

A Study Of Influences On Internet Utilization By Sports Education Students In Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The increasing integration of the internet into higher education has significantly reshaped teaching and learning practices, including within the field of sports education. This study investigates the major factors affecting higher education students' adoption of internet-based learning for sports education in China. Specifically, it examines students' perceptions, internet accessibility, instructional design, and the level of institutional support. Using a systematic literature review combined with qualitative methods, the study identifies key challenges such as limited digital literacy, inadequate internet connectivity, and low levels of student engagement. The findings indicate that although internet-based sports education offers greater flexibility and accessibility, issues related to technological infrastructure and instructor effectiveness remain critical barriers. The study offers practical insights for enhancing digital sports education initiatives to improve student satisfaction and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Sports Education, Higher Education, Internet-Based Learning, China

1. Introduction

The adoption of internet technologies in education has expanded rapidly in recent years, with online learning platforms increasingly utilised across various sectors. In the context of sports education, the use of online resources, virtual coaching, and digital instructional tools has notably influenced students' learning experiences. Advances in internet technology have enabled more interactive and engaging approaches to sports training and education. Nevertheless, students' acceptance of internet-based sports education is shaped by multiple factors, including perceived usefulness, ease of access, and institutional support. Despite the widespread development of online learning systems, many higher education students remain hesitant to fully engage in internet-based sports education. Challenges such as inadequate technological infrastructure, low motivation, and ineffective instructional strategies continue to limit its adoption. Identifying and understanding these barriers is essential for designing effective e-learning approaches in sports education.

Distance learning has been available since the 1960s; however, the widespread acceptance of online education coincided with the rapid growth of the internet and web technologies. Bezhovski and Poorani (2019) note that numerous sectors, including education, industry, and the military, have increasingly adopted online learning in recent years. The internet plays a crucial role in enhancing educational quality and contributing to national development. While some scholars argue that internet use may have adverse effects on adolescents, others suggest that its educational application can improve learning effectiveness. Hamzah, Ariffin, and Hamid (2021) emphasize that achieving higher-order thinking skills among students requires appropriate instructional approaches and effective learning strategies that benefit all stakeholders.

Today, university students have access to extensive information across diverse fields such as politics, economics, culture, and technology through the internet (Guan, 2021). The widespread availability of online information has facilitated knowledge acquisition and learning opportunities. Previous studies indicate that online communication can support students' long-term development (Pimdee et al., 2023) and foster interpersonal relationships, potentially strengthening interactions across different social groups (White et al., 2022). However, Yao and Zhong (2020) report that increased internet use has reduced university students' participation in offline activities, contributing to social isolation and, in some cases, internet addiction. Moreover, the abundance of online content—including misleading, sensationalised, and harmful material—poses risks to students with limited internet literacy, potentially affecting both their physical and mental well-being (Guan, 2021).

Sports education can be viewed as an educational service analyzed through various lenses. From the perspective of international trade, the World Trade Organization (WTO) categorizes education as a service under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), which was implemented in January 1995 following the Uruguay Round negotiations. International education is typically divided into four main types: primary, secondary, tertiary (higher), and adult education ("S/C/W/49", 1998).

As defined by the International Standard Classification of Education (UNESCO, 1997), higher education encompasses post-secondary programs at both sub-degree and university levels, including advanced theoretical studies, professional education, and vocational or practical training provided within higher education institutions. Sports education and training aimed at international students may fit within any of these classifications. Unlike general education, sports education is generally more varied in both content and teaching methods.

China's rapid digital transformation has profoundly influenced communication, commerce, and education. The expansion of online education has led to a sharp increase in participation, with approximately 77.97 million online learners reported in 2020. Although previous research highlights factors such as perceived usefulness, ease of use, and adaptability as determinants of technology adoption, their relationship with student satisfaction remains inconsistent. Additionally, instructor competence and course design have been identified as critical elements shaping students' learning experiences in web-based environments. This study therefore seeks to examine the key factors influencing higher education students in China to use the internet for sports education, while addressing both the benefits and limitations of digital learning contexts.

Research scope defines the boundaries and limitations of a study (Robinson, 2020). In this research, participants will be drawn from public and private higher education institutions across three regions in China. A non-random sampling approach will be employed to identify suitable respondents from Generation Y. Eligibility criteria include Chinese nationality and belonging to Generation Y, defined as individuals born between 1977 and 1994, aged 21 to 38 at the time of the study.

The objectives of this study are to identify the key factors influencing students' use of the internet for sports education, examine the role of digital infrastructure in online sports learning, explore students' perceptions of internet-based sports education, and propose recommendations to enhance digital sports learning experiences. The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and higher education institutions aiming to improve online sports education. By highlighting major challenges and opportunities, the study contributes to the development of effective e-learning strategies that promote student engagement and improved learning outcomes.

This research also aims to extend the existing literature on student satisfaction in web-based learning environments. From a theoretical perspective, the study supports the validation of existing theories,

informs future research, and enhances scholarly understanding of online learning adoption. From a managerial standpoint, the findings provide insights into web-based learning practices that may assist institutional leaders in developing more effective online education strategies. Academically, the study offers students a clearer understanding of their preferences and experiences related to web-based learning in sports education.

2. Literature Review

In educational contexts, "Internet usage" or "e-learning" refers to instructional delivery conducted via the Internet or a corporate intranet, accessible to learners equipped with web browsers (Shen, 2019). This mode of education allows learning to occur anytime and anywhere online. Arbaugh (2019) defines e-learning as the utilization of internet technologies by users to acquire specific knowledge. Stakeholders involved in e-learning include students, educators, employers, and others (Harsasi & Sutawijaya, 2019).

Furthermore, e-learning is described as an educational method that leverages electronic tools and media through network and internet technologies. It serves as an alternative pedagogical approach, connecting instructors and learners from diverse locations (Harsasi & Sutawijaya, 2019). Some scholars define e-learning as the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and computers to deliver educational content and instruction. Harasim (2019) characterizes online education as an emerging field that facilitates novel forms of learner engagement (Barbera, Clara, & Linder-Vanberschot, 2019).

To enhance the effectiveness of e-learning systems, various standard frameworks have been adopted. One prominent approach involves service-oriented architectures (SOA), which allow rapid enhancement of system capabilities through the dynamic addition of services. For example, Fajar et al. (2019) proposed a SOA-based design comprising six layers: data, resource, application, business process, presentation, and governance. Each layer's data is treated as a service, improving system reusability, adaptability, and accessibility to diverse tools. This approach enables institutions and society to expand e-learning affordably, reaching many students in distant learning environments (Harsasi & Sutawijaya, 2019).

Similarly, Gonzalez et al. (2019) extended current e-learning frameworks. According to Barbera, Clara, and Linder-Vanberschot (2019), Salmon (2019) emphasized that e-learning transforms traditional perceptions of learning environments by overcoming temporal and spatial constraints. This modern modality provides learners and employees with a cost-effective, flexible option for engaging with global markets (Salmon, 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly disrupted educational institutions worldwide, affecting over 1.5 billion teachers and learners. Governments were forced to cancel national exams, close schools temporarily, suspend face-to-face instruction, and enforce physical distancing measures. These challenges accelerated digital transformation in higher education, testing institutions' capacities to respond efficiently. Schools adopted appropriate technologies, allocated resources for teaching staff, and adjusted curricula alongside infrastructural enhancements and new pedagogical methods.

Research by Arbaugh (2019) and Thurmond (2019) found that prompt instructor responsiveness significantly influences student satisfaction in e-learning. Immediate academic support motivates students to persist despite difficulties in online courses. Conversely, Soon, Sook, Jung, and Im (2019) noted that delayed teacher responses negatively affect student learning. Stefanovic et al. (2019)

further affirmed that effective management of e-learning activities and timely attention to student needs increase satisfaction levels.

Volery and Lord (2019) identified key factors impacting student satisfaction, including the instructor's approachable demeanor, ability to assist with learning challenges, and interactions facilitated by e-learning platforms. Stefanovic et al. (2019) also highlighted instructional quality as a major determinant of student contentment. Historical studies by Finaly (1994) and Williams and Ceci (1997) similarly recognized the instructor as the primary influence on student satisfaction. Positive correlations between teacher performance and student satisfaction were established by Hiltz (1993) and Debourgh (1999) (Martindale & Bolliger, 2019). Additionally, perceived usefulness of digital tools correlates positively with user satisfaction (Chiu et al., 2019; Isik, 2019).

Academic staff are expected to integrate continuously evolving instructional technologies (Becker et al., 2019). To meet diverse educational demands, teachers require a broad set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, collectively referred to as competencies (Westera, 2019). Teaching involves more than a set of skills; it is a continuous integration of personal behaviors and professional identity (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2019). Professional identity comprises routines, knowledge, skills, beliefs, and attitudes shaped by individual experiences and interests (Jonker et al., 2019). The term "attributes," defined as characteristics that describe a person or object (Babbie, 2019), closely relates to personality components (Allport, 1961).

Allport (1961) described personality as a "dynamic organization" of psychophysical systems within an individual that shapes distinctive thoughts and behaviors. This dynamic nature highlights the interconnected and ever-changing aspects of personality, emphasizing both psychological and physical elements (Feist & Feist, 2019).

Arbaugh (2019) emphasized that the flexibility of web-based courses—regarding time, location, and instructional modes—facilitates student participation and satisfaction. Removing physical barriers allows more dynamic engagement, fostering collaborative learning opportunities (Brandon & Hollingshead, 1999; Salmon, 2019). Web-learning enables students to communicate instantaneously at their convenience (Harasim, 1990; Leidner & Jarvenpaa, 1995; Taylor, 1996), without constraints of time or place.

Moreover, online platforms reduce the social discomfort often associated with traditional face-to-face courses. Strauss (1996) noted that discussion forums and bulletin boards allow students to express opinions and ask questions more freely. Arbaugh and Duray (2019) reported that most web-based courses serve as supplementary or continuing education programs, with many participants being employed adults.

Eom et al. (2019) linked course structure to student satisfaction levels. Barbera, Clara, and Linder-Vanberschot (2019) cited Sun et al. (2019), who found that flexibility and quality of e-learning courses strongly influence student satisfaction. Sahin and Shelly (2019) also observed both direct and indirect effects of course flexibility on satisfaction (Cakir, 2019).

Successful course completion requires learners to have reliable equipment and familiarity with relevant technologies (Martindale & Bolliger, 2019). Parlak (2019) and Sahin and Shelly (2019) reported that learners' satisfaction can vary based on their internet access when engaging in online courses. Conversely, Miltiadou (2019) argued that computer proficiency does not necessarily impact learner satisfaction (Cakir, 2019).

Some literature emphasizes challenges related to internet connectivity among students (Aboagye et al., 2021; Chase et al., 2019; Chung et al., 2019a; Lorenzo, 2019), though Apuke and Iyendo (2019) contend that poor infrastructure is not a major obstacle in universities. They suggest institutions should provide conducive learning environments and reliable internet access. Tarimo and Kavishe (2019) found that 82% of students surveyed used the internet for academic purposes. However, other studies reveal negative attitudes toward online learning management systems (Serhan, 2019). Internet connectivity issues affect not only students but also faculty and institutions. Additionally, the availability of learning devices remains a critical concern. Despite widespread technological access, disparities persist; for example, a South Asian study reported access to computers and internet at homes and schools (Siddiquah & Salim, 2019).

User satisfaction is a widely used indicator of information system success (Mtebe & Raphael, 2019), often serving as a proxy for other success measures. In e-learning, student satisfaction reflects learners' perceptions of their experience and the value derived from online courses. Martindale and Bolliger (2019) highlight the importance of satisfaction in influencing student motivation.

Ajzen and Fishbein's (1975, 1980) Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), originating from social psychology, offers a framework for understanding consumer behavior and how to influence adoption of new methods. TRA posits three core constructs: behavioral intention, attitude, and subjective norm. An individual's intention to perform a behavior depends on their attitude toward the behavior and perceived social pressures (subjective norms). Attitudes involve beliefs about the consequences of the behavior, while subjective norms incorporate perceived expectations of relevant others and the motivation to comply. This study applies TRA to examine intentions related to online purchasing.

Both TRA and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) predict user behavior based on intentions. Davis (1989) developed TAM to explain factors influencing adoption of various computer technologies. Zhang et al. (2019) note TAM's applicability to online shopping behaviors, and Venkatesh and Davis (2019) report individual differences, such as gender, significantly affect TAM outcomes. However, Zhou et al. (2019) argue that TAM does not fully capture the unique features of online shopping, despite its frequent use in e-commerce research. Consequently, Legris et al. (2019) emphasize TAM's foundational role in assessing external influences on beliefs, attitudes, and intentions.

3. Materials and Methods

This study employed a semi-structured interview approach to efficiently gather detailed information and gain valuable insights addressing the research problem. This design enables a broad and deep understanding of the issues by collecting data from multiple sources. It aligns with the core principles of the study and the chosen data collection methods (Witon, 2022). A qualitative research approach was deemed most suitable for exploring the research questions presented.

The study involved 15 higher education students currently enrolled in sports education programs at both public and private colleges and universities across three major cities in China. Participants were selected based on specific criteria. Individual interviews were conducted at mutually convenient locations. Additionally, interviews with subject matter experts—including sports education lecturers, module developers, and department heads—were carried out to ensure the sample size sufficiently captured comprehensive data. Field notes from direct observations and archival records were also reviewed to build a shared understanding of the research issue. Interviews were audio-recorded digitally, then transcribed. The transcripts were coded to identify emerging themes by analyzing patterns and significant statements expressed during interviews.

Expert validation was incorporated to refine and confirm the original interview questions, with feedback ensuring their relevance and clarity (Guth & Asner-Self, 2021; Ravitch & Carl, 2019). This process enhanced understanding of how the selected methods aligned with the research problem and objectives. Conducting face-to-face qualitative interviews facilitated reconstructing events not personally experienced, allowing for comprehensive perspectives from different participants on complex phenomena (Bailey, 2020).

The research adopted a qualitative methodology focusing on factors influencing higher education students' use of the internet in sports education. Among the primary research approaches—quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Wisdom et al., 2022)—qualitative was chosen to guide and deepen understanding of the context under study (Guth & Asner-Self, 2021). Purposeful sampling was used to select students from public and private institutions who were most likely to provide relevant, meaningful data.

Participants included 15 students from various colleges and universities across three cities in China, all possessing prior experience with using the internet for educational purposes and currently enrolled in sports education components within their academic programs. The sample was intentionally diverse in gender and experience to accurately represent the broader student population. Purposeful sampling involves selecting cases rich in information based on defined criteria (Rubin, 2022; Yin, 2021).

The sample size of 15 was justified by continuing interviews until data saturation was achieved—when no new significant information emerged. Interview transcripts were analyzed to identify themes. Additional data sources such as field notes and archival documents were used to validate and triangulate findings. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2020) suggest that a shared understanding typically emerges early in interviews, but more interviews may be needed if saturation is not reached. Deeper insights can be obtained by analyzing individual-level data and incorporating observations and document reviews (Guest et al., 2022). This study employed an inductive thematic coding process, initially analyzing data segments and coding emerging themes and patterns for further analysis, drawing on frameworks by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2020) and Ravitch and Carl (2019).

Participant recruitment occurred following Institutional Review Board approval. Informed consent was obtained prior to interviews and audio recordings. Transcripts underwent member checking, allowing participants to verify accuracy and ensure their views were correctly interpreted. Transcribed texts were then imported into Microsoft Word for data analysis.

Qualitative data collection inherently involves subjectivity, as interpretation of textual meaning is central to the method (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2022). Careful selection of participants and meticulous preparation throughout data collection were critical to obtaining relevant insights (Marshall et al., 2021). An extensive literature review informed the data collection process and sample selection, ensuring alignment with the semi-structured interview design. Each face-to-face interview lasted between 30 to 40 minutes, with interviewing as the main data collection technique.

Triangulation was employed to enhance research quality by utilizing multiple data sources (Patton, 2022). Data triangulation involved cross-verifying information from interviews, field notes, and documents to strengthen the credibility of identified themes (Yin, 2021). Reflexivity was maintained by recording the researcher's observations and reflections in a diary (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2022).

Thematic analysis involved interpreting, explaining, and categorizing data to develop comprehensive themes. A structured protocol guided the analysis stages to ensure external validity—meaning the findings’ applicability and transferability to other contexts (Collins & Cooper, 2020; Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2022). According to Yin (2021), revisiting initial research propositions during analysis helps maintain focus and avoid digressions. Detailed documentation of the research setting, data collection, and analysis was maintained, allowing future researchers and readers to assess the applicability of results to similar populations or contexts (Marshall et al., 2021).

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the anticipated findings of the study based on the research objectives and literature review. The study aims to explore the factors influencing internet utilization among higher education students enrolled in sports education programs in China. Through semi-structured interviews with students and analysis using thematic analysis, several key themes are expected to emerge.

One anticipated finding is that students’ perceptions toward internet-based learning will significantly influence their use of online learning platforms. It is expected that many students will express positive attitudes toward using the internet for educational purposes because it provides flexible access to learning materials such as sports training videos, recorded lectures, and research articles. Online learning platforms may allow students to review materials repeatedly and learn at their own pace, which can improve understanding of theoretical aspects of sports education. However, it is also anticipated that students will highlight the limitations of internet-based learning, particularly in relation to practical sports training. Since sports education involves physical practice, students may indicate that online learning should complement rather than replace face-to-face instruction.

Another anticipated theme relates to internet accessibility and technological infrastructure. Students who have access to stable internet connections and suitable digital devices are expected to demonstrate greater engagement with online learning resources. Reliable internet connectivity may enable students to participate in virtual learning environments, access instructional videos, and communicate effectively with instructors. However, some students may report challenges such as unstable internet connections, slow internet speeds, or limited access to digital devices. These challenges may reduce the effectiveness of internet-based learning and create barriers to full participation in online educational activities.

The study is also expected to highlight the importance of instructional design and teaching approaches. Students may report that well-designed online courses with clear instructions, multimedia materials, and interactive elements improve their learning experience. In particular, sports education students may benefit from video demonstrations, recorded training sessions, and performance analysis tools available through online platforms. These resources can help students better understand sports techniques and theoretical concepts. However, some students may indicate that certain instructors lack sufficient skills or experience in using digital teaching tools. As a result, poorly structured online learning materials may reduce student engagement and limit the effectiveness of internet-based education.

Another anticipated finding is the role of institutional support in facilitating internet utilization. Universities that provide digital learning platforms, access to online libraries, and technical support services are expected to encourage greater student engagement with internet-based learning.

Institutional initiatives such as training workshops and digital literacy programs may also help students and instructors adapt more effectively to online learning environments. Conversely, limited institutional investment in technological infrastructure and training may hinder the successful implementation of internet-based sports education.

Overall, the anticipated findings suggest that internet utilization in sports education is influenced by a combination of student attitudes, technological accessibility, instructional design, and institutional support. While internet-based learning offers several benefits such as flexibility and improved access to learning resources, challenges related to technological limitations and the practical nature of sports education may still affect its effectiveness. These findings are expected to highlight the importance of adopting a blended learning approach, combining online learning with traditional face-to-face practical training to enhance the overall learning experience for sports education students.

5. Conclusion

This study aims to explore the factors influencing internet utilization among sports education students in higher education institutions in China. With the increasing integration of digital technologies in education, understanding how students engage with internet-based learning has become increasingly important.

Based on the anticipated findings, it is expected that several factors will influence the effectiveness of internet utilization in sports education. These factors include students' perceptions of internet-based learning, access to reliable internet and technological resources, the quality of instructional design, and the level of institutional support provided by universities.

Students are expected to demonstrate generally positive attitudes toward internet-based learning due to its flexibility and convenience in accessing educational materials. However, because sports education requires practical skill development, internet-based learning is likely to be viewed as a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for traditional teaching methods.

The anticipated findings also suggest that reliable internet access and technological infrastructure play a significant role in supporting students' engagement with online learning resources. In addition, effective instructional design and well-structured online learning materials may enhance student understanding and participation in digital learning environments.

Furthermore, institutional support is expected to be essential for successful implementation of internet-based education. Universities that invest in digital platforms, training programs, and technical support services may create more effective learning environments for students and instructors.

In conclusion, the study is expected to contribute to a better understanding of how internet technologies can be effectively integrated into sports education programs. The findings may provide useful insights for higher education institutions seeking to improve digital learning strategies and enhance students' learning experiences. By addressing challenges related to infrastructure, instructional design, and institutional support, universities may be able to maximize the benefits of internet-based learning while maintaining the practical components essential to sports education.

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