

Exposure to Technology by Learners during COVID-19 and Its Benefits for their Careers in the Post-COVID-19 Context

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1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant changes across various sectors worldwide, notably affecting teaching and learning practices in education. In Cambodia, the pandemic presented numerous challenges for students and teachers, primarily due to the limited use of technology in classrooms. However, despite these obstacles, some educational institutions seized the opportunity to enhance their use of technology. At the same time, teachers sought innovative ways to facilitate learning and help students engage with new educational methods.

In reality, not all students could adapt to these sudden changes, prompting a need to examine the impact of technology on students and their ability to adjust to these advancements. This chapter also aims to identify the benefits of technology in supporting students' career development, particularly since many university students in Cambodia are balancing part-time jobs or internships with their studies. Our primary objectives are centered around a thorough investigation of these dynamics and the overarching impact of technological integration in education during and following the pandemic.

This chapter primarily aims to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To explore the impact of technology on student's learning during COVID-19.
2. To examine how students adapted to the changes in technology during this period.
3. To identify the technological benefits that assist students in their careers in the post-COVID-19 context.

The following section reviews the empirical studies in this direction. Following this, the chapter discusses the methodology used in this study. Subsequent sections present the empirical results and discussions, followed by the conclusion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Impact of Technology on Students during COVID-19

This section examines technology from a human perspective. Prior research has shown that people demonstrate two distinct reactions to introducing new technologies or digital transformations: one group is thrilled, while the other is curious and concerned. Higher education must feel obligated to provide the necessary infrastructure and technological tools for effective instruction. It is crucial for universities to recognize that digital transformation, which alters the overall university experience, requires establishing new conditions (Efimov & Lapteva, 2018).

No one can imagine their existence without digital technology in the present world, especially during and after the global pandemic. People utilize technology for work, study, and leisure. Critical technologies such as cloud computing can enhance this experience as the educational system rapidly approaches distance learning. Digital student employment and marketing have also evolved, allowing for remote supervision of distance learning, tutoring, and mentoring sessions (Jha & Shenoy, 2016). Unlike traditional methods that require students to be physically present at a university, students can now attend classes remotely.

Moreover, institutions can now effectively offer services and connect with a larger audience using digital marketing strategies. However, as digital technology advances, organizations and businesses operating internationally face increasing challenges in keeping pace with the disruptive market. This online competition extends to colleges and universities as well. Universities often spend significant money on the latest technology to attract as many students as possible. Leveraging sufficient digital technology can enhance the overall quality of graduates. Conversely, leading institutions may experience declines or collapse due to technological advancements (Crittenden *et al.*, 2019). This indicates that colleges risk losing their ability to attract sizable student populations if they do not adapt to technological changes.

Large institutions should prioritize this issue since technology plays a crucial role in education. Crittenden *et al.* (2019) noted that as more business operations become digital, communication channels have simplified, resulting in new ways for companies and customers to interact, often disrupting traditional marketing strategies. In an educational setting, careful planning is essential for developing and delivering online courses, and educators must possess the skills to blend classroom instruction with online learning effectively.

Although technology-integrated classes enhance the likelihood of active student participation in their education (Henry, 2008), the desire to incorporate technology in higher education extends beyond the classroom. Technologies such as artificial intelligence, augmented reality, blockchain, gamification, the Internet of Things (IoT),

and 3D printing have become essential for business-customer interactions, target marketing, and the overall marketing mix. For example, the customer support industry extensively uses artificial intelligence technologies.

Therefore, higher education institutions (HEIs) and universities should focus on these technologies to provide high-quality instruction and attract as many students as possible. By considering the rapid development of social media applications, the advancement of data analytics, the evolution of search engine optimization, and the proliferation of online e-businesses, we can glimpse the future of technology in education. Crittenden *et al.* (2019) assert that “it is imperative that college gain exposure to potentially disruptive, cutting-edge technologies, and more importantly, deeply ingrained the conceptional, inquiry, critical thinking, creativity, and integrative learning skills needed to enhance their future decision-making and human capabilities.” This highlights the significance of digitization for students pursuing a university degree.

2.2 Student’s Adaptation to the Changes in Technology during COVID-19

COVID-19 has ushered in a new era in education that impacts people’s lives, and online learning is a trending kind of mainstream education. Thus, students must adjust to the latest learning mode, requiring them to alter their behavior to maintain or improve their performance. Adaptation refers to adjustments to society’s needs, limits, and other factors, such as the capacity to live and work in harmony with others and to have pleasant social interactions and relationships. According to Al-Hawamleh *et al.* (2022), when students choose the online learning method, they rely on their professors’ guidance and assistance, adversely affecting their self-regulation and autonomy. By using self-regulating learning processes, students would similarly try to adapt to online learning, but their inadequate strategies would not directly result in better marks. It is important to consider how students’ adaptation to online learning will affect the development of their self-regulation throughout COVID-19. First, online learning forces students to adjust to the online environment. Students are forced to adapt to the new educational environment as they transition from traditional face-to-face learning to online learning, with these changes leading to varied degrees of self-regulation development.

As Dinsmore *et al.* (2008) explain, self-regulation is the process by which the environment influences an individual’s awareness and regulatory response. This concept is particularly crucial in academic achievement, as it falls within the domain of self-regulated learning. Students must exercise self-control in the classroom to meet their learning objectives. The effectiveness of learners is determined by their use of the social cognitive learning approach of self-regulated learning. Schunk (2008) points out that while training and direction from external sources are essential for

teaching, the learner must also integrate this external influence into their self-regulation system. The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new educational pressures that impact student growth in self-regulation. The adaptation to the new environment visibly influences the ongoing adjustment process.

2.3 Technology that Benefits Student's Future

The confirmation of COVID-19 has profoundly affected people's lives and daily routines, leading to the closure of schools at all levels, from elementary to university. In response, these institutions were compelled to swiftly transition from traditional classroom instruction to online teaching, facing significant challenges due to the abrupt nature of this shift and the lack of adequate preparation. Nevertheless, some schools view this transition as an opportunity to enhance students' technological skills and better equip them for their future careers (Oyedotun, 2020). Students have been introduced to various online platforms that transform their learning experiences and help them understand how to leverage technology for their educational benefit. Tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, and others have proven supportive of student learning, offering schools accessible and user-friendly options to facilitate this new mode of instruction (Oyedotun, 2020).

Integrating technology in the classroom has proven beneficial for both students and instructors during times of crisis, enabling the continuation of education while broadening perspectives on technological advancements. According to Winter *et al.* (2021), platforms such as "Zoom, YouTube, interactive video, PowerPoint, and Google Classroom" are deemed useful by students for their studies during such challenging periods and are likely to play a role in their future careers. Shenoy *et al.* (2020) also emphasize the effective use of these tools for teaching and learning, highlighting applications like Zoom, Google Hangouts, Skype, Google Classroom, and YouTube. Their findings indicate that, despite the online format, students utilized these platforms for class assessments, research, and presentations, underscoring a favorable attitude towards digital tools. Similarly, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) has assembled a variety of online platforms, including its website, Facebook page, YouTube channel, and radio and television broadcasts, to facilitate learning (Sothy, 2021). Beyond using these digital tools for communication during instruction, schools ensured students had online access to materials and textbooks, either as digital copies or in soft format. This new experience has encouraged students to develop skills in navigating virtual classrooms, enabling them to appreciate the convenience of technology and effectively utilize the new tools provided by their schools.

Unexpected changes significantly impacted students, as many were unprepared to adapt to new technology. A key issue was that some students lacked sufficient

support at home, highlighting the essential role of parental assistance and school support in ensuring access to technology (Winter *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, the lack of Internet connectivity made it difficult for students to access online learning resources. Factors such as Internet speed and the availability of appropriate learning materials were critical for online learning, and there was a need for technical guidelines and support from schools (Sothy, 2021).

When technical problems arise, schools or teachers should be prepared to provide students with alternative solutions to resolve issues promptly. Therefore, having a reliable technical support system is a crucial strategy for tackling technological difficulties, even if developing or implementing these solutions takes time. Another important approach is to teach students how to engage with technology effectively and embrace change. Although this may influence their behavior or thought processes, students need to learn about modern technology in school to utilize it in the future. The skills and experiences gained during this time can benefit the education sector during the pandemic. As students apply them afterward, they can better prepare students and schools for similar situations (Lennox *et al.*, 2021).

Students who enhance their ability to adapt to technological changes gain a significant advantage over those with less technological experience (Bennett & McWhorter, 2021). Therefore, flexibility in adapting to technology is a crucial skill that dramatically benefits students. Furthermore, the advantages of technology help students use it more actively and retain these experiences for their future careers. In conclusion, the experiences students acquire during this period contribute to their flexibility and awareness of using technology effectively, preparing them for the demands of the modern workplace.

2.4 Key Debates and Controversies

The primary strategy used by governments to slow the spread of COVID-19 was to minimize physical contact, leading to the closure of educational institutions. Many students experienced unexpected delays in their education, and many who have not attended school in a year raised concerns about their educational situation (UNESCO, 2023). According to Maldonado and De Witte (2021), the school closures led to a combination of lost learning progress and learning loss, including rising inequality within and across schools. The learning losses during school closure were a concern that damaged students' learning and put them in a disadvantageous position (González & Bonal, 2021). The current studies have led to unequal learning in skills development and academic performance, which pushes students from advantages to disadvantages. Social class, cultural background, and age are factors that affect students' learning when adapting to changes during COVID-19 (Abadzi, 2009). Based on the situation, some students were not able to afford and make full

use of the technologies and, therefore, had to leave school; yet, those who had adapted and had full access to the technologies faced challenges in learning online since the culture of learning was primarily based on physical engagement and teaching.

Additionally, students were disadvantaged at socializing because they could not interact with their peers face-to-face as they used to in or outside the classroom. This created a problem that affected their learning and kept them from lively classroom engagement. Since everything was online, students might not be able to express their ideas fully, and there was less movement, which made the class less active and boring (Cattaneo *et al.*, 2017). Other controversies are that all of the technology platforms such as “e-book/e-journals, pdf documents, YouTube videos, online meetings (Zoom, Google Meet or Microsoft Teams), WhatsApp, social media (Facebook or Instagram), Google Classroom, e-mail, Google Search Engine, Podcasts, educational websites, Audio Calls, and PowerPoint Presentations” were introduced to the students, posed challenges for students in their learning. One of the challenges was the inexperience of new software and applications; students would require time to get used to the new software and apply the practice to their studies. In addition, there is a lack of knowledge of technology, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds who cannot obtain the necessary devices or internet connectivity (Rahiem, 2020). In some instances, parents had negative beliefs about the values and benefits of online learning, like Chinese parents who preferred traditional learning in early childhood settings (Dong *et al.*, 2020). According to Dong *et al.* (2020), due to the shortcomings of online learning, young children’s inadequate self-regulation, and parents’ lack of time and professional knowledge in supporting children’s online learning, including the hardship caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese parents resisted and even rejected online learning at home.

All in all, these controversies bring concerns about students’ learning losses and disadvantages during school closures. Social class, cultural background, and age can affect students’ ability to adapt to online learning. Some may not have access to necessary technology devices, while others may struggle with the lack of physical engagement and social interaction. Moreover, inexperience with new software and applications was an issue for schools and students, along with the lack of technology knowledge, especially for children from poor backgrounds.

3. STUDY DESIGN AND METHODS

This descriptive research explores the impact of technology during COVID-19 on students’ careers after the pandemic and examines whether online education can establish itself as the standard in the field.

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to conduct the research. The target respondents were fourth-year students at a leading business

school in the capital city of Cambodia. We surveyed the sample respondents online using Google Forms, focusing on the impact of technology on students' learning during COVID-19. Through the qualitative approach, we gained more profound insights into how students adapted to technological changes during the pandemic and identified the benefits of technology that supported their careers after the crisis.

The study's sample size was determined using the Yemen (1967) formula. For the total population (N) of 315, we calculated the study's sample size as 124 with a 0.07 margin of error. Further, based on the gender representation in the total population, we randomly selected 67 percent of female students (n = 84) and 33 percent of male students (n = 40) using a lottery method for the online survey.

A semi-structured questionnaire was created to collect primary data from the sample respondents. The questionnaire was pre-tested with a small group of selected students and revised based on their feedback. We then distributed the final version to the target respondents and asked them to complete the online survey using Google Forms. Additionally, we conducted online focus group discussions with study participants who expressed interest in participating. All ethical guidelines were adhered to throughout the study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Using Technology in Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic

Familiarity and Usefulness of Using Technology

The survey showed that all respondents were familiar with using technology in their learning. However, around 60 percent of participants believed that technology was beneficial to their studies, while the remaining 40 percent found it moderately helpful. From the responses, we inferred that technology significantly impacts learners' ability to learn, contributing to improved academic performance. Participants agreed that technology offers a convenient way to study. One respondent stated, "It is easy and faster to search for information and review through video recordings, which helps us learn new skills and understand new technology." Others mentioned, "Using platforms like Zoom or Google Meet has made online studying easier; without technology, we wouldn't be able to learn the lessons in a timely manner."

Impact of Technology on Study

The survey revealed that 83 percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that technology has positively impacted their education and enhanced their studies. However, 17 percent of participants chose to remain neutral on the matter. This

suggests that most respondents feel they have benefited from using technology in their studies. Respondents highlighted various advantages, including: “It makes communication and teamwork easier,” “It creates a more engaging learning environment,” and “It allows for sharing ideas and opinions through images and videos, as well as having clearer video recordings for reviewing lessons.”

Accessibility to an Online Learning Platform

The study assessed respondents’ accessibility to online learning platforms such as Zoom video conferencing, Google Meet, and other Google applications that assist them in their studies. Seven among 10 respondents (around 70 percent) felt these platforms were either strongly accessible or accessible. However, one-fifth of them considered the accessibility only moderate, and nearly 10 percent experienced it as slightly accessible, indicating potential issues with their Internet connectivity. Overall, respondents were able to access the online learning platforms when needed for their studies.

Adaptation to Online Learning

The respondents who engaged in online learning exhibited various strategies for adapting to their virtual educational environment, highlighting the diversity and complexity inherent in the learning process. Over two-fifths of the study participants (43.5 percent) acknowledged that essential tools, including a reliable laptop, earphones, a microphone, and stable Internet connectivity, play a crucial role in adapting to online learning. In contrast, nearly one-third (30.4 percent) of respondents emphasized the importance of having a conducive learning environment, such as a quiet space. Additionally, some participants indicated that practicing during class hours (17.4 percent) and seeking assistance from peers, lecturers, and support staff (8.7 percent) were other effective methods for adapting to the online learning experience. While learners employ different strategies to adapt, possessing the right tools and a suitable environment is fundamental to enhancing the online learning experience.

Knowledge in Using Online Learning Platforms

The study reveals that most respondents were familiar with online learning platforms for their education. About 70.0 percent found platforms like Zoom and Google Classroom to be very easy or easy to use, while the rest felt it was moderately difficult. Overall, most respondents demonstrated a good understanding of how to navigate online learning platforms.

Factors Contributing to Effective Online Learning

Study participants shared their thoughts on what factors contributed to their successful online learning experiences. Nearly two-fifths (39.0 percent) of respondents strongly believed that most students showed interest in online learning as they saved their time by not commuting during the pandemic and felt comfortable studying at home. Another significant factor was the ability to ask instructors questions without hesitation, which was noted by 31.0 percent of participants who felt less judged compared to traditional classroom settings. Additionally, 17.0 percent mentioned that having presentation slides on their screens and clearly hearing the lecture (13 percent) benefited their learning experience.

However, respondents also identified several challenges in the online learning process, including slow Internet speeds, a lack of motivation due to the absence of face-to-face interactions, and a lack of learning environments at home.

4.2 Benefits of Using Technology in Contributing to Students' Career

This study aims to investigate how the online learning technologies adopted by students during the pandemic contribute to their career development afterward. The research highlights various learning platforms used, including Zoom, Google Meet, Google Forms, Google Classroom, Kahoot, and Google applications such as Google Docs and Google Sheets. Most respondents identified Google Classroom, Google Forms, Google Applications, and Kahoot as the most beneficial tools (Figure 13.1).

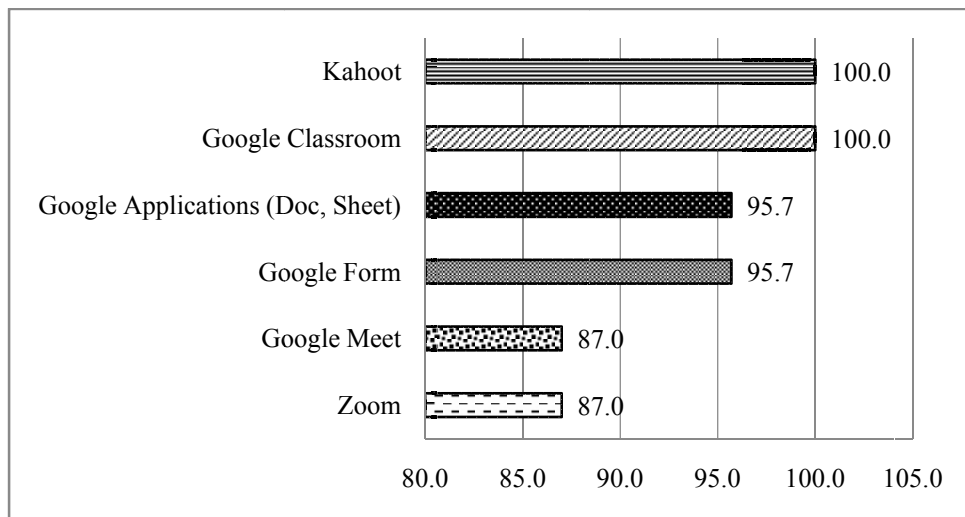


Figure 13.1: Beneficial Apps/Web-Based Technology in Learning (%)

Source: Primary data compiled by the author.

The respondents, who have been immersed in the world of learning technology since their time at a private institution, have found great satisfaction in the practical application of technology. While not all students were initially familiar with platforms like Zoom or Google Meet, the shift to online classes during the pandemic has seen them quickly mastering these tools. When asked about the primary benefits of using technology, eight out of ten respondents identified several advantages: it saves time, provides convenient access to online materials anytime and anywhere, and makes it easier to research specific lessons or topics. Additionally, one-fifth of the respondents mentioned that technology enhances their learning experience by making it more enjoyable and engaging. They noted that it helps them acquire new skills and knowledge, gain a better understanding through practical application, and improve their communication skills and overall performance in school and the workplace.

As students are introduced to new technology, they must learn to adapt and pay close attention to these changes. Despite this challenge, students generally view technological advancements positively. They reported gaining new skills and knowledge that have helped improve their soft skills. Additionally, their experiences with online learning have given them a significant advantage, as they are likely to use platforms like Zoom or Google Meet for discussions in their future workplaces.

Furthermore, Google applications have enabled them to effectively utilize various tools for their studies and work. Google Classroom is an essential resource for students, as most assessments and materials are stored in these applications, allowing them easy access. Kahoot, an engaging app, is used in every session for quizzes and slide presentations, making it enjoyable for students to answer questions. However, while these tools enhance the learning experience, they may not significantly benefit students' careers unless their future jobs involve training, instruction, or lecturing. Nonetheless, providing students access to software and applications is crucial for their academic experience. Continuing to utilize these tools could greatly benefit them in the future.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A substantial body of theoretical and empirical research supports the direct and indirect relationships between the use of technology—such as online learning—and learner performance and adaptation. Numerous studies have thoroughly examined the role of technology in enhancing the quality of education. Institutional management must recognize the need to invest in technology, particularly online learning tools and high-speed Internet, to enhance educational quality and provide greater flexibility for learners.

Our research indicates that the study institution has diligently equipped learners with the necessary skills, technology, and tools to adapt to significant changes in the learning environment. The practical skills acquired through technology will aid learners in adapting to future technological advancements and greatly benefit their

career prospects. This ease of adapting to new technology highlights the advantages of using technology in education during the COVID-19 pandemic. It reassures the continued relevance of this investment to learners' careers in the post-pandemic context.

The respondents in this study were selected from a private higher education institution, limiting the findings' generalizability. Additionally, the study did not include important participants such as instructors, management, non-academic staff, and others. Therefore, there is potential to expand the scope of this research.

Based on the findings, the study intends to provide the following recommendations:

1. Although the study institution has adequate infrastructure to adapt to the changing learning environment, it should consider reviewing and implementing newer technologies to enhance students' learning experiences.
2. Given the post-pandemic context, the institution could offer students the flexibility to choose between online and in-person classes. This option would be especially beneficial for students traveling long distances to attend classes.
3. The institution's proactive approach to researching new technologies, particularly educational tools that facilitate learning, should reassure stakeholders of its commitment to continuous improvement.
4. It is crucial for the institution to establish a continuous feedback mechanism for learners. This will enable them to share their thoughts and experiences regarding the technologies provided, ensuring that their needs and preferences are considered in the ongoing enhancement of the learning environment.

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