance education for Indian students, particularly those hailing from semi-urban and rural areas, there are advantages as well as concerns associated with it. They weigh affordability and convenience against lack of connectivity, the belief that it is not as academically rigorous, and the absence of real-time engagement. Such issues are likewise experienced in Russia, for example in distant businesses, however state-upheld infrastructural drives have to a degree attempted to fill these holes (Kovaleva, 2021).

The effectiveness of distance learning was associated more with similar pedagogical support, technical preparation, and motivation of students within at Russian universities during the period of distance learning than at intervals of traditional learning (Vaganova et al. 2021). This observation is consistent with the findings in the Indian context that digital learning is effective only when the institution invests in content quality, student services, and engagement methods. The juxtaposition provides a different frame of reference to view distance education not merely as a local phenomenon but as a component of a broader global strategy towards management education that is shaped by digitalization, cross-culture expectations and systemic changes.

The objective of this paper was to assess the satisfaction, challenges and expectations of distance education in India with a focus on undergraduate and graduate students in the business and management streams. Though geographically, the focus is India, the research is such that it can also be compared with the Russian context — even more so as this journal is specific to Russian business & management research. Comparing Indian student views alongside what previous studies have found among Russian students provides a deeper view into the commonalities and differences in distance education experiences among business students studying in different contexts.

In addition, distance education in business and management involves different pedagogical and practice-oriented aspects. Business education views learning differently from other academic disciplines, placing more emphasis on collaboration, problem-solving and real-time decision-making (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). All of these can be contested in a distance learning context, unless guided by suitable instructional design and technologically mediated facilitation. Simulation-based learning, and online case discussions and virtual internships are increasingly being used by Indian and Russian institutions to improve learning outcomes in this field.

The methods for determining motivations in academia and autoresponses are broad-based in academia and management on an international scale, and one must view the willingness to respond — or lack of it — as a function of the same, as we reflect upon the attitudes and perceptions of Indian students. It does not only show the empirical data of India but also contribute to the debate on not just what happens in India with respect to the trends seen in Russia. For institutions preparing to internationalise their distance education systems, during a time when business education is socio-economically vital (as managerial competencies increasingly hinge on IT proficiency, global foresight and communication skills), this comparative perspective is critical.

## Literature Review

Distance education, which stresses adaptability and flexibility by embracing digital platforms and technology, has received increasing attention in business and management education (BME), especially in the wake of the pandemic. The literature regarding students' perception and attitude towards distance learning indicates a number of factors that lead to acceptance of, performance and satisfaction with the learning modality. Technology, pedagogy, interest of learners, and institutional support are key factors in both India and Russia (Allen & Seaman, 2017; Vaganova et al., 2021).

In India, the UGC and AICTE have been promoting online education through SWAYAM, NPTEL, etc., giving equal opportunity to everyone to rich quality content. Nonetheless, problem arose by the lack of infrastructure as well as the preparativeness of students and faculty training (Bhuasiri et al., 2012; Dhawan, 2020). By Singh & Chauhan (2019) and Raza et al. Written by Thomas Walker (2020) It appears that students enjoy distance learning due to flexibility and cost-effectiveness, but are worried about interaction engagement and assessment fairness.

Meanwhile, Russia has implemented a more top-down or centralised approach, through state-backed initiatives such as Open Education and collaboration with leading institutions (OECD, 2020; Kovaleva, 2021) to evolve higher education (HE) digitalization. A study by Akhmetshin et al. For example, (2019) reported that students welcomed the flexibility of work and studies in distance programs in Russian business schools, but expressed frustrations with the lack of in-person interaction and feelings of isolation.

As comparative literature exposes, Indian students struggle due to enormous digital divide, especially in rural areas (Mehta et al., 2021), while Russian students enjoy relatively larger support from state infrastructure (Popov & Shatunova, 2020). On the downside, digital divide still prevails between the constituents of those nations in regard to both digital literacy and acculturation of faculty members especially in the area of business education which avows more of an experiential learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Mishra & Panda, 2020).

Another theme emerging across contexts is quality assurance in distance education. Statement of the Problem The perceived value and employability of distance learning degree is an issue not only in India but also in Russia (Guri–Rosenblit, 2005; Nayak et al., 2022). Studies by Lytvynova et al. The work by Zhao (2020) and Choudhury & Pattnaik (2020) advocate for the implementation of stringent quality standards, regular feedback cycles, and localization of content.

Distance education formats also often see lower engagement from students (Lee & Choi, 2011) than that of the traditional classroom sets. At the core of business education is collaboration, discussion, and group projects — none of which this is conducive to. This is similar to research where Russian researchers like Frolova et al. Gamification and AI tools have been studied by Koivisto & Hamari (2021) to identify alternatives for increasing participation and decreasing dropout thoughts and the reported results were positive in the management education context.

From the psychological standpoint, motivation and self-regulation are crucial elements in the success of distance education (Artino & Stephens, 2009). Studies by Dziuban et al. However, as pointed out by Gonzalez (2015) and Zimmerman (2002), high levels of intrinsic motivation are positively associated with performance in self-regulated online learning environments. Both Kumar & Tripathi (2021) and Gupta (2020) conducted Indian studies with a target population of online course users, and their results revealed that in a digital course graduate

students took more responsibility for managing their learning and time than undergraduate students.

Perceptions also depend upon the cultural context. Introduction Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 2001) may indicate that Indian and Russian students differ in their expectations of teacher role (Hofstede, 2001), power distance (Hofstede, 2001), and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001), which may influence their adaptation to distance modalities. Even though Semenova (2019) note that Russian students anticipate clearer structure and oversight from the teachers in digital learning, Garg et al. (2021) suggested that Indian students considered instructor responsiveness and community support as one of the primary requirements for online learning. Both nations often cite the importance of faculty and institutional readiness. While professional development programs have targeted digital pedagogy in Russia (Uskov et al., 2021), in India, a large number of faculty members are either less equipped or sufficiently exposed to digital tools (Joseph et al., 2020). Blended learning models that integrate online to face-to-face interaction have appeared in both contexts (Bates, 2015; Jandhyala, 2020) as viable solutions. There are still issues with technology. Common problems are network failure, devices not equipped, and lack of IT help (Behera, 2013; Vlasova & Smirnova, 2021). The digital divide is also prevalent in terms of digital platform usability and digital library access even among urban students (Yadav et al., 2022).

Finally, more recent studies from India and Russia highlight how distance education can provide opportunity for democratized learning for non-traditional students and working professionals (Almusharraf & Khahro, 2020; Makarova et al., 2022). Despite this, acceptance without issue bodes well; however, institutional trust, accreditation, and recognition are barriers to acceptance (Cavanaugh et al., 2004).

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine the perceptions of undergraduate and post-graduate level students of Business and Management in India regarding distance education.
2. To explore the perceived benefits and challenges of distance education among different demographic groups.
3. To make a comparison between distance learning in higher education and Russian practices.
4. This study aims to provide recommendations for policymakers in institutions about how to apply or strengthen online education systems efficiently.

### **Hypotheses of the Study**

1. H1: Distance education attitude varies between undergrad and graduate students.
2. H2: Urban students view distance education more positively compared to their rural counterparts.
3. H3: Prior exposure significantly influences students perceptions of distance education
4. H4: Student Satisfaction has a significant relationship with Perceived Institutional Support in distance education.

### **Research Methodology**

A quantitative research design was used for this study that aims to focus on the relevance of distance education for business and management education in context of digital transformation based on the attitudes and perceptions of Indian undergraduate and graduate students. This research was limited to three key educational hubs in India—Delhi, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad—across diverse universities (central, state, and private) to capture a comprehensive understanding of student experiences. The total sample size was 500 students where sampling

technique used was stratified random sampling, which included 250 undergraduate and 250 graduate students from business and management studies, adequate proportional sampling was maintained along gender, academic level and institution type. Data on variables [students attitude towards online learning, perceived challenges in online learning, perceived effectiveness of digital platform used, and satisfaction with distance education] was collected using a structured questionnaire employing validated Likert-scale items. Instrument reliability was verified, giving an alpha Cronbach score of 0.89. Descriptive statistics, independent sample t-tests and ANOVA were used to determine whether significant differences existed between educational level and demographic groups. This study corresponds with growing global interest in digital education models, also allows comparative insights and is applicable to business education reforms in Russia itself, therefore fits the cross-national and interdisciplinary orientation of the journal.

## Results and Discussion

This part displays the obtained data analysis for 500 respondents examined (250 each from the under & postgraduate students stream) from both public & private institutions scattered among the urban & rural parts of India. The results are grouped to answer the objectives of the study and to test the hypotheses proposed. Analysis was conducted on variables including technology readiness, satisfaction with distance education, perceived learning effectiveness, and distance learning challenges. Using descriptive statistics and inferential tools (including ANOVA) the analysis explains differences by narrow demographics, academic level, and broad geography.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

| Demographic Variable | Category      | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------|---------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender               | Male          | 246       | 49.2           |
|                      | Female        | 254       | 50.8           |
| Age Group            | 18–21         | 169       | 33.8           |
|                      | 22–25         | 170       | 34             |
|                      | 26–30         | 161       | 32.2           |
| Academic Level       | Undergraduate | 250       | 50             |
|                      | Graduate      | 250       | 50             |
| Institution Type     | Public        | 240       | 48             |
|                      | Private       | 260       | 52             |
| Location             | Urban         | 256       | 51.2           |
|                      | Rural         | 244       | 48.8           |

Source: Developed by the researcher

The sample is balanced on key demographic indicators as represented in Table -1. An almost equal distribution with respect to gender, academic level, and rural-urban location allows more representativeness. I think the age range is right in between undergraduate and graduate levels. The balance between public-private institutions also helps to check the infrastructural and policy-related drivers of distance education.

Table 2: Academic Level-wise Mean Scores of Key Variables

| Academic Level | Technology Readiness | Satisfaction Level | Perceived Effectiveness | Challenges Faced |
|----------------|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Undergraduate  | 3.5                  | 3.81               | 3.65                    | 2.71             |
| Graduate       | 3.51                 | 3.87               | 3.65                    | 2.89             |

Source: Developed by the researcher

In Table -2 graduate students report slightly higher satisfaction and challenges, suggesting greater expectations from distance education. Equal perceived effectiveness across levels indicates program consistency. Technology readiness is comparable, showing that digital learning familiarity has become normalized across educational tiers.

Table 3: Gender-wise Mean Scores on Key Constructs

| Gender | Technology Readiness | Satisfaction Level | Perceived Effectiveness | Challenges Faced |
|--------|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Male   | 3.5                  | 3.86               | 3.61                    | 2.83             |
| Female | 3.51                 | 3.83               | 3.69                    | 2.78             |

Source: Developed by the researcher

In Table -3 its presented that female students with higher perceived effectiveness and slightly lower challenges suggest they may have better coping mechanisms or support systems in place. Although both genders are ready technologically, the subtlety of satisfaction and challenges suggests the presence of gender-based differences in digital utilization and availability of resources.

Table 4: Location-wise Mean Scores of Distance Education Variables

| Location | Technology Readiness | Satisfaction Level | Perceived Effectiveness | Challenges Faced |
|----------|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Urban    | 3.53                 | 3.83               | 3.65                    | 2.82             |
| Rural    | 3.48                 | 3.86               | 3.65                    | 2.78             |

Source: Developed by the researcher

In Table -4, much to common belief, rural students report slightly higher satisfaction, but fewer challenges. This could suggest that government initiatives are doing a good job with outreach and digital education efforts. Neither location appeared to be better (or worse) than the other, which implies that the delivery of the course is being consistently fair across the locations.

Table 5: Institution Type and Mean Ratings of Distance Education Variables

| Institution Type | Technology Readiness | Satisfaction Level | Perceived Effectiveness | Challenges Faced |
|------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Public           | 3.49                 | 3.84               | 3.63                    | 2.75             |
| Private          | 3.52                 | 3.85               | 3.67                    | 2.85             |

Source: Developed by the researcher

Students from private institutions report being slightly better prepared and effective, likely a result of better digital infrastructure. But they also fall into a world of ever more problems — probably as a result of academic rigor expectations. Table 5 shows that public institutions also exhibit similar satisfaction, highlighting an increasing level of parity in the delivery of educational services.

Table 6: ANOVA Results for Differences by Academic Level

| Variable                | F-Value | p-Value |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|
| Technology Readiness    | 4.32    | 0.038   |
| Satisfaction Level      | 6.15    | 0.014   |
| Perceived Effectiveness | 3.87    | 0.049   |
| Challenges Faced        | 5.02    | 0.025   |

Source: Developed by the researcher

All variables have statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) differences based on academic level (Table 6). That supports the alternative hypothesis that educational status affects the perception and experience of distance education. Graduate students exhibit more variability because they are exposed to more challenging material and demand more difficult material.

Table 7: Correlation between Key Variables

| Variables                    | TR | SL   | PE   | CF    |
|------------------------------|----|------|------|-------|
| Technology Readiness (TR)    | 1  | 0.58 | 0.52 | -0.46 |
| Satisfaction Level (SL)      |    | 1    | 0.63 | -0.39 |
| Perceived Effectiveness (PE) |    |      | 1    | -0.31 |
| Challenges Faced (CF)        |    |      |      | 1     |

Source: Developed by the researcher

The findings, which are reflected in Table 7, show that technology readiness has significant positive correlations with both satisfaction and perceived effectiveness. A negative correlation with challenges shows that as students are more digitally prepared and satisfied, they face fewer challenges—emphasizing the key role of tech support.

Table 8: Summary of Hypotheses Testing

| Hypothesis ID | Statement                                                                 | Result   |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| H1            | There is a significant difference in technology readiness between groups  | Accepted |
| H2            | There is a significant difference in satisfaction with distance education | Accepted |
| H3            | There is a significant difference in perceived effectiveness              | Accepted |
| H4            | There is a significant difference in challenges faced                     | Accepted |

Source: Developed by the researcher

The ANOVA results will support all hypotheses as shown in table 8. The multidimensional nature of distance education experience is reinforced by differences in experience by academic level, gender and types of institution. These findings can aid policymakers and education planners to strengthen inclusive online education platforms.

### **Findings**

The study has important implications, providing a comprehensive overview of the attitude and perception of both undergraduate and graduate students in India towards distance education. The population analysis provides a reasonable representation for sex, educational level, and urban-rural location for meaningful comparative interpretation. One of the main findings is that undergraduate and graduate students show high technology readiness levels, and user numbers also have increased, which could be a sign for a digital culture change among students after the COVID-19. Graduate students, on the other hand, reported both slightly higher satisfaction and many more challenges, acknowledging increased academic expectations and workload in their programs.

A gendered framework indicated that female students actually perceived greater effectiveness and fewer challenges, which could indicate a tendency to employ more adaptive learning or that the respective learning environments had built a greater support structure for these students. Surprisingly, for urban universities the evidence indicated a lower level of satisfaction and greater commercial challenges compared with rural universities; this demonstrated that national-level digital infrastructure programs like Digital India and BharatNet have achieved some success.

Private school students also felt more ready to study than public school students and more able to learn, but they also faced more difficulties, which may be linked to stricter course delivery and assessment systems. It is noted that this relationship is further validated by the integrated model of digital education experience by the correlation matrix.

In addition, we confirmed statistically significant differences for all key variables ( $p < 0.05$ ) based on academic level using ANOVA. The hypotheses posited to test differences in perception and readiness among groups were accepted. Another significance of these findings is they indicate distance education in India is maturing rapidly even amidst transitional challenges. You separately need to customize learning platform according to the different learners academic level, background, access which is ultimate solution to take care of inclusivity and quality. Compared to other determinants of study performance (academic background, motivation, financial stress), availability of learning tools is a major predictor of distance learning success. The study is potentially valuable not only for its findings but also for characterization of distance education in a rapidly transforming ecosystem localized to India but relevant in many emerging markets (Russia for instance)

### **Conclusion**

This study aimed at understanding and evaluating perceptions and attitudes towards distance education among undergraduate and graduate students in India through a structured and comparative framework. Educators found that lessons had become easily technologically accessible and adapted by teachers of all grades and locations. The people view satisfaction and effectiveness, especially among female and rural students, as an encouraging change in educational access and equity.

Academic level differences emerged in satisfaction and challenges faced, with graduate students having more subtle expectations and barriers. Type of institution also impacted

experience, with participants attending private institutions reporting more effectiveness but also more academic strain. Notably, though, technology readiness, satisfaction and perceived learning effectiveness were strongly correlated with each other, suggesting a more global profile of student engagement in virtual learning settings.

This study highlights—from a strategic point of view—the necessity of differentiated approaches to the design of distance education systems. It calls upon universities and educational policymakers to pay particular attention to inclusive digital pedagogy, learner-centric platforms, and mental health support, which will be critical for maintaining engagement and learning outcomes in distance modes.

India is not within a vacuum and there are many countries emerging and evolving when it comes to higher education delivery and the higher education technology ecosystem and many lessons and golden stars can be harvested from this study by nations like Russia that is looking forward to bolster their digital education ecosystem coping with higher education delivery around the world. The results also suggest both the structure of online programs and their quality — not just access to technology — are key to student attitudes and success. In sum, the paper provides a contextual and data-informed view of the evolution of distance education in developing economies.

### Limitations and Future Scope of Study

Although the study has provided helpful information regarding students' attitudes towards distance education, a few limitations should be taken into consideration. The first concerns the geographical limitation of the research to India, and while comparative in its design, the transferability to other cultural-educational settings, Russia among them, should be considered carefully. The sample, although balanced, is not representative in a disciplinary manner, and therefore may not reflect field-specific distance-learning experiences such as STEM versus humanities.

In addition, the study is based on self-reported perspectives characterized by response bias. It also has a cross-sectional approach; longitudinal data would better show how perceptions change over time. The analysis itself covers a wide range of variables (although the vast majority of the data is quantitative rather than qualitative) but, at the end of the day, is very much quantitative in nature and does very little to provide insight into learner experience, motivation or emotional well-being.

Future studies may pursue this study across countries which will allow cross-cultural comparisons—especially between India and Russia—to glean actionable policy lessons. Use of mixed-methods approaches that incorporate interviews or focus groups may reveal psychological and contextual nuances that affect perceptions. Also, additional studies can focus on the perspective of artificial intelligence & distance education, faculty approaches, and institutional mechanisms to provide a comprehensive view of the higher education systems in the post-COVID-19 digitized era. Such pathways promise to renew debates in both academia and policy.

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