

**THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON STUDENT EXPERIENCES AND
EXPECTATIONS: EVIDENCE FROM A SURVEY ANALYSIS**

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Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic precipitated an unprecedented crisis in global higher education, forcing universities worldwide to rapidly transition to emergency remote online learning platforms. This research analysis synthesizes findings from a comprehensive survey of approximately 1,500 undergraduate students at Arizona State University to examine the profound socio-economic and academic disruptions experienced by students. The study evaluates critical dimensions including academic performance degradation, graduation trajectory delays, shifts in student study habits, and adverse impacts on part-time employment and future career salary expectations. The empirical results reveal substantial negative impacts across all evaluated metrics, with a pronounced widening of existing socio-economic inequalities. Students from lower-income brackets, minority populations, and first-generation backgrounds faced disproportionately higher rates of graduation delays, job losses, and acute financial or health-related anxiety. Based on these findings, institutional policy recommendations are proposed to enhance digital infrastructure resilience, expand financial support mechanisms, and institutionalize proactive mental health provisions for future public emergencies.

Keywords: COVID-19, Higher Education, Student Expectations, Socio-economic Inequality, Online Learning.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the biggest global crises in modern history. It affected every part of life, including health, education, employment, and the economy. Schools, colleges, and universities around the world were forced to close their campuses to stop the spread of the virus. Because of this, millions of students had to continue their

education through online classes. Although online learning helped students continue their studies, it also created many new challenges.

College students experienced many difficulties during the pandemic. Some students lost their part-time jobs, while others struggled to attend online classes because of poor internet connections or lack of suitable devices. Many students faced financial problems because their family income decreased. Others experienced stress, anxiety, loneliness, and uncertainty about their future careers. These problems affected students' academic performance and their expectations for the future.

The research paper "The Impact of COVID-19 on Student Experiences and Expectations: Evidence from a Survey" studies these problems by collecting information from approximately 1,500 students at Arizona State University in the United States. The purpose of the study was to understand how COVID-19 changed students' educational experiences, career plans, financial conditions, and future expectations. This simplified report explains the findings of the research paper in easy language. It focuses on understanding the impact of COVID-19 on students and suggests ways educational institutions and governments can better support students during future emergencies.

Background Of The Study

Before the pandemic, students attended regular face-to-face classes. They participated in classroom discussions, laboratory work, sports, cultural activities, internships, and campus events. These activities helped students develop both academic knowledge and practical skills.

Everything changed when COVID-19 spread rapidly across the world in early 2020. Governments introduced lockdowns, social distancing, and travel restrictions. Universities immediately shifted from classroom teaching to online learning. Although online education allowed learning to continue, many students were not prepared for this sudden change. Several difficulties appeared: poor internet connectivity, lack of laptops or smartphones, difficulty concentrating at home, limited communication with teachers, cancellation of internships, loss of part-time employment, and severe mental health issues such as stress and depression.

Many families also faced financial hardship because parents lost jobs or businesses closed. Students from economically weaker families suffered more because they had fewer educational resources. The researchers wanted to understand not only what happened to students during COVID-19 but also how students believed the pandemic would influence their future careers, graduation plans, and earnings.

Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study were:

- To understand how COVID-19 affected college students' education.
- To examine whether students delayed graduation because of the pandemic.
- To study changes in students' academic performance.
- To examine changes in study habits and learning experiences.
- To analyze the impact of COVID-19 on employment and internships.
- To understand students' expectations about future jobs and salaries.
- To identify whether students from different social and economic backgrounds were affected differently.
- To determine whether financial and health problems explain these differences.
- To suggest policies that can reduce the negative effects of future crises on students.

Importance Of The Study

This research is important because it helps governments, universities, teachers, and policymakers understand the real problems students faced during the pandemic. The findings can help educational institutions improve online education systems, provide financial support to needy students, offer mental health counseling, develop emergency education plans, and systematically reduce educational inequality.

The study also highlights that the pandemic affected students differently depending on their family income, health, and social background. Understanding these differences is crucial for creating fair educational policies.

Literature Review

Before this research, many studies had already shown that economic crises affect employment and education. Earlier research found that students graduating during economic recessions usually experience lower salaries and fewer job opportunities. Other researchers suggested that online learning can be effective when properly planned. However, emergency online teaching during COVID-19 was very different from normal online education because both teachers and students had very little preparation time. Previous studies also indicated that students from low-income families usually face greater educational challenges because they have fewer financial resources. This research builds upon earlier studies by directly asking students how they believed COVID-19 affected both their current situation and their future expectations. This makes the study unique because it measures students' own perceptions rather than relying only on academic records.

Research Methodology

The researchers used a survey method to collect information from students. This was a quantitative research study based on a structured questionnaire. The researchers surveyed approximately 1,500 undergraduate students from Arizona State University. After removing incomplete responses, the final sample included 1,446 students.

Students completed an online questionnaire during April 2020. The survey collected information about academic performance, study hours, graduation plans, choice of major, employment status, family income, health concerns, future job expectations, and expected

future salary. One unique feature of the survey was that students answered two versions of many questions: their current situation during COVID-19, and what they believed their situation would have been if COVID-19 had never happened. This comparison allowed researchers to estimate the impact of the pandemic more accurately.

Major Findings Of The Study

The survey clearly showed that COVID-19 had a strong negative impact on students' academic life, employment, and future career expectations. Although every student experienced the pandemic differently, most students faced difficulties in one or more areas. The researchers found that the pandemic affected students in three major ways: academic performance declined, employment opportunities decreased, and financial and health problems increased. The study also found that students from low-income families suffered more than students from financially stable families.

Impact On Academic Performance

One of the biggest effects of COVID-19 was on students' education. Many students reported that studying from home was much more difficult than attending regular classroom lectures. Some common problems included lack of concentration, family distractions, poor internet connection, less interaction with teachers, reduced motivation, and stress or anxiety. Because of these challenges, many students believed that their academic performance became worse during the pandemic. The study found that the average GPA expected by students decreased because of COVID-19. Many students also reported spending fewer hours studying every week. Interestingly, not every student experienced the same situation. Some students actually studied more because they stayed at home and had fewer social activities. This shows that COVID-19 affected students differently depending on their personal circumstances.

Delay In Graduation

One of the most important findings was that many students believed they would graduate later than originally planned. According to the survey, around 13% of students delayed their graduation, 11% withdrew from one or more courses, and 12% considered changing their major. There were several reasons for delaying graduation: financial problems, difficulty completing online courses, family responsibilities, health concerns, loss of motivation, and limited access to university facilities. Students worried that delayed graduation would also delay their careers and reduce future earnings.

Changes In Study Habits

The pandemic changed how students learned. Before COVID-19, students attended classroom lectures, teachers interacted directly with students, group discussions were common, and library resources were easily available. During COVID-19, classes shifted online, students studied alone at home, communication became limited, and practical learning activities stopped.

The survey showed that study hours changed significantly. Some students studied more because they stayed home, while others studied much less because of stress, family

responsibilities, or financial difficulties. Overall, average study hours declined slightly, but the difference between students was very large.

Online Learning Experience

One surprising finding was that many students became less interested in online learning after experiencing it during the pandemic. Researchers expected students to become more comfortable with online education. Instead, many students preferred traditional classroom teaching. Students gave several reasons: online lectures were less engaging, technical problems interrupted learning, teachers had limited interaction, practical subjects became difficult, and students missed campus life. Many students believed face-to-face education helped them understand concepts better. However, students who had previous experience with online learning adapted more easily. This suggests that training and preparation are important for successful online education.

Impact On Employment

COVID-19 also created serious employment problems for college students. Many students worked part-time to support their education. When businesses closed during lockdowns, many students lost these jobs. According to the survey, about 29% lost their current job, 13% lost internships or job offers, and 61% had a family member whose income decreased or job was lost. Losing employment affected students in many ways: difficulty paying tuition fees, increased financial stress, delayed graduation, and reduced confidence about future careers. Students who lost internships also worried that they would have less work experience after graduation.

Future Career Expectations

The pandemic changed how students viewed their future careers. Many students became less confident about finding employment after graduation. The survey found that students expected lower chances of getting a job, lower starting salaries, and reduced earnings even many years later. Researchers concluded that students believed COVID-19 would affect their careers for a long time. Even students graduating several years later expected the job market to remain uncertain. This shows that the psychological impact of the pandemic extended far beyond the immediate health crisis.

differences between students

The study showed that not all students experienced COVID-19 in the same way. Some students faced much bigger challenges than others. Students who experienced greater difficulties included low-income students, first-generation college students, and minority students. These students were more likely to delay graduation, change majors, experience lower academic performance, and face financial hardship. The researchers concluded that COVID-19 increased existing educational inequalities instead of affecting everyone equally.

15. Statistical Analysis Explained Simply

The researchers compared two situations: students' actual experiences during COVID-19, and students' expected experiences if COVID-19 had never occurred. By comparing these two situations, they estimated the impact of the pandemic. This approach allowed them to identify changes in GPA, graduation plans, study hours, employment, and

salary expectations. The analysis showed that most differences were statistically significant, meaning they were unlikely to have happened by chance.

16. Why Were Some Students More Affected Than Others?

One of the most important findings of this research is that COVID-19 did not affect every student equally. While almost all students experienced some difficulties, the severity of those problems depended on their personal, financial, and family situations. Students from lower-income families were affected more because they had fewer resources to deal with the crisis. Many of them had to work while studying, and when they lost their jobs, paying tuition fees and other expenses became difficult. Some students even had to support their families financially. The researchers also found that many low-income students worried about paying bills or repaying loans. These financial worries made it harder for them to concentrate on their studies.

Health concerns also played an important role. Students who believed they or their family members were at greater risk of severe illness experienced higher levels of stress and uncertainty. This combination of financial and health problems increased the chances of delaying graduation or changing academic plans.

17. economic factors behind the results

The study identified several financial problems that influenced students' education. These included loss of student jobs, reduction in family income, fear of future financial problems, difficulty paying debts, and increased household responsibilities. Many students who lost their income had to reduce study time because they searched for new jobs or helped their families. Students from wealthier families usually had better internet access, personal computers, and quiet study environments. As a result, they adjusted more easily to online education. This finding shows that financial security became an important factor in educational success during the pandemic.

18. Health Factors Behind The Results

Besides financial problems, health concerns also affected students. Students worried about becoming infected with COVID-19, family members becoming seriously ill, long-term health effects, and access to healthcare. These fears created stress and anxiety, making it difficult for students to focus on academics. The researchers found that students who believed they were more likely to require hospitalization if infected were also more likely to delay graduation or change their educational plans. This demonstrates that physical health and mental well-being are closely connected to academic success.

19. Interpretation Of The Findings

The research suggests that COVID-19 was not only a health crisis but also an educational and economic crisis. The pandemic disrupted almost every aspect of student life. Instead of worrying only about exams, students also had to think about their family's financial condition, their own health, their future employment, completing their degrees, and managing online education. The researchers concluded that these combined pressures created a significant burden on students. The study also shows that educational inequality increased

during the pandemic. Students who already faced disadvantages before COVID-19 experienced even greater challenges afterward.

20. Strengths Of The Research

This research has several strengths:

- **Large Sample:** The researchers collected responses from nearly 1,500 students, making the findings more reliable.
- **Wide Range of Topics:** The survey covered many areas, including education, employment, family income, health, career expectations, and online learning.
- **Comparison Method:** Instead of only asking students about their current situation, the researchers also asked how life would have been without COVID-19. This comparison helped estimate the actual impact of the pandemic more effectively.

21. Limitations Of The Study

Although the research is valuable, it has some limitations:

- **Only One University:** The study was conducted only at Arizona State University. Students from other universities or countries may have experienced different situations.
- **Self-Reported Information:** The survey depended on students' personal opinions and memories. Some students may have overestimated or underestimated the effects of COVID-19.
- **Early Stage of the Pandemic:** The survey was conducted in April 2020, when the pandemic had only recently begun. Long-term effects may be different from what students expected at that time.
- **No Experimental Design:** Since this was a survey, the researchers could identify relationships but could not prove every cause with complete certainty.

22. Recommendations

Based on the findings, several improvements can help students during future emergencies:

- **Improve Online Education:** Universities should train teachers in online teaching, use interactive learning methods, improve digital learning platforms, and provide recorded lectures.
- **Financial Support:** Governments and universities should increase scholarships, provide emergency financial assistance, and offer flexible tuition payment options.
- **Mental Health Services:** Every university should provide free counseling, stress management programs, psychological support, and career guidance.
- **Better Internet Access:** Students from rural and low-income families should receive free or affordable internet, laptops or tablets, and digital learning support.
- **Internship Opportunities:** Universities should create online internships, virtual career fairs, industry partnerships, and skill development programs.

23. Lessons Learned From Covid-19

The pandemic taught important lessons. Education systems should always be prepared for unexpected emergencies. Universities should develop emergency learning

plans, strengthen digital education, reduce inequality, support disadvantaged students, and protect students' mental health.

The experience also showed that education is not only about classrooms. Students need financial stability, emotional support, healthcare, and career opportunities to succeed.

24. Overall Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the greatest challenges faced by students in recent history. It affected not only physical health but also education, employment, mental well-being, and future career opportunities. The research conducted on undergraduate students at Arizona State University clearly shows that the pandemic created serious disruptions in students' academic and personal lives.

The study found that many students experienced lower academic performance, reduced study hours, delayed graduation, job losses, and financial difficulties. Students also became more uncertain about their future careers and expected lower employment opportunities and salaries after graduation. These findings indicate that the effects of COVID-19 extended far beyond the health crisis itself and had long-lasting consequences for higher education.

Another important conclusion is that the pandemic affected students differently. Those from lower-income families, first-generation college students, and socially disadvantaged backgrounds suffered more severe educational and financial problems. These students were more likely to delay graduation, change their academic plans, and face economic hardships. The research highlights that existing educational inequalities became even wider during the pandemic. The study also emphasizes the importance of financial stability and good health in achieving academic success. Students who experienced financial stress or worried about their health were more likely to perform poorly in their studies. This demonstrates that academic achievement depends not only on intelligence and hard work but also on social, economic, and health conditions.

Overall, the research provides valuable evidence for governments, universities, teachers, and policymakers. It shows that educational institutions must be better prepared to protect students during future emergencies. Financial assistance, mental health services, digital learning infrastructure, and flexible academic policies are essential to ensure that students can continue their education successfully during difficult times.

25. Key Findings

The major findings of the research are summarized below:

- COVID-19 negatively affected almost every aspect of student life.
- Around 13% of students delayed graduation because of the pandemic.
- Many students experienced lower grades and reduced study hours.

- Online learning created challenges such as poor interaction, technical issues, and reduced motivation.
- A large number of students lost part-time jobs, internships, or job offers.
- Many families experienced income reductions, increasing students' financial stress.
- Students expected lower employment opportunities and lower future earnings.
- Low-income students were affected much more than higher-income students.
- Financial and health problems explained a large part of the differences between students' experiences.
- Universities need stronger support systems for students during emergencies.

26. Practical Implications

For Universities: Universities should develop strong online learning systems, train teachers in digital teaching methods, improve communication with students, provide counseling and mental health support, and create emergency financial aid programs.

For Governments: Governments should increase educational funding during crises, expand internet access in rural and low-income areas, support students with scholarships and grants, and protect internship and employment opportunities for graduates.

For Students: Students should develop digital learning skills, improve time management, build financial awareness, maintain physical and mental health, and seek help whenever necessary.

27. Future Scope Of Research

Although this study provides important information, future research can explore additional areas. Researchers may study students from different countries, compare public and private universities, examine the long-term career effects of COVID-19, investigate mental health in greater detail, analyze how technology can improve online education, study the effectiveness of government support programs, and compare the impact of COVID-19 across different academic disciplines. Such studies will help educational institutions prepare for future emergencies.

28. Personal Analysis

After analyzing this research paper, it is clear that COVID-19 was not simply a medical emergency. It became a social, educational, and economic crisis. The research demonstrates that education cannot be separated from students' personal lives. Financial security, family support, physical health, mental well-being, and access to technology all influence academic success.

One of the strongest aspects of this study is its focus on students' expectations. Instead of examining only grades or attendance records, the researchers tried to understand how students themselves viewed their future. This provides valuable insight into students' decision-making and confidence during uncertain times. Another important contribution of this research is its emphasis on inequality. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds suffered greater educational losses than wealthier students. This finding reminds

policymakers that equal educational opportunities require additional support for students who face greater challenges.

The study also highlights that emergency online education should not be considered the same as planned digital education. Universities need better preparation, teacher training, technological infrastructure, and student support systems to make online learning effective. Overall, this research provides strong evidence that investing in student welfare is essential for improving educational outcomes, especially during national or global crises.

29. Final Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic changed higher education across the world. This research demonstrates that the pandemic influenced students' education, employment, mental health, and future expectations. Students experienced lower academic performance, reduced study motivation, graduation delays, job and internship losses, financial hardship, and career uncertainty. However, the effects were not equal for everyone. Students from economically weaker backgrounds suffered the most. The study concludes that governments and universities should focus on reducing financial and health burdens, strengthening digital education, improving counseling services, and supporting disadvantaged students. These measures can reduce educational inequalities and improve resilience during future crises.

Works Cited

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