Teacher Educators and Trainee Teachers' Attitude Toward Online Teacher Education Courses

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Abstract: The purpose of the study was to explore the attitude towards Online Teacher Education Courses (OTEC). To that end, this study was carried out over the teacher educators and trainee teachers of Bangladesh Open University. Here, teacher educators represent the faculty members of the School of Education (SoE) of Bangladesh Open University (BOU), and trainee teachers represent the Master of Education (M.Ed.) and Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) students of BOU. A mixed research approach with triangulation was used to conduct the study with a descriptive survey, two focus group discussions (FGDs), and one key personnel interview. Data were collected from a total of 602 teacher trainees (182 were M.Ed. students and 420 were B.Ed. students) and 12 teacher educators, selected through multiple sampling techniques. The baseline data, as explored, revealed that the teacher educators and trainee teachers had a positive attitude towards online courses since the mean score of faculty members, M.Ed., and B.Ed. students of BOU were 3.60, 381, and 3.81, respectively. Taking into account all these aspects, this study suggested that SoE / BOU should how decide rationally to shape its future Online Teacher Education Courses (OTECs). This research contributes to the basement of new knowledge through an exploratory study with all the possible stakeholders that cover the whole country of interest.

Keywords: attitude, online teacher education courses, teacher educators, teacher trainees, Bangladesh open university.

Abstrak: Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi sikap terhadap Kursus Pendidikan Guru Online (OTECs). Untuk itu, penelitian ini dilakukan terhadap para pendidik guru dan guru peserta pelatihan dari Bangladesh Open University. Di sini, pendidik guru mewakili anggota fakultas School of Education (SoE) bangladesh Open University (BOU), dan guru peserta pelatihan mewakili siswa Master of Education (M.Ed.) dan Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) dari BOU. Pendekatan penelitian campuran dengan triangulasi digunakan untuk melakukan penelitian dengan survei deskriptif, dua Focus Group Discussion (FGD), dan satu wawancara personel kunci. Data dikumpulkan dari total 602 peserta pelatihan guru (182 adalah siswa M.Ed. dan 420 adalah siswa B.Ed.) dan 12 pendidik guru, dipilih melalui beberapa teknik pengambilan sampel. Data dasar, seperti yang dieksplorasi, mengungkapkan bahwa pendidik guru dan guru peserta pelatihan memiliki sikap positif terhadap kursus online karena skor rata-rata anggota fakultas, M.Ed., dan B.Ed. siswa BOU masing-masing adalah 3,60, 381, dan 3,81. Mempertimbangkan semua aspek ini, penelitian ini menyarankan bahwa SoE / BOU perlu memutuskan secara rasional untuk membentuk Kursus Pendidikan Guru Online (OTEC) di masa depan. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada dasar pengetahuan baru melalui studi eksploratif dengan semua pemangku kepentingan pada level nasional.

Kata Kunci: sikap, kursus pendidikan guru online, pendidik guru, peserta pelatihan guru, universitas terbuka Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION

In this new normal learning environment brought about by Covid-19, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) play an essential part in the teaching and learning process (Daniel, 2020). Therefore, it is now imperative to incorporate ICT into education (Xie et al., 2020). In this setting, the global demand for online courses via ICT integration in education has accelerated (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Bestiantono et al., 2020; Toquero, 2020). It is especially significant for open and distance education. Sun and Chen (2011), for instance, stated that the introduction of the World Wide Web (WWW) in 1991 marked a turning point in the rapid spread of online teaching and learning and a potent impetus for the advancement of open and distance education. Thus, open universities around the world have begun to provide not only online training but also full online degree programs (Mishra et al., 2020). This paradigm shift is greatly upgrading the quality of open and distance education. As evidence, online education enables students to learn at their own pace; conversely, online education enables teachers to carry out their teaching activities more effectively by utilizing online teaching content and professional networks (Emine & Kalelioglu, 2019; Sanchez & Aleman, 2011). Following these benefits, Nwagwu (2020) and Mishra et al (2020) suggested that online learning can assist in converting the teaching-learning environment of higher education institutions into one that is learner-centered.

Bangladesh Open University, as the only distance university in Bangladesh, is implementing a daunting task of providing educational opportunities to different underprivileged and working people of the country (Islam & Islam, 2008). Since its establishment, it has produced a huge number of graduates and post-graduate students. From the very beginning, it is making use of a conventional distance learning mode for its instructional delivery (Ali et al., 1997), whereas the online course is quite absent, although it is becoming an increasingly common phenomenon in many open and distance learning universities of the world. Hence, in the context of the worldwide online learning revolution, it has become pertinent for BOU to shift some of its programs from conventional face-to-face to fully online courses. However, the launching of any such online courses must require a positive attitude from the stakeholders i.e., the students and teachers (Ranganathan et al., 2021). In this regard, to introduce online teacher education courses, this study is designed to explore the attitude of the students and faculty members of the School of Education towards online courses. To achieve the abovementioned purposes, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Did the SoE faculty, M.Ed., and B.Ed. students receive any training on computer operation?
2. What was the awareness level of the SoE faculty, M.Ed., and B.Ed. students regarding online courses?
3. What were the attitudes of the SoE faculty, M.Ed., and B.Ed. students towards online courses?

This study will provide significant information regarding the attitude of the SoE faculty, M.Ed. and B.Ed. students towards online courses that will be useful in implementing online learning. This study will examine respondents' computer operation skills and online course awareness, which must contribute to developing strategic approaches to implementing online courses. Additionally, this study will aid in the development of an online course curriculum that is suitable for the teacher trainees of Bangladesh such as developing the instructional practices, materials, and assessment

tasks. Thereby, this study will be a blueprint for directing how to maintain significant online elements such as the application of e-modules, online individual activities, online forum discussions, virtual seminars, LMS, IVCR, and web-based assessments system.

1. Literature Review

The term "information communication technology" refers to the tools and resources that are utilized to communicate, create, disseminate, store, and manage data (Chowdhury et al., 2018). It plays a critical role in ensuring that education is more student-centered (Mishra et al., 2020). Thereby, it promotes both collaborative and self-directed learning. To able these benefit of online learning more and more institutions are introducing online learning (Daniel, 2020). However, the introduction of such online courses must involve an examination of the attitudes of the stakeholders, i.e., the students and teachers (Ranganathan et al., 2021).

There are several studies in this regard, for example, in terms of faculty member perspective, few studies exist on faculty views regarding e-learning, however, there are studies on faculty technology integration (Bakogianni et al., 2020; Panda & Mishra, 2007). Jamlan (2004) used a questionnaire to assess faculty opinion on the introduction of e-learning at the University of Bahrain. He noticed that while faculty members were generally positive about e-learning, they were apprehensive about its economic viability. Faculty attitude and motivation are vital in distance teaching, according to Panda and Mishra (2007), as is efficient adoption and implementation of technology-enabled education. They noted that attitudinal predispositions, institutional, and allied barriers (including appropriate governmental actions) will be crucial in making an efficient transition from traditional remote education delivery to web-enabled education and training. However, their findings show that extensive computer and email use is linked to positive attitudes toward e-learning and that the most significant impediments to e-learning perceived by faculty were students' lack of internet access and a lack of e-learning training, followed by institutional policy and instructional design for e-learning. Faculty participation in web-based distance education was not influenced by the time and effort required to create course materials, according to Lee and Busch (2005), but rather by their sense of the recognition they received. Many teachers believe their achievements in online teaching are devalued at their institutions (Wilson et al., 2003). Therefore, it can be said that faculty member attitude toward online learning is diverse and influenced by contextual background, hence, before introducing online leanrning, universities must explore the attitude of faculty members.

Again, regarding students, exploring their attitude is also essential since they are also a key stakeholder. Graff (2003) argued that to some extent, students' attitudes toward online learning influence their performance in web search, online debate, and online assessment. Again, due to student-centered learning, number of online student is increasing. According to Sohail (2018), one in every seven university students in the United States is enrolled in an entirely online program, and the trend is similar on both sides of the Atlantic. However, according to Cairncross and Pöysti (2004), computer and internet use in education in underdeveloped nations is still in its infancy, and in other cases, it is not used at all, due to limited infrastructure and perceived high access costs. Despite these challenges, countries are offering online courses due to the numerous advantages of online learning. As a result of the rapid development of digital media and information and communication technologies (ICT), online courses in several educational fields, including teacher education, have become increasingly relevant, and this trend will continue in the twenty-first century (Sun & Chen, 2016). Hence, it can be concluded that

students' attitudes regarding online learning are variable and influenced by circumstance; therefore, universities must investigate students' attitudes before implementing online learning.

In Bangladesh, several scholars conducted empirical studies to investigate the state of online learning. Chowdhury et al. (2018), for example, did a qualitative study on ICT integration in Bangladeshi higher education classrooms. Data was gathered from Dhaka University students and lecturers. Because of a lack of ICT knowledge, skills, equipment, and access to the internet and technological support, ICT is not fully integrated with teaching-learning in higher education. As a result, the study strongly advocated for ICT training for instructors, as well as the development of a positive attitude among teachers and collaborative planning for ICT integration in higher education.

Sohail (2018) expressed great concerns in his paper on the fact that no public university in the country offers any online higher education program that has been approved by the UGC, despite the fact that certain private colleges have launched online programs. Even BOU, the primary portal for post-secondary distant education, has failed to achieve success in this area. Such a situation, he believes, is unacceptably dangerous in the twenty-first century. He aggressively advocated for the early introduction of high-quality online bachelor's and master's degree programs to provide adults and stay-at-home moms with opportunities for higher education. With its enormous potential and physical, technological, and human resource capabilities, SoE/BOU should be able to achieve this goal.

The critical review of research and literature relevant to the subject under investigation is crucial in providing insight into the problem under investigation. According to the critical review, online education is the most valuable need of the twenty-first century. As a result, the majority of the literature has concentrated on the use of ICT on ODL from either a country or regional viewpoint, or the perspective of the developing world. Despite the fact that many countries have made great progress, Bangladesh's education system still needs to be directed in that direction, and there is no way to avoid this obligation.

The literature review further shows that the implementation of online courses involves much soft and hard preparation for teachers and students. In contrast, like many other institutions, SoE/BOU might have limitations too. It is also true that many of these limitations may be overcome through coordinated efforts for the betterment of society, nation, and the world. Hence, it is crucial to identify the nature of the problems of the SoE and its faculty and the students to face the challenge of introducing an online education program.

Another finding erupts from the critical review of literature is although few studies on online learning have been conducted in Bangladesh, however, there is a scarcity of studies related to exploring the attitude toward online courses. Such a study is really important for planning and designing online teacher education courses. From this viewpoint, the researchers were very beneficial in forming the objectives and research questions, designing research methodology and tools, and analyzing and interpreting the research findings of this study.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study made use of a mixed method of research approach i.e., a combination of quantitative and qualitative data gathering processes (Caruth, 2013; Creswell, 2012). For quantitative analysis, it used a descriptive survey method to generate in-depth data

to describe, record, analyze, and interpret what is or conditions exist in terms of attitude towards online courses. The quantitative was corroborated by some qualitative techniques, which included open-ended questioning, FGDs, and key personnel interview (Ponce & Pagán-Maldonado, 2015). In addition to the mixed method of research approach, it used triangulation for the collection of data, under which data were drawn from multiple sources.

1. Population, Sampling and Samples

The SoE faculty members, B.Ed., and M.Ed. students from all centers throughout the whole country including the headquarter of BOU at Gazipur, Dhaka constituted the population of this study. Thereby, the population of this study included 6826 teacher trainees and all the faculty members of SoE during the study time of 2019. A multi-stage sampling technique, a combination of simple random, purposive, and convenience sampling, was used to select the sample and sample size. At every stage, different sampling techniques were used as per requirement. A total of 182 M.Ed. students and the 420 B.Ed. students were selected through the use of the convenience sampling technique. The total number of samples i.e., 602 from 6826 meets the recommendation of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) (if the population is 7000, the sample size should be 364). In the case of the faculty member and technology-enabled people, all were selected purposively.

2. Instruments and Data Collection

Data were collected by administering two survey questionnaires – one for the teacher trainees and the other for the teacher educators – two FGDs guidelines, and a key informant interview schedule. The researchers personally administered the two survey questionnaires and prepared for collecting data from the respondents. However, as data were collected from different student groups and study centers located in different and remote corners of the country and therefore the expertise of the faculty of SoE was utilized to collect the huge data targeted for the study. In doing so, an orientation session was organized by the researchers for the faculty, who took part in the data collection process, for developing a common understanding of the data collection process among them. All participants were provided their consent to participate in the research study. Confidentiality was assured throughout the duration of and upon completion of the research study. For all participants, participation was voluntary and all those involved were assured that they can withdraw from the research study at any time. Measures were taken throughout the research to maintain the anonymity of the respondents participating in the study.

3. Statistical Analysis

The data were properly coded and managed by using the statistical software SPSS. The researchers interpreted the answers, provided by the participants against each of the questions. Quantitative analysis was accomplished by using simple descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, and mean). For qualitative analysis, frequencies and occurrences of responses were calculated following the guidelines of () and participants' opinions were presented in a narration form. For narration form, common trends and themes were identified and categorized with major headings and key comments and descriptions. The use of a mixed-method helped in the in-depth interpretation of data

and triangulation of research outcomes generated from two different research approaches.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are presented in the following sub-sections as per the research questions.

1. Computer Operating Training Received by The Faculty and The M.Ed. and B.Ed. Students

One-third of the faculty members who participated in this study received training on the operation of computers while two-thirds did not attend any such training program. The data indicates that almost two-thirds (65.8%) of the M.Ed. students and about sixty percent (57.4%) of the B.Ed. students received training on computer operating systems. Still, large portions of the respondents in both categories had no training in computer operation.

2. Awareness of Online Course

Two-thirds (67%) of the SoE faculty had well awareness of online courses. Still, significant portions (33%) of them were unaware of this investigation. According to the data, an absolute majority of the M.Ed. and B.Ed. students (56.9% and 63.1% respectively) were not aware of any online courses. The scenario in this area was almost same for the both groups of respondents.

Analysis of qualitative data revealed that the respondents were found almost correct in their conception of online courses. For example, the answers they provided were - an online course every instructional aspect, like educational resources, teaching-learning, examinations, discussions, etc. will be online and there will be no face-to-face tutorial class.

3. Attitude Towards Online Course

The attitudes of the SoE faculty, M.Ed., and B.Ed. students were determined by the scores obtained on 12 attitude statements, developed by using Likert's five-point scale. According to table 1, the mean attitude scores of the SoE faculty were 3.60. The M.Ed. and B.Ed. respondents had the same mean attitude score of 3.81. All the three mean attitude scores were above the criterion mean of 3.00, which indicates all the three groups had positive attitudes regarding online teacher education courses.

A comparison of the mean attitude scores of the three groups of respondents shows that the M.Ed. and B.Ed. students' attitude scores were higher than the mean attitude score of the SoE faculty. The faculty members exhibited a lower level of attitude in all the items than the students. The finding indicates that the SoE faculties are less motivated about launching any online education course.

The analysis of the attitude statements summarizes that all the three groups ventilated positive attitudes against nine statements and negative attitudes on three items (3, 7, and 10). They expressed the highest levels of attitude about the required improvement of the technological facilities of BOU to be capable of conducting online course delivery (item 11). They were also highly motivated of becoming proud students of an online course to be offered by SoE/BOU. The areas of negative attitudes were lack

of required technical skills to take/conduct an online course, difficulties in achieving the necessary technological skills, and that the country's context is yet to be made suitable for introducing any online course.

Overall, the attitude scores express that the SoE faculty as well as the M.Ed. and B.Ed. students were motivated to take/conduct online courses; they were in favor of introducing online M.Ed. and B.Ed. and were confident in their ability to take/conduct the online course and spend the required time for that. They also confirmed that quality is possible to maintain in the case of online education course delivery. Despite the positive aspects, the respondents were afraid of their technological skills/ability required for taking and conducting online courses and found it difficult to achieve in the existing institutional capacity of the country.

Table 1. *Mean Attitude Scores of the Respondents*

Item No.	Attitude Statements	Mean Attitude of the Respondents		
		SoE Faculty	M.Ed. Student	B.Ed. Student
1.	I would describe myself as a self-motivated person for having/conducting any online education course.	3.75	4.01	4.04
2.	It would be better if the B.Ed. and M.Ed. programs are offered through distance mode.	3.41	3.86	4.08
3.	I think I have lack of skills required to take/conduct an online course.	2.50	2.86	2.77
4.	BOU should introduce online courses immediately.	3.67	4.92	4.28
5.	I should motivate others to take an online course.	4.00	4.30	4.31
6.	I would be able to complete online courses even when there are distractions at my home.	3.58	3.97	3.96
7.	Acquiring the required technological skills for taking/conducting online courses seem to be very difficult for me.	2.67	2.77	2.60
8.	I can work independently for my online course/I can work independently to conduct online courses.	4.00	4.06	4.03
9.	I think the quality of education is possible to maintain through online courses.	3.92	4.33	4.36
10.	Introducing online courses is believed to be not suitable in the present context of Bangladesh.	2.75	2.67	2.45
11.	I think BOU needs to increase its technological facilities to support online course implementation.	4.75	4.36	4.36
12.	I will be proud to be a student/tutor of an online course	4.17	4.40	4.41
	Overall mean scores of the three groups	3.60	3.81	3.81

3.1 Findings from qualitative sections

To explore the attitude in-depth, the following questions were asked to the M.Ed. and B.Ed. students.

Q. 1: Do you think SoE/BOU should offer its education courses through online delivery?
All the students included in the FGDs answered positively. This question was followed by another question to have a deeper understanding of their idea on the inquiry such as-

Q. 1.1: What advantage will you enjoy from online delivery? (Follow-up question of Q.1)

The students' key answers were as follows:

One student said that 'It will save our time and thereby we will be able to spend more time on our education'. By supporting the above statement one female student mentioned that 'We will get rid of terrific street jams as no transportation will be required to attend face-to-face sessions'. Similarly another student added that 'We will be able to learn according to our own time and pace, besides, ew will be able to attend the course from any geographical location.' At the end, all students were aggred that the online program will be cost-effective for them as no expenses for traveling will be required and they will get an opportunity to participate in ICT based, modern, international standard education program. Most importantly, perhaps they will not suffer from session jams as are presently faced by them.

Q. 2. What does BOU need to implement an online education course/program?
The students' key answers regarding this question was 'BOU should enhance its technological capabilities to introduce an online education program that must be interactive with the scope of a well-designed synchronous and asynchronous communications and evaluation system and other required facilities'. Again, to explore the attitude in-depth, the following questions were asked to the faculty members.

Q. 1: How SOE/BOU can embark on a successful online program?
The faculty members' key answers indicated that before introducing any online course, UGC approval is a prime requirement to introduce it. Because without UGC approval, recognition of BOU's online degree may be at stake. Besides, social and institutional acceptance of online courses is also an important factor as often BOU's education program(s) suffers. This factor also decreases the motivation of faculty members and learners. In addition, BOU's technological capacity should be developed significantly to support the implementation of an online education program and the faculty should be adequately trained in the online delivery of education programs. Faculty should be provided practical/hands-on experience by attaching them to the delivery of such online programs being offered by distance education universities abroad.

Q. 2: What potential benefits can BOU reap from an online education program?
The faculty's answers were synonyms for that of the students. Additionally, they mentioned that online delivery of education courses can increase the brand image of BOU and can make educational delivery more interactive. Most importantly, it is one of the vital ways to mordanize the educational delivery through ICT integration that will bring BOU to international standard.

The question as included in the survey questionnaire was:

Q. 3: How the students of SoE/BOU can be benefitted from an online education program?
The answers of this question was analyze via key in context method (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007) which explore the following key words:

• Learners' autonomy in choosing a course	• No geographical boundaries	• Upgradation of university image
• Cost-effective	• Time saving	• ICT training opportunities
• Learners can pursue study from home and abroad and from their workplace	• Adjusted to own pace	• Make LMS accessible all over the country
• Increased enrolment	• e-learning facilities	• Produce skilled manpower
• Enrollment from distance	• Learning Management System facilities	
• Easy to complete	• Smartphone learning	
• Convenient in terms of place and time	• Program customization	
• Flexibility in completing the course	• User friendly technology	

Q. 4: Do you recommend implementing an online course immediately?
The faculty opined that introducing blended learning will be the best option instead of a fully online course at the beginning, where a significant portion of the instructional delivery will be online. Based on this experience, a fully online course to be delivered in the future.

Note that, the expert opinion was in favor of a plethora of recommendations to create proper ground such as:

• The capacity of LMS should be increased and made user friendly	• Create a smartphone version of LMS
• Server upgradation	• Provide web cam to the faculty so that they can manage online courses from their official desk
• ICT integration training for the faculty	
• Production of skilled manpower	• Make LMS accessible all over the world
• Increasing internet and IVCR speed Develop Bangla version LMS	• Program customization
	• Piloting before the final introduction

4.   Discussion

The study was guided by three research questions, set for exploring baseline data on (a) computer training status, (b) awareness of online courses (c) and attitudes towards online courses. Data were gathered employing a qualitative survey questionnaire, corroborated with some qualitative measures like open questioning, FGDs, and key personnel interview. Overall, the quantitative and qualitative analyses have explored some key information crucial for deciding on the factor of introducing online courses by SoE/BOU.

Computer training is vital to be successful in any online course for anybody. It can help one be equipped with both software and hardware to complete the course successfully. The finding is in line with the investigation report of Graff (2003). However, a great majority of the students and faculty were found not to attend any formal training program on the computer. Although some of them were aware of online courses, an absolute majority had no experience with online courses. Despite possessing adequate

ICT infrastructure, skill, and attitude, this shortcoming in ICT training might influence learners' achievement in online education course delivery. However, considering the emerging need for ICT integration in education, online course delivery should be made a reality by SoE/BOU by providing the faculty with training on online course delivery. Computer training programs for the potential students also could be offered before making any such attempt. In sum, computer training status and awareness of online courses uphold the need for equipping teacher trainees with ICT-enabled skills to become quality teachers in school. The Education Policy 2010 and the education sector development projects and partners, CoL, CEMCA (TQI one and two, A2i, SESIP, SEDP, ADB, World Bank along with others) advocated and strategized for armoring teachers with ICT knowledge and skills to integrate that successfully in their teaching delivery. To meet the set demand and standard for secondary teachers' ICT knowledge and standard, SoE immediately needs to introduce online teacher education courses, which can contribute to the national effort of armoring the teachers with 21st century ICT skills.

Attitude is an excellent indicator to learn one's mental state for getting into any new education program. It is influenced by the factors involved in the process, like personal and professional requirements, knowledge, skills, access to that particular area, and so on. Along with a good level of computer literacy, online learning awareness, and the professional characteristics of the respondents, both the teacher educators and teacher trainees expressed good attitudes toward getting into the online course. Interestingly, teacher trainees were found to hold a higher attitude than the teacher educators, i.e., they were more motivated than the teacher educators to have an online course. The qualitative data drawn from the students explored several benefits of the potential delivery of online education, which perhaps worked as a motivational factor to express their high level of attitude toward it. The professional and social status of the M.Ed. and B.Ed. students as secondary school teachers in distant rural private schools with incapability to attend regular face-to-face classes due to high workload, comparatively poor economic status, and severely constrained transportation with street jams and uncertainty may also work for their higher attitude. As the leading caterer of the educational requirement of this underprivileged and marginalized group, BOU needs to make an immediate rational decision in this regard.

The qualitative data drawn from the faculty and ICT experts of SoE/BOU opined that despite having the problems, BOU should embark on online course delivery to improve its brand image and make its education delivery to global standard by cashing the positive aspects explored in this study and improving the deficient areas. However, approval from the UGC is required to enhance its acceptance in society and nationally. Also, they recommended introducing first a blended course delivery, with a proportionate combination of online and face to face to delivery, before making any significant jump to online course delivery by considering the state of computer training and awareness of the faculty and the students. Perhaps, this conscious and stringent measure may lead BOU to an effective and successful online delivery in the future. Nevertheless, there is no way to stay in its present position rather than going forward to realizing its mission through online course delivery.

5.   Policy Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have several implications for BOU policy planners. For instance, this study has brought into light the existing strengths, challenges, and gaps that need to be considered and minimized for introducing online courses by SoE. Besides, improving the professional capacity of the SoE faculty for an online course is another

vital issue explored by the study. Proper measures to this end can help SoE/BOU policymakers properly design professional development programs for BOU faculty. Most importantly, the identified high level of attitude of the teacher trainees toward the online education program indicates there is no more waiting time by BOU to reach this goal. In another way, it could be said that the distance learners of SoE are in real demand for an online course. Hence, it is high time for BOU to step forward with online courses. The policymakers of BOU hope to work on that track. Finally, it could be said that in the present era of the fourth industrial revolution, online learning has become an indispensable part of our social as well as educational arena. Hence, from the global perspective, it is quite impractical for any educational institution to go without online course delivery, where one out of every seven university graduates completes their degree through online course delivery. BOU policy planners need to make a rational decision in this regard.

6.   Suggestions for Further Studies

The study findings can help develop significant insights to plan for the future introduction of online course delivery by SoE/BOU. More studies are required to be undertaken for in-depth insights into the problems. As mentioned in the background of the study, BOU has yet to introduce online learning. Therefore, to cope with the demand and challenges of online course delivery, similar studies are suggested to conduct in other fields of studies of BOU. The study also could be conducted on other relevant variables and by adopting/adapting/trialing recognized models for assessing the ICT preparedness of different clientele groups.

CONCLUSION

The study has provided some critical insights on respondents' computer literacy, online learning awareness, and attitudes towards online courses. From the findings, it is clear that the students of M.Ed. and B.Ed. were in solid support of the online course. The perceived attitudes of SoE faculty and students on the abovementioned factors were found supportive for online course delivery. Hence, SoE/BOU should positively decide to offer online courses for the students. Despite the strong desirability of the online course, absence of required computer/computer lab, ICT training and experience on online education delivery, high-speed internet connectivity, supportive and user-friendly learning management system, recognition of online course, required technological facilities for the students and faculty were some of the factors that can hinder implementation and efficient management of online course delivery. Therefore, the authority of SoE/BOU needs to take the necessary action to successfully implement online course delivery by making all these facilities available for the faculty. Especially, required ICT infrastructure and technical support are to be provided to the education deliverer to make an attempt successful. Recognition of any course by the relevant statutory body is crucial for its acceptance by society. The qualitative data from the faculty and ICT experts expressed concern over the issue and recommended action to this end. Therefore, required measures are also being in place to resolve the issue.

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