

## PAPER

# Studying in Online Environment: Students' Attitude Towards Online Open Electives in Karnataka

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## ABSTRACT

With the increasing popularity of the online environment, universities and colleges have started offering open online elective courses to provide students with a wide range of options to choose from. However, the success of these courses largely depends on the students attitudes toward them. The current study aimed to investigate the attitudes of undergraduate and postgraduate students toward online open electives in Karnataka. The sample consisted of 393 students chosen through purposive sampling and employed MOCA (Measure of Online Communication Attitude), developed by Ledbetter in 2009. The study revealed that students reported higher levels of apprehension and self-disclosure when compared to other domains, with social connection, ease, and miscommunication following suit. Males were observed to have higher levels of self-disclosure and social connection when compared to females. Apprehension was found to be more prevalent among students under 20 years old, whereas miscommunication, social connection, and ease were more prevalent among those between 23 and 25 years of age. Students from rural areas tended to exhibit higher levels of self-disclosure, apprehension, and miscommunication compared to their urban counterparts. Government college students reported higher levels of apprehension, while self-disclosure, social connection, and ease were higher among students studying in unaided colleges. Miscommunication was found to be more common among humanities and social science students, while science students reported higher levels of social connection and ease. The results of the study will help understand the factors that influence students' attitudes towards online open electives and provide insights into how universities and colleges can improve the design and delivery of these courses to enhance students' learning experiences.

## KEYWORDS

online environment, attitude, online open electives, Karnataka

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Digitalization in education refers to the integration of digital technologies into the learning process. This can include the use of computers, mobile devices,

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internet connectivity, digital tools, and applications. Digitalization in education has the potential to transform traditional teaching and learning methods by enabling more personalized, interactive, and engaging experiences for learners. It can also help break down traditional barriers to education by providing greater access to educational resources and opportunities for students, regardless of their location. One of the key benefits of digitalization in education is the enhancement of teaching methods. With the integration of technology, teachers can access a wide range of digital tools and resources to support their lessons. For example, digital textbooks, online simulations, and educational apps provide teachers with the ability to personalize instruction and cater to individual student needs. Studies have shown that teachers who use digital tools are able to create more engaging and interactive learning environments, leading to increased student participation and motivation [1–2].

Digitalization has also transformed the way students learn. Digital devices and online platforms allow students to access a vast amount of information and resources from anywhere at any time. This improves access to education and facilitates self-directed learning and student-centered approaches. Additionally, digital tools have been shown to improve student achievement, particularly in the areas of literacy and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) subjects [3–4]. The use of digital tools in education has also been linked to positive student outcomes, including higher academic achievement, increased engagement, and improved critical thinking skills [5–6]. Digitalization has also opened up new opportunities for distance learning and educational access for students who may not have access to traditional education forms. Studies have shown mixed results regarding the effectiveness of online education for students.

Online education offers several benefits to students, including increased flexibility, access to a broader range of courses and resources, and the ability to learn at their own pace. According to a study by Allen and Seaman, 74.1% of students who took online courses reported that they did so because they could work at their own pace. Additionally, online education allows students to access course materials from anywhere, making it easier for them to fit learning into their schedules [7]. Online education also allows students to interact with their instructors and peers in various ways, such as through discussion boards, chat rooms, and video conferencing. This interaction can lead to increased engagement and collaboration, which can enhance learning outcomes [8]. While online education has some drawbacks, one of the most significant is the lack of face-to-face interaction between students and instructors. This lack of interaction can lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection from the learning community [9]. Another drawback of online education is the potential for students to experience technical difficulties. Technical issues can lead to frustration and negatively impact students' learning experiences [10].

In Karnataka, open electives are an important aspect of the higher education system. Open electives refer to courses that are not mandatory for a particular program but are available for students to take as an optional subject. These courses are offered by various departments within the institutions and are open to all students, irrespective of their streams and programs. These courses cover a variety of subjects, including science, art, literature, social sciences, management, and technology. The institutions offer both theoretical and practical courses, giving students hands-on experience in various fields. One of the major advantages of open electives is that they help students develop critical thinking, adopt a multi-disciplinary approach, and even change streams for further studies. This helps students become more innovative and creative in their approach to problem-solving. Another advantage of open electives is that they allow students to specialize in a particular area of interest. For example, a

student pursuing a degree in engineering may take an open elective in management, which can help them acquire business skills that can be useful in their future career. Similarly, a student pursuing a degree in literature may take an open elective in statistics, which can help them develop a deeper understanding of research.

This study explores college students' attitudes toward open online electives. Students' attitude towards open electives refers to their overall evaluation or emotional response to the idea of taking elective courses that are not mandatory or required for their academic program or major. This attitude can be influenced by factors such as personal interests, career goals, perceived value of the courses, availability of options, and prior experiences with similar courses. A positive attitude towards open electives suggests that students are motivated and willing to explore new topics or fields of study and see the courses as opportunities for personal and intellectual growth. A negative attitude, on the other hand, indicates that students may feel indifferent, skeptical, or hesitant towards taking such courses and may see them as a burden or distraction from their core studies.

Exploring the students' attitude towards online electives is important for several reasons. With the growing popularity of online education, it is essential to understand how students perceive online electives, particularly in terms of their quality, effectiveness, and overall satisfaction with the learning experience. By examining the students' attitudes, educators can identify potential areas for improvement and develop strategies to enhance the online elective courses' delivery and design. This can help ensure that the courses align with students' expectations and meet their learning needs. Additionally, exploring students' attitudes towards online electives can provide insights into how to increase student engagement and motivation, which are critical factors in achieving successful learning outcomes. Furthermore, understanding students' attitudes towards online electives can inform decisions related to curriculum planning and resource allocation. For example, if students have a negative attitude towards online electives, this may indicate a need for more resources to improve the quality of the courses or more opportunities for interaction and collaboration among students and instructors. Overall, exploring students' attitudes towards online electives can provide valuable insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers to ensure that online education meets the needs and expectations of students and contributes to their academic success.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Participants

The sample consisted of 393 college students from Karnataka, India, who pursued open elective courses through the online mode. More than half of the participants are female (53.2%), with around three-fourths of them below 20 years of age (72.8%) and hailing from urban locales (74%). The majority of them study in aided colleges (52.2%) and pursue studies in the deanery of commerce and management studies (40.5%).

### 2.2 Research instrument

The measure of online communication attitude (MOCA), developed by Ledbetter in 2009, is the instrument used for this study. The measure includes 31 items of cognitive and affective constructions that likely influence one's propensity to engage some

media channels over others across five dimensions with high levels of reliability indicated by Cronbach's alpha values: self-disclosure ( $\alpha = .90$ ), apprehension ( $\alpha = .87$ ), miscommunication ( $\alpha = .86$ ), social connection ( $\alpha = .84$ ), and ease ( $\alpha = .83$ ). The tool displays face validity since it corresponds with its operationalization and the conceptual approach of gauging individuals' attitudes towards online communication. All the dimensions evaluate individual preferences towards different aspects of technologically mediated communication (outlined below). Additionally, the MOCA has been proven to have convergent validity as it correlates with comparable variables such as technology usage experience and communication competence. It is used in research and educational settings to gain insights into individuals' attitudes towards online communication and how these attitudes may influence their online behavior and communication patterns. It can also be used as a diagnostic tool to identify individuals who may need support in improving their online communication skills or reducing their apprehension or miscommunication in online communication. [11].

1. **Self-disclosure:** It is the act of revealing personal information about oneself in an online learning environment. It can involve sharing personal experiences, opinions, beliefs, values, or emotions with classmates or instructors in the virtual classroom. When students feel comfortable sharing personal information about themselves, it can help them establish deeper connections with their peers and instructors, and it can also encourage greater engagement and participation in class discussions.
2. **Apprehension:** It refers to a sense of unease or anxiety that students may experience when engaging in online learning activities. This apprehension can be related to a variety of factors, such as the technical complexity of online learning platforms, the lack of face-to-face interaction with instructors and classmates, or concerns about the quality or effectiveness of online instruction.
3. **Miscommunication:** It is the breakdown or failure in conveying and receiving accurate information between the teacher and the students in a virtual learning environment. It can take various forms, such as technical difficulties, language barriers, a lack of personal interaction, misreading messages, and cultural differences.
4. **Social connection:** It refers to the ability for students to interact and connect with each other, as well as with their instructor, through digital communication channels. In traditional classroom settings, social connections are built through in-person interactions such as group projects, discussions, and extracurricular activities. However, in online education, social connections must be fostered through digital means such as online discussion forums, video conferencing, and social media platforms.
5. **Ease:** It refers to the level of convenience and flexibility that online learning offers students. With online education, students have the freedom to learn at their own pace, in their own time, and from any location, provided they have access to the Internet.

### 2.3 Data collection and analysis

An online survey was conducted among the higher education institutions in Karnataka through purposive sampling. By utilizing purposive sampling, the researcher could select particular groups of students who are more inclined to offer pertinent and valuable information for the research. As a result, this could improve the quality and reliability of the gathered and analyzed data, as the chosen participants possess specific qualities or features that are applicable to the research inquiry.

Information regarding the study was communicated to the contacts obtained, and 393 students voluntarily participated in the online survey, which was carried out from December 2022 to February 2023. The sample included representation from all 31 districts of Karnataka.

As the data were not normally distributed, non-parametric tests, including the Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis H test, were performed to investigate the online communication attitude toward open electives among student profiles. The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to examine the nature of the relationship between the five dimensions, namely self-disclosure and apprehension, Miscommunication, social connection, and ease.

### 3 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of the dimensions of online communication attitude

Dimension	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Self-Disclosure	28	7	35	20.78	5.82	33.88
Apprehension	32	8	40	22.43	6.53	42.64
Miscommunication	20	5	25	16.82	4.69	22.07
Social Connection	20	8	28	18.82	3.61	13.04
Ease	20	5	25	17.34	4.14	17.17

Descriptive statistical analysis suggests that the range of dimensions of online communication attitude extends from 5–8 to 25–40. Apprehension and self-disclosure were found to have comparatively higher mean scores than the other domains, followed by social connection, ease, and miscommunication, respectively (Table 1).

**Table 2.** Gender and online communication attitude

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	U	Z	Sig.
Self-Disclosure	Male	184	216.50	15640.50	-3.20	.00
	Female	209	179.83			
Apprehension	Male	184	192.52	18403.00	-.73	.46
	Female	209	200.95			
Miscommunication	Male	184	195.36	18926.50	-.27	.78
	Female	209	198.44			
Social Connection	Male	184	214.08	16084.50	-2.82	.00
	Female	209	181.96			
Ease	Male	184	209.23	16977.50	-2.02	.04
	Female	209	186.23			

Note: \* $p < 0 .05$ .

Mann-Whitney U test suggested a significant difference in self-disclosure ( $U = 15640.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and social connection ( $U = 16084.50$ ,  $p < .00$ ) among males

and females. Males were found to have higher levels of self-disclosure and social connection when compared to females (Table 2).

**Table 3.** Age and online communication attitude

	Age	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal Wallis Chi-Square	Sig.
Self-Disclosure	Below 20	286	189.35	4.92	.08
	21–22 years	90	219.04		
	23–25 years	17	209.06		
Apprehension	Below 20	286	206.43	7.45	.02
	21–22 years	90	173.56		
	23–25 years	17	162.50		
Miscommunication	Below 20	286	177.10	32.73	.00
	21–22 years	90	248.56		
	23–25 years	17	258.79		
Social Connection	Below 20	286	188.20	6.63	.03
	21–22 years	90	222.53		
	23–25 years	17	209.88		
Ease	Below 20	286	194.01	10.44	.00
	21–22 years	90	190.29		
	23–25 years	17	282.85		

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ .

Kruskal Wallis H test suggested a significant difference in apprehension ( $H = 206.43$ ,  $p = .02$ ), miscommunication ( $H = 177.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ), social connection ( $H = 6.63$ ,  $p = .03$ ), and ease ( $H = 10.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ) among age categories. Apprehension was found to be higher below 20 years of age, whereas miscommunication, social connection, and ease were found to be higher between 23 and 25 years of age (Table 3).

**Table 4.** Locality and online communication attitude

	Locality	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal Wallis Chi-Square	Sig.
Self-Disclosure	Rural	26	306.13	32.04	.00
	Semi Urban	76	217.79		
	Urban	291	181.82		
Apprehension	Rural	26	255.19	18.35	.00
	Semi Urban	76	231.09		
	Urban	291	182.90		
Miscommunication	Rural	26	254.37	11.95	.00
	Semi Urban	76	218.12		
	Urban	291	186.36		

(Continued)

**Table 4.** Locality and online communication attitude (Continued)

	Locality	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal Wallis Chi-Square	Sig.
Social Connection	Rural	26	254.37	3.58	.16
	Semi Urban	76	218.12		
	Urban	291	186.36		
Ease	Rural	26	246.08	5.44	.06
	Semi Urban	76	190.08		
	Urban	291	194.42		

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ .

Kruskal Wallis H test suggested a significant difference in self-disclosure ( $H = 32.04, p < .001$ ), apprehension ( $H = 18.35, p < .001$ ), and miscommunication ( $H = 11.95, p < .001$ ) among students from rural, semi-urban, and urban localities. Students from rural areas were reported to have higher self-disclosure, apprehension, and miscommunication when compared to others (Table 4).

**Table 5.** Type of the institution and online communication attitude

	Institution	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal Wallis Chi-Square	Sig.
Self-Disclosure	Government	19	182.18	5.83	.05
	Aided	205	185.31		
	Unaided	169	212.85		
Apprehension	Government	19	225.45	12.63	.00
	Aided	205	177.67		
	Unaided	169	217.25		
Miscommunication	Government	19	142.32	4.77	.09
	Aided	205	198.16		
	Unaided	169	201.74		
Social Connection	Government	19	167.55	6.76	.03
	Aided	205	186.25		
	Unaided	169	213.35		
Ease	Government	19	144.00	7.61	.02
	Aided	205	190.30		
	Unaided	169	211.09		

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ .

Kruskal Wallis H test suggested a significant difference in self-disclosure ( $H = 5.83, p = .05$ ), apprehension ( $H = 12.63, p < .001$ ), social connection ( $H = 6.76, p = .03$ ), and ease ( $H = 7.61, p = .02$ ) among students studying in government, aided, and unaided institutions. Government college students were found to have higher levels of apprehension. Self-disclosure, social connection, and ease were reported to be higher among students from unaided colleges (Table 5).

**Table 6.** Deanery and online communication attitude

	Deanery	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal Wallis Chi-Square	Sig.
Self-Disclosure	Commerce and Management	159	201.13	6.88	.07
	Social Science and Humanities	123	201.89		
	Science	81	200.74		
	Others	30	144.98		
Apprehension	Commerce and Management	159	188.59	5.20	.15
	Social Science and Humanities	123	204.80		
	Science	81	187.96		
	Others	30	233.98		
Miscommunication	Commerce and Management	159	183.19	24.35	.00
	Social Science and Humanities	123	237.74		
	Science	81	167.70		
	Others	30	182.27		
Social Connection	Commerce and Management	159	168.20	24.76	.00
	Social Science and Humanities	123	206.25		
	Science	81	242.54		
	Others	30	188.72		
Ease	Commerce and Management	159	171.17	21.95	.00
	Social Science and Humanities	123	204.57		
	Science	81	241.24		
	Others	30	183.45		

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ .

Kruskal Wallis H test suggested a significant difference in miscommunication ( $H = 24.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ), social connection ( $H = 24.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and ease ( $H = 21.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ) among students from different deaneries. Miscommunication was found to be higher among humanities and social science students, whereas social connection and ease were found to be higher among science students (Table 6).

**Table 7.** Relationship between the dimensions of online communication attitude

	Self-Disclosure	Apprehension	Miscommunication	Social Connection	Ease
Self-Disclosure	1	-.087	.119*	.328**	.363**
Apprehension		1	.311**	-.021	-.034
Miscommunication			1	.234**	.424**
Social Connection				1	.522**
Ease					1

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .001$ .



The Pearson correlation coefficient suggests that self-disclosure is positively correlated with social connection, ease, and miscommunication. Apprehension is positively correlated with miscommunication. Miscommunication is positively correlated with social connection and ease. Social connection and ease are also positively correlated (Table 7).

## 4 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSIONS

The study revealed that apprehension and self-disclosure were high among students when compared to other domains. Other factors to follow included social connection, ease, and miscommunication. When compared to females, males were found to have greater levels of self-disclosure and social connection. Apprehension tended to be more prevalent among individuals under the age of 20, while miscommunication, social connection, and ease tended to be more prevalent among those between the ages of 23 and 25. Compared to their counterparts, students hailing from rural areas were observed to exhibit greater levels of self-disclosure, apprehension, and miscommunication. Students attending government colleges had higher levels of apprehension, while those studying in unaided colleges exhibited greater levels of self-disclosure, social connection, and ease. Humanities and social science students had a higher incidence of miscommunication, while science students tended to have higher levels of social connection and ease. Self-disclosure was found to have a positive correlation with social connection, ease, and miscommunication. Apprehension was positively correlated with miscommunication, and miscommunication was positively correlated with social connection and ease. Additionally, social connection and ease correlated positively with each other. Previous literature suggests that self-disclosure in online communication can lead to increased social presence and connectedness. Students who engaged in more self-disclosure were reported to have stronger relational outcomes, such as feelings of closeness and trust [12]. The relationship between social presence, self-disclosure, and online trust in higher education was positively associated with online trust, and those who engaged in more self-disclosure reported higher levels of social presence and trust in their online learning environment [13]. In a study by McCroskey and Richmond (1990), it was found that individuals with high apprehension levels tend to have lower communication skills than those with low apprehension levels [14]. Individuals who experience higher levels of apprehension tend to perceive their communication experiences as more negative and less effective [15]. Individuals who have higher levels of communication competence tend to experience less miscommunication; individuals who engage in active listening tend to experience less miscommunication [16–17].

Miscommunication can also be a factor in the online education environment, and it is positively correlated with both apprehension and social connection [18]. It can arise when students do not fully understand the instructions or expectations for an assignment or when they have difficulty communicating with their peers or instructors. This can lead to feelings of apprehension and social disconnection, which can negatively impact the online learning experience. Despite the potential for miscommunication, research suggests that social connection and ease are still positively correlated in the online education environment [19]. When students feel socially connected and at ease in the online learning environment, they are more likely to engage in meaningful interactions with their peers and instructors. This can lead to a more positive and productive online learning experience.

The study has several implications for educators, policymakers, and researchers interested in understanding the attitudes of students towards online learning. Firstly, the study highlights the importance of addressing students' apprehension towards online learning, particularly among those who are under 20 years old and those attending government colleges. Educators and policymakers can use these findings to design interventions that help reduce students' anxiety and increase their confidence and motivation towards online learning. Secondly, the study emphasizes the need for enhancing social connection and ease of use in online learning environments, as these factors were found to be positively associated with students' attitudes towards online learning. Educators can use these findings to design online learning platforms and courses that are user-friendly and promote social interaction among students, such as through discussion forums, group assignments, and collaborative projects. Thirdly, the study provides insights into the differences in attitudes towards online learning among students from different demographic backgrounds. For instance, students from rural areas were found to exhibit greater levels of self-disclosure and miscommunication compared to their urban counterparts, highlighting the need for customized interventions that address the unique needs and challenges faced by these students. Similarly, the differences observed between students from government and unaided colleges suggest the importance of considering institutional context when designing online learning programs and policies. Overall, the findings of this study can inform the development of effective strategies for promoting positive attitudes toward online learning, enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes, and reducing the digital divide among students from different backgrounds.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Online education has had a significant impact during the pandemic, providing greater access to education and improving the use of technology in education. However, it is important to recognize the challenges that come with this mode of learning, including the social and emotional impact on students. As the world moves into the post-pandemic period, it will be important to continue to develop and refine online learning platforms to ensure that they are effective and accessible to all students.

## 6 FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND SPONSORSHIP

Nil.

## 7 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Nil

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## 9 AUTHORS

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