

REASONS FOR UNDERGRADUATES' ATTITUDES TOWARD ONLINE LEARNING

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While online learning was implemented voluntarily in some countries, it is the pandemic that forced many countries to embrace online learning as the only strategy for continuing the education of university students. Even though Sri Lanka was returning to normalcy and reverted to a full onsite learning mode or hybrid mode, the current economic catastrophe Sri Lanka is facing has changed online learning yet again. Although the previous studies focused on many aspects of online learning, students' attitudes towards online learning and the reasons behind those attitudes received rare attention. In this background, this paper aimed to explore the reasons for university students' attitudes toward online learning based on nearly two and half years of experience. Under the qualitative methodology, 20 semi-structured, in-depth interviews were held with students from various disciplinary backgrounds representing both private and state universities. The data were analysed by coding the transcribed interviews sentence-by-sentence and identifying inductive codes. These codes were then collated into categories. The data analyses revealed that while there are no students who have extremely positive or extremely negative attitudes, many of them believe in online learning during crises. Also, in general, participants' attitudes toward online learning were mixed in nature since they felt positively as well as negatively about online learning depending on psychological, teaching methods, online learning environment, administration, colleagues, and crisis-driven reasons. This study is unique as it explored why students think and feel positively or negatively toward online learning during multiple and prolonged crises, based on subjective viewpoints. Finally, the study provides implications to higher education institutions of the present context and beyond to improve future online learning effectiveness.

Keywords: Crises, COVID-19 pandemic, online learning, online learning attitudes