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ASSESSMENT 2: INDIVIDUAL ESSAY

Introduction

This essay discusses the impact that the rapid advancement of technology in the 21st century has had on university students. The scope of this discussion includes an assessment of the student's experience in the context of advantages and disadvantages that arise from relying on IT for their studies. The discussion will incorporate literature that is relevant to the assessment of such an impact on university students and will consider recent real-world incidents such as the global pandemic for their relevance in the acceleration of technology across the learning environment. This approach will satisfy the discussion's aim of presenting a stance in favour of digital advancement for university students.

Discussion

Advantages

Firstly, it creates an ease of delivery of knowledge and information between the students and university instructors or institutions as a whole. Platforms like Moodle enhance the learning experience through a learning management system, from which students can get instant access to module studies at any time (Costa, Alvelos and Teixeira, 2012). This ensures students are given repository accessibility to information and updates regarding their studies across semesters.

Secondly, it offers flexibility to students regarding physical commuting to the classes. Students can attend the classroom virtually through digital lectures and other learning sessions. This reduces their expenditure associated with commuting, particularly as recent developments have increased the cost of living for students (ONS, 2023). It also increases their study-life balance as the time and money spent on commuting is not a mandatory requirement.

Thirdly, it makes education more accessible to different groups of students. For instance, distance learners can gain their education achievement without being affected by barriers such as living in a remote area (Yeh and Tsai, 2022). Part-time students can increase their learning and diversification of qualifications through online learning at night, thereby engaging with education while being working professionals. It also allows students with disabilities to engage equitably with other students in the virtual classroom environment, increasing the accessibility of education across society (Petretto et al., 2021).

Fourthly, it allows students to learn technology skills through digital engagement with their studies. Students have to use IT tools such as Office, research, handle computers and laptops, as well as maintaining their coursework engagement on platforms like Moodle (Almahasees,

Mohsen and Amin, 2021). This increases their IT proficiency making it easier to use IT in future workplace environments, where digital technology becomes a mandatory requirement to perform workplace jobs (Dukach, 2022).

Lastly, it allows students to increase the scope of their learning beyond the boundaries of the university's studies. Through IT, students can increase their essential skills such as practising typing speeds online (van Weerdenburg, Tesselhof and van der Meijden, 2018). They can improve their research skills by familiarising themselves with research platforms like Science Direct (Vieno, Rogers and Campbell, 2022). Furthermore, students can gain insight into writing their assignments through real-world news developments from platforms like Bloomberg which can be relevant to their general knowledge.

Disadvantages

Firstly, relying on IT creates a barrier to learning for university students in today's diverse learning environment. Inequalities exist among students due to different factors across social and economic conditions (Norman et al., 2022). A certain reliance on IT can deepen these inequalities in the field of education by making IT less accessible to economically underprivileged students or students from personal backgrounds with limited IT use in general cases, such as a lack of IT awareness in households.

Secondly, using IT technologies such as laptops creates a distraction that impedes the learning experience for students. Studies have shown that using laptops or smartphones in the classroom affects learning capability by limiting the attention span of students (Tanil and Yong, 2020). This was also proved in a study where students taking notes through paper scored "significantly higher" compared to laptop users (Will, Bischof and Kingstone, 2020). Performance of multitasking also distracts the student's fellow peers in the classroom (Fried, 2008).

Thirdly, it creates a potential threat where legitimate unfortunate incidents can affect a student's learning journey. For instance, a sudden breakdown of IT devices such as computers can be threatening to the student's education, such as "technical failure" during the exam (Boevé et al., 2015). Other incidents such as the loss of data through cybercrime can result in the deletion of the personal learning materials of the students (Fouad, 2021).

Fourthly, it distorts the teacher-student exchange for virtual classroom activities. The participation of teachers and students in virtual learning results in the mediation of the learning experience across IT devices instead of physical presence and face-to-face interaction (Hehir et

al., 2021). This creates a dehumanising effect where ¹ the social relationships in teaching are eroded, thereby eroding the potential for education in creating a socially enriching experience for students (Izadpanah and Alavi , 2016).

Lastly, it creates isolation in students who are participating in remote learning. Continued interaction with IT is present among students in the learning environment as well as in their personal life (Hehir et al., 2021). This develops a psychological association of safety and security when being connected to IT devices, the absence of which creates anxiety and social isolation (Cazan, Cocoradă and Maican, 2016). Ultimately, across virtual and physical learning situations alike, this fragments the teacher's ability to manage the classroom and address the learning needs of different students, due to their different degrees of IT-induced social isolation (Şad and Göktaş, 2013).

Conclusion

The essay has discussed different ways in which IT dependency creates advantages and disadvantages for students. The long-term approach towards education through IT must be used to make it a positive development, as IT integration has made it indispensable in the learning environment. The pandemic showed the necessity for having IT integration in education, as remote learning interventions sustained students across the world during the critical social isolation period. Furthermore, IT integration will only continue to grow in classrooms and workplaces equally. Therefore, IT disadvantages must be reduced while its strengths utilised fully to secure continuity of education performance across universities.

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