

Awareness and Usage of e-PG Pathshala: A Study of Post-Graduate Students of Central University of Punjab (India)

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abstract: Open Educational Resources (OER) have a significant impact on students' academics in the digital age. These resources have seen increased use in education, with many preferring electronic resources to print. Most students and teachers benefit from the e-resources available in online portals. e-PG Pathshala is a portal that stores electronic information primarily used for educational purposes as e-text and videos created by subject experts. The prime objective of this study was to explore the awareness and usage of e-PG Pathshala among postgraduate students at the Central University of Punjab, in addition to examining student satisfaction level and the benefit of using e-PG Pathshala over traditional print resources. The study collected data through a questionnaire taken by 200 university students who were selected using a simple random sampling method. The study found that most of the students in the university were aware of e-PG Pathshala, and they were actively using it for their academic needs. The respondents expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the contents of this portal. Moreover, the results show that e-PG Pathshala positively influenced the academic performance of respondents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction and background

Modern technology has influenced the world across different domains, the educational sector being no exception. The development of various digital devices and the rapid growth in the network, particularly the Internet, has brought a swift change in the mode of education, from the traditional method of teaching and learning to advanced learning with the help of various technologies.¹ In addition, information and communication technologies integration has improved education's flexibility, accessibility and ability to respond to the diverse needs of students worldwide.² Due to the COVID epidemic, the entire globe has shifted to a more online style of learning; this change has significantly impacted the education sector, with a marked increase in the utilization of e-resources and digital content in this new era.³ Higher education has witnessed the shift from old

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means of accessing, storing, organizing, using, distributing, and sharing information to the way in which learners now interact with the information they require.⁴

The availability of Open Educational Resources (OER) has significantly enhanced the sphere of education by providing an improved learning environment for students. Open Educational Resources support students' academic success through openness and affordability. OER platforms offer unrestricted, free access to vast amounts of excellent content at any time and allow students to quickly access resources for their academic work. Thanks to the extensive availability of excellent content in OER, open education tools also aid in raising end-course grades, reinforcing the positive impact on student learning outcomes.⁵ Learners choose Open Educational Resources due to advantages over print curriculum materials, such as easy access to a large number of resources that might be restricted to users due to geographical location or finance, the ability to download materials at any time and from any location, ease of sharing content with friends and colleagues without incurring additional cost, and also the facilitation of long-term storage without the need for additional physical storage space.⁶ Even though online educational resources offer valuable support to learners in their self-studies, many of the resources are accessible only through subscriptions or purchase. This has created a significant gap between the learners who can afford access to curricular educational resources and those who cannot. Furthermore, the reliability and quality of some e-resources available on the Internet remain questionable; authenticity and originality issues are common, and the quality of resources might be poor.⁷ However, a number of initiatives have been implemented worldwide to provide free access to quality and authentic e-resources. In India, the government has initiated various programs and funded institutions to develop databases of OER, facilitating free access for all citizens to support their self-learning.⁸

To promote e-learning, the Indian government has started several significant programs, such as e-Gyankosh, the Institute of Life Long Learning (ILL), the National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL), e-Gurukul, and the Consortium for Educational Communication (CEC) with e-PG Pathshala serving as a notable example. It offers self-directed learning materials in a variety of disciplines, such as e-texts, subject-specific papers, professional video lectures, and quizzes. These platforms are intended to support independent study and improve self-learning among students throughout India.⁹

e-PG Pathshala is a well-known e-content project launched by the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) as part of its National Mission on Education Through Information and Communication Technology (NME-ICT) to develop high-quality, curriculum-based interactive content in 70 subjects at the postgraduate level across all disciplines of social science, arts, fine arts and humanities, natural and mathematical science, linguistics and languages. The Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET Centre) developed e-PG Pathshala with the backing of the University Grants Commission (UGC), and it has had a significant impact on the progress of e-learning in INDIA.¹⁰ e-PG Pathshala offers a huge collection of open educational resources and electronic materials primarily designed for postgraduate students, including over 20,000 e-texts, over 19,000 video lectures, contributions from more than 3,200 subject experts, over 30,000 quiz programs, and 723 papers spanning 70 academic subjects. It also offers self-assessment tools, including interactive quizzes, multiple-choice questions, and assignments, to



help learners evaluate their understanding and monitor their academic progress. The courses in e-PG Pathshala are developed in accordance with UGC-approved curriculum and are part of the University Grants Commission's National Mission on Education through ICT project.

e-PG Pathshala has become one of the most prominent OER as of the last two months of 2017—approximately 100,000 students accessed the e-PG Pathshala website, underscoring its role in providing high-quality academic content. Aditi Bhushan and Priya Ranjan Kumar found that e-PG-Pathshala contains comprehensive educational content accessible to instructors, students, parents, researchers, and educators and is available on the web and mobile devices, with resources available in English, Hindi, and Urdu.¹¹ This portal hosts diverse resources, including teacher training modules, magazines, supplements, National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) audio-visual resources and textbooks (grades 1-12), accessible for unlimited downloads and offline use from anywhere and at any time. A flipbook feature improves the reading experience by simulating a realistic page-turning format. Furthermore, e-PG Pathshala serves as a major content provider for UGC MOOCs on SWAYAM, an Indian government portal for free open online courses, by providing course materials that are also used in other digital initiatives like e-Adhyayan, a collection of e-textbooks for convenient reference and self-paced learning, and e-Pathya, which gives learners offline access.¹² The portal's use has increased drastically, highlighting its growing importance as a key platform for accessing e-resources.¹³ Among all the existing OERs, e-PG Pathshala has emerged as the most popular and widely used e-resource portal among students, highlighting its significant impact on their academic pursuits.¹⁴

Literature Review

Several studies have been conducted in various educational institutions about the awareness and use of open educational resources, with special reference to e-PG Pathshala among learners such as students and research scholars, and among the educational instructors at college and university levels. The studies have focused on parameters such as awareness level, nature, place, and time of accessing the e-resources. A questionnaire method was found to be the most common approach to data collection in the studies.¹⁵ Findings of many of the studies have shown a high awareness level of the various e-resources among students of different ages and also among the teaching fraternity. The users access the OER mostly from their respective educational institutions and libraries. Apart from the traditional learning environment, studies have found that the use of OER like the e-PG Pathshala has helped students and research scholars to attain their learning goals. They also help the teachers in their academic-related work, such as the preparation of notes for classroom teaching.¹⁶ The main reasons for the preference for e-resources include speedy access, time-saving, and full-time access.¹⁷ Although many students are aware of the e-resources, including e-PG Pathshala, e-Gyan Kosh, and e-learning platforms like SWAYAM, many others are still not aware of the OER. Even among those who are, there are yet many who face challenges in accessing the resources, as found in the study conducted by Abdul N. Latheef and T.K. Thiruvengadamani, where only 11 percent of students accessed the e-resources once a week.¹⁸ Therefore, many of

the studies have suggested that providing awareness classes on e-resources, providing high-speed Wi-Fi on educational institution campuses, and providing training about online platforms and their uses will help create better awareness and increase usage of the e-resources.¹⁹ Providing better ICT infrastructure will also help make accessing the e-resources more efficient.²⁰

Study Significance

The topic "Awareness and Usage of e-PG Pathshala: A Study of Post-Graduate Students of the Central University of Punjab" is critical because the students are in the post-pandemic era, in which the usage of e-resources in the academic fields is high. There has been a significant shift from the traditional way of learning to online modes due to the development of technology and the COVID-19 pandemic. Students rely on electronic educational resources for studying, making notes, preparing for exams, and so forth.

Study Objectives

This study was conducted to determine the awareness and usage of e-PG Pathshala among postgraduate students at the Central University of Punjab, Bathinda. The proposed study includes the following objectives:

- To find out the awareness and use of e-PG Pathshala among the students of the Central University of Punjab, Bathinda.
- To analyse the advantages of using e-resources over print materials.
- To understand the satisfaction level of students while using e-PG Pathshala for learning.
- To explore the usage of e-resources during and post-COVID-19 pandemic period.

Research Methodology

The study used a self-designed online English language questionnaire as the tool for data collection. The population for the study comprises approximately 1,000 postgraduate students in different departments at the Central University of Punjab, Bathinda. Among those, 200 students were selected as the sample for conducting the study. The questionnaire was randomly distributed to the postgraduate students at the Central University of Punjab, Bathinda, through Google Forms.

Data Analyses and Results

The survey revealed that 73.2 percent of the respondents (n=115) were aware of e-PG Pathshala, whereas 26.8 percent (n=42) indicated a lack of awareness (see Table 1). The findings suggest that most respondents are familiar with e-PG Pathshala, pointing to a substantial level of awareness in the population. However, the result also underscores the existence of a significant minority who remain unaware of e-PG Pathshala.



Table 1.
Awareness of e-PG Pathshala

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Aware	115	73.2%
Not Aware	42	26.8%
Total	157	100%

Table 2 shows the sources through which the respondents became aware of e-PG Pathshala. Results revealed that 63.9 percent (n=78) of the students learned about e-PG Pathshala through their friends, and interactions with friends have influenced them to learn about the platform. Moreover, 47.5 percent (n=58) became aware through teachers, pointing the role of educators in promoting educational resources. Surprisingly, only 8.2 percent (n= 10) of respondents became aware of the platform through advertisement, suggesting a limited impact of formal promotional strategies. Furthermore, 11.5 percent (n=14) of students identified other sources of information, including social media, acquaintances and information from seniors.

The benefits of using content on e-PG Pathshala over traditional print materials have been summarized in Table 3. The majority of respondents, 73.5 percent (n =83), point out the ability to download content for offline reading, while the availability of content on e-PG Pathshala anytime and anywhere is highlighted by 51.3 percent (n=58) of respondents. Notably, 37.2 percent (n=42) indicated that e-PG Pathshala has a significant role in distance learning education and 34.5 percent (n=39) of respondents agreed that content on e-PG Pathshala is cheaper than print materials. Additionally, 18.6 percent (n=21) found value in its MCQ-type questions, quizzes and sample questions.

Table 2.
Sources of awareness of e-PG Pathshala

Sources	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Friends	78	63.9
Advertisement	10	8.2
Teacher	58	47.5
Other	14	11.5



Table 3.
Advantages of content on e-PG Pathshala

Advantages of e-PG Pathshala	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Any/every time accessibility	58	51.3 %
Low cost	39	34.5 %
Downloadable material	83	73.5 %
Availability of MCQ's	21	18.6 %
Helpful for distance learning	42	37.2 %

Table 4 highlights the satisfaction level of respondents regarding the content quality of the e-PG Pathshala platform. The results show that 47.8 percent (n= 75) of respondents were satisfied with the overall performance of the content available on the platform, indicating a generally favourable perception of the resources. While 32.5 percent (n= 51) of students are no more or less satisfied with the platform. It was found that 14.6 percent (n=23) respondents were highly satisfied with the e-PG Pathshala platform while only a minority of the respondents reported dissatisfaction and high dissatisfaction toward the platform 3.2 percent (n= 5) and 1.9 percent (n=3), respectively.

The survey also asked whether usage of e-PG Pathshala increased during the COVID-19 Pandemic (see Table 5). Based on the survey results, during the COVID-19 epidemic, the utilization of the resources in the e-PG Pathshala witnessed a significant increase; most respondents, 72 percent (n= 113), agreed that the use of the platform had

Table 4.
Student satisfaction level related to content of e-PG Pathshala

Satisfaction level	Number of Respondents	Percentage of respondents
Very satisfied	23	14.6 %
Satisfied	75	47.8 %
Neutral	51	32.5 %
Dissatisfied	5	3.2 %
Very Dissatisfied	3	1.9 %



Table 5.

Increase in the usage of e-PG Pathshala increased during the COVID-19 pandemic

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of respondents
Yes	113	72.0 %
No	16	10.2 %
Maybe	28	17.8 %

grown during the pandemic. An additional 17.8 percent (n=28) partially agreed with the statement, indicating some degree of agreement regarding the platform's increased usage. Conversely, a minority of the respondents, 10.2 percent (n=16), expressed their disagreement regarding the assertion, pointing out that they did not rely more on the e-PG Pathshala during COVID-19 than pre-COVID-19 times. These findings highlight the role of e-resources when the traditional educational environment was restricted.

Students were also surveyed as to whether e-PG Pathshala can be an effective tool for classroom teaching. Table 6 highlights that the majority of respondents agree that e-PG Pathshala is an effective tool in achieving the aim of classroom teaching. Notably, 71.3 percent (n=112) of participants admit that the platform fulfils the requirements of tradi-

Table 6.

Impact of e-PG Pathshala on classroom teaching

Perception of Respondents	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Fulfills the requirements of classroom teaching	112	71.3 %
Does not fulfill the requirements of classroom teaching	45	28.7 %



tional classroom instruction. Hence, 28.7 percent (n=45) disagreed, asserting that e-PG Pathshala does not fully meet the objective of classroom teaching. These results highlight a lack of understanding of the platform's capacity to reproduce the all-encompassing educational experience offered by traditional teaching techniques.

Discussion

The survey revealed that e-PG Pathshala is well-known among the respondents, and most of them became aware of it through their friends and teachers. Users depend on the portal mostly for self-study, research purposes, and making notes. Downloading the materials for offline reading is the advantage of using e-PG Pathshala, as reported by most respondents. The quality of content delivered by the portal is satisfactory to the students, but some responses indicate that this portal should focus more on increasing the quality of content. Many respondents agreed that they relied on this portal during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it has improved their academic performance. Some of the respondents had faced issues like a lack of their desired materials in the portal, and some resources for specific courses were missing. Some students have no idea how to effectively search the materials and how to reach out to specific resources. Most of the respondents agreed that e-PG Pathshala is helpful for distance learning.

With the success of the e-PG Pathshala platform, these findings suggest that universities should concentrate on offering various programs, such as seminars, workshops, and extension lectures, to increase the awareness and usage of various open educational resources available for free to students. Teachers should encourage the students to make notes themselves with the support of e-resources portals. The university library should list the names of various open educational resources platforms on its notice board or websites, to reach its audience. To promote awareness about e-PG Pathshala and other open education resources, libraries can disseminate the information through official institutional websites and display it on a notice board placed near the library building. Such strategic dissemination practices can effectively capture students' attention and encourage the utilization of these valuable academic resources.

Conclusion

The platform e-PG Pathshala has a prominent role in the digital era, facilitating access to various e-resources in the form of text, audio, and video, to students without cost. Moreover, this portal facilitates self-learning access to quality content at anytime and anywhere. The study has found that the relevance of this portal during the COVID-19 pandemic increased, as did many online resources all over the world. There was a lack of awareness about the e-PG Pathshala platform among some of the postgraduate students, even though they are the major beneficiaries of this portal. It is highly important to make them aware of the platform and deliver training sessions to students. e-PG Pathshala is a significant open educational resource (OER) initiative launched by the Government of India, aimed at providing free and equitable access to high-quality academic content for postgraduate students across the country. It provides a thorough, excellent selection of educational materials intended to enhance conventional teaching strategies and increase



accessibility to postgraduate education. The platform is valuable because it offers free, curriculum-aligned e-texts, video lectures, interactive texts, and assignments created by subject matter experts. This rich set of resources helps students grasp complex concepts, enhance their subject knowledge, and improve academic performance.

Postgraduate students can access structured learning resources like e-texts, video lectures, and quizzes that align with university curricula through e-PG Pathshala. It is a trustworthy academic resource for research support, test preparation, and in-depth study. Through multimedia information, the platform also enables students to review difficult subjects and study at their own pace. Additionally, students can monitor their progress and successfully reinforce learning with the use of self-assessment tools like assignments and quizzes. Those who live in remote locations or have limited access to conventional resources can pursue high-quality postgraduate education in an inclusive and convenient manner with e-PG Pathshala. Furthermore, universities should encourage the students to use open educational resources platforms for self-study and note-making at this time, when the learning process mostly depends on electronic resources.

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