

## ASSOCIATION OF SELF-EFFICACY AND COGNITIVE LOAD IN ONLINE LEARNING AMONG UNDERGRADUATE PHYSICAL THERAPY STUDENTS

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### Abstract

**Background:** Online education has become increasingly prevalent, offering flexible learning opportunities. However, factors like cognitive load and self-efficacy significantly influence student performance and adaptation in virtual environments.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to examine the relationship between general self-efficacy and cognitive load in online learning among undergraduate physical therapy students. It also explored how COVID-19-related stress and physical activity levels interact with cognitive load.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted from October 2021 to July 2022 involving 444 undergraduate physical therapy students from private universities, selected through non-probability convenience sampling. Inclusion criteria required students to have at least six months of online learning experience. Data were collected using the General Self-Efficacy Scale, Cognitive Load Scale, International Physical Activity Questionnaire, and COVID-19 Stress Scale. An online form was distributed, and responses were analyzed using SPSS version 23.

**Results:** Findings revealed a weak positive correlation between cognitive load and general self-efficacy ( $r = 0.358$ ,  $p = 0.486$ ). Additionally, cognitive load showed weak positive correlations with COVID-19 stress ( $r = 0.151$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and physical activity ( $r = 0.111$ ,  $p = 0.019$ ). These results indicate that although the associations are not strong, they are statistically relevant in the context of online education.

**Conclusion:** The study suggests that enhancing self-efficacy may help reduce cognitive load among students engaged in online learning. Meanwhile, COVID-19-related stress may contribute to increased cognitive burden. Promoting self-efficacy and addressing stress management could support better learning outcomes in virtual settings.

## INTRODUCTION

Concept of learning under the law The National Education System's number 20 challenges for 2003 is how students connect with teachers and learning resources in a classroom setting. Online learning is instruction that takes place between professors and students without them physically meeting. E-learning, remote learning and video conferences are all ways to learn. Online learning is also referred to by words like e-learning and System Online Learning. Computer-based learning and the Online Learning Model (OLM) (1). With the use of information and communication technology, or e-learning, students may study whenever and wherever they choose. E-learning is a development that may be used in the educational process to modify learners' abilities in a variety of skills in addition to how learning materials are delivered. A technique of teaching and learning known as "e-learning" employs electronic media and the internet as an intermediary throughout the teaching and learning process (2). Learning online during the COVID-19 epidemic was more difficult since it required the student to be independent in their learning and successful completion of the lecturer's assignments. Online learning is obviously different from traditional face-to-face learning, and it can put students under cognitive strain. A psychological theory called the theory of cognitive load looks at the potential and constraints of the human cognitive architecture to anticipate the outcomes of the study (3). "Germane cognitive learning (GCL)", "extraneous cognitive load (ECL)", and "Intrinsic cognitive load (ICL)", make up cognitive load. ICL is influenced by how complex a given piece of content is; the more parts and connections there are, the more sophisticated the information is, and the higher the ICL will be as a result. ECL is dependent on how the subject matter is presented. If the presentation of the content is poor, it can increase ECL; but, if the material is poorly constructed, it can result in cognitive processes that are ineffective and irrelevant. GCL places focus on the procedure or effort used by pupils to resolve issues after learning. The GCL can be impacted by an individual's traits, motivation, attitude toward the content being studied, learning style, experience, and knowledge (4). Self-efficacy, often known as confidence in one's capability to perform, has gotten

a lot of attention in the literature on applied psychology (5). The connections between self-efficacy and well-respected conceptions like expectation and the intuitively alluring idea that one's self-confidence might have self-fulfilling implications have caught the attention of practical researchers in a variety of fields (6).

Self-efficacy is a individual's appraisal of their own capacity to do the activity. Self-efficacy encompasses assessments of one's capacity to execute the job and confidence in one's capacity to do so. Self-efficacy is defined in this study's context as the student's assessments and beliefs about her or his ability to grasp and complete the task when studying online (9). According to a research by Isiksal et al (2005), expertise may have an impact on students' self-efficacy in the classroom. Technology offers students a number of advantages by enabling them to "manage the speed of the program, investigate information, and build their own paths through the material," according to Cauble et al (2000) study on the impact of expertise on self-efficacy (10). Expertise "influences their confidence level with the topic and develops a sense of competence in the student area," they conclude. Evidently, prior research has either examined self-efficacy as a dependent variable that is impacted by expertise, (11) or as an independent variable that impacts learning accomplishment (12).

A psychological theory called the theory of cognitive load looks at the potential and constraints of the human cognitive architecture to anticipate the outcomes of the study (20). The idea of cognitive learning places a strong emphasis on the intangible mental processes that humans employ to learn and retain knowledge or new skills (21). Working memory labor required to comprehend information received at a specific time is known as cognitive load (22). The theory of information processing refers to the management or processing of information in human perception. "Long-term memory and Short-term memory" make up the majority of the system memory that is used to process information (23). The system memory's long-term memory is where data is kept when it has to be stored for a while "Short-term memory", commonly referred to as working memory or working memory, is a type of memory that can temporarily store a limited quantity of information.

Instructional design establishes the capabilities and constraints of the human cognitive architecture in accordance with the concept of cognitive load (24). "Rating scales" have been widely used and recognized for evaluating cognitive load, although there is still debate over whether and how often to use the instrument. In general, two methods have been reported in the literature: "1) measuring cognitive load once, following the completion of the entire learning/problem-solving phase; and 2) assessing cognitive load immediately following each problem-solving step or task and averaging the obtained values to produce an indicator of the overall cognitive load". When Schmeck et al. examined these two approaches, they discovered that the average of delayed evaluations was much greater than that of instant ratings. Van Gog et al, who looked at mental effort as another often used subjective measure of cognitive load, came to similar findings. The question of whether of the two approaches is superior is still open (16).

Definition of education under the law The National Education System's number 20 challenges for 2003 is how students connect with teachers and learning resources in a classroom setting. Online learning is instruction that takes place between professors and students without them physically meeting. E-learning, remote learning and video conferences are all ways to learn. Online learning is sometimes referred to by names like e-learning, System, and Online Learning. Computer-based learning and the Online Learning Model (OLM) (8).

One of Albert Bandura's most noteworthy features of his social-cognitive theory on personality development was the idea of self-efficacy (or social learning theory). According to Bandura's theory, the self is described in terms of cognition as "a set of sub functions for the perception, assessment, and regulation of action" and "cognitive structures that offer reference mechanisms" (56)

As a context-related construct, academic self-efficacy relates to people's perceptions of their own capacities for effectively carrying out a plan of action those results in a desired outcome (80). Albert Bandura's "self-efficacy theory" as a starting point, as well as further research with an emphasis on academic self-efficacy (79), we believe that the following phase necessitates research on students' mental or cognitive strain in relation to their perceptions of their

academic abilities, particularly cognitive abilities. It has been demonstrated in several research that academic self-efficacy is a powerful predictor of academic accomplishment. The goal of this study is to investigate the relationship between the motivational and learning variable (self-efficacy) and the cognitive load in online learning among undergraduate students of physical therapy because there are few studies on self-efficacy and cognitive load in Pakistan.

## Objectives

1. To determine association between self-efficacy and cognitive load in online learning among undergraduate Physical therapy students.
2. To determine the association of COVID-19 related stress with cognitive load in online learning among undergraduate Physical therapy students.
3. To determine the association of physical activity with cognitive load in online learning among undergraduate Physical therapy students.

## Alternate Hypothesis:

1. There is association between self-efficacy and cognitive load in online learning among undergraduate Physical therapy students.
2. There is association of COVID-19 related stress with cognitive load in online learning among undergraduate Physical therapy students.
3. There is association of physical activity with cognitive load in online learning among undergraduate Physical therapy students.

## Null Hypothesis:

1. There is no association between self-efficacy and cognitive load in online learning among undergraduate Physical therapy students.
2. There is no association of COVID-19 related stress with cognitive load in online learning among undergraduate Physical therapy students
3. There is no association of physical activity with cognitive load in online learning among undergraduate Physical therapy students.

## Methodology

An Analytical cross Sectional study with sample size of 344 was conducted in Private Sector Universities offering DPT in Peshawar, KPK, to find out association of self-efficacy and cognitive load in online

learning among undergraduate physical therapy students, using Non probability convince sample technique.

## Inclusion Criteria:

- Both genders
  - Undergraduate Students of PT
  - Students taking online classes at least six months
- 2.6.2

## Exclusion Criteria:

Participant failing to fall in this category would be excluded of the study.

- Irregular students
- Students having only clinical rotations

For data collection we used General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) , International Physical Activity Questionnaire

(IPAQ), Cognitive Load Scale (CLS) and Covid-19 Stress Scale Questionnaire.

After taking approval from Board of advance studies and research, Riphah University, Approval was taken from concerned universities. Students were assessed for eligibility. Those who was willing and meeting our criteria was enrolled and filled different questionnaires namely General Self-Efficacy Questionnaire, COVID-19 stress scale, International physical activity questionnaire, Cognitive Load Scale. All data was collected through online Google forms. The demographical data was analyzed using the descriptive statistics and presented as mean, standard deviation, frequency and percentages. Pearson correlational coefficient (r) was used for the analysis of correlation between self-efficacy and cognitive load. P value of 0.05 or less than 0.05 was significant.

## RESULTS

**Table 1 Shows Descriptive Statistics**

S.No	Variable	Male	Female	Total
1	Age of the participant in years (Mean±S.D)	21.39±1.88 Years	21.74±1.86 Years	21.55±1.83 Years
2	Gender of participant Frequency (%)	238(53.6%)	206(46.4%)	444(100%)

**Table 2: Shows Correlation of Cognitive Load Scale With Gross General Self Efficacy**

Cognitive Load Scale	General Self Efficacy	
	r- value	p-value
Keeping Things in Mind	-0.043	0.364
Task Complexity	0.042	0.379
Understanding the task	-0.049	0.300
Understanding Correctly	-0.030	0.529
Task Comprehension	0.060	0.209
Exhausting Task	0.091	0.055
Inconvenient Task Design	-0.009	0.852
Difficulty in Understanding	0.014	0.762

Table 3: Shows Pearson Correlation of Cognitive Load Scale And General Self-Efficacy (Scale A)

	Keeping Things in Mind		Task Complexity		Understanding the task		Understanding Correctly	
	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value
<b>Problem Management</b>	0.35	0.486	0.006	0.902	0.048	0.317	0.001	0.982
<b>Problems Cover-up</b>	-0.049*	0.361	0.106	0.025	<b>-0.031**</b>	0.508	0.026	0.592
<b>Goals Accomplishment</b>	0.001	0.990	-0.041*	0.392	0.027	0.573	-0.043*	0.369
<b>Dealing Efficiently</b>	-0.036*	0.447	0.108	0.023	<b>-0.087**</b>	0.068	-0.053*	0.269
<b>Handling unforeseen situations</b>	-0.038*	0.426	0.068	0.023	<b>-0.030**</b>	0.535	-0.027*	0.577
<b>Problem Solving</b>	-0.021*	0.655	-0.068*	0.155	<b>-0.031**</b>	0.509	-0.044	0.354
<b>Coping strategies</b>	-0.093*	0.051	-0.045*	0.344	0.025	0.605	0.006	0.907

Table 4: shows Pearson Correlation of Cognitive Load Scale and General Self-Efficacy (Scale B)

<b>Solution finding for problems</b>	-0.036*	0.446	0.002	0.970	<b>-0.082**</b>	0.086	0.061	0.203
<b>Thinking of solutions in trouble</b>	-0.083	0.081	-0.073*	0.125	<b>-0.027**</b>	0.565	0.003	0.946
<b>Dealing with every situation</b>	-0.015*	0.749	0.398	0.040	0.018	-0.112*	0.065	-0.088*

\*= Statistically Significant Value, \*\*= Negative Correlation

	Task Comprehensi on		Exhausting Task		Inconvenient Task Design		Difficulty in Understanding	
	r- value	p- value	r-value	p- value	r-value	p- value	r-value	p- value
<b>Problem Management</b>	0.044	0.359	0.070	0.142	- <b>0.002*</b> *	0.97 1	0.013	0.789
<b>Problems Cover-up</b>	0.031	0.510	0.096	<b>0.044</b> *	- <b>0.067*</b> *	0.15 9	0.005	0.920
<b>Goals Accomplishment</b>	0.058	0.219	0.045	0.348	0.033	0.49 1	- <b>0.032*</b> *	0.503
<b>Dealing Efficiently</b>	- <b>0.015</b> **	0.754	0.095	<b>0.046</b> *	0.044	0.35 6	0.150	<b>0.001</b> *
<b>Handling unforeseen situations</b>	- <b>0.004</b> **	0.927	- <b>0.056*</b> *	0.240	- <b>0.062*</b> *	0.19 1	0.022	0.637
<b>Problem Solving</b>	- <b>0.012</b> **	0.807	- <b>0.044*</b> *	0.353	- <b>0.031*</b> *	0.19 1	-0.070	0.637
<b>Coping strategies</b>	0.047	0.318	0.077	0.104	0.036	0.44 4	- <b>0.015*</b> *	0.760
<b>Solution finding for problems</b>	0.049	0.303	0.030	0.526	0.002	0.96 8	- <b>0.010*</b> *	0.823
<b>Thinking of solutions in trouble</b>	0.064	0.176	0.001	0.993	0.010	0.82 8	- <b>0.029*</b> *	0.543
<b>Dealing with every situation</b>	- <b>0.003</b> **	0.950	0.097	<b>0.041</b> *	0.087	0.06 8	0.094	<b>0.048</b> *

\*= Statistically Significant Value, \*\*= Negative Correlation

Table 5: shows Pearson Correlation of Cognitive Load Scale and Covid-19 Stress (Scale A)

	Keeping Things in Mind		Task Complexity		Understanding the task		Understanding Correctly	
	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value
Risk of Contagion	-	<b>0.001*</b>	0.008	0.864	-	<b>0.001*</b>	-	0.141
	<b>0.151**</b>				<b>0.159**</b>		<b>0.070**</b>	
Social Isolation	-	0.109	0.038	0.420	-	<b>0.001*</b>	-	0.088
	<b>0.076**</b>				<b>0.164**</b>		<b>0.081**</b>	
Relationship with relatives	-	0.405	-	0.203	-	0.316	-	0.715
	<b>0.040**</b>		<b>0.061*</b>		<b>0.048**</b>		<b>0.017**</b>	
			*					
Relationship with Colleagues	0.023	0.631	-	0.604	0.097	<b>0.042*</b>	0.037	0.432
			<b>0.025*</b>					
			*					
Relationship with professors	-	0.985	-	0.343	0.069	0.149	-	0.500
	<b>0.001**</b>		<b>0.045*</b>				<b>0.032**</b>	
			*					
Study Experience	-	0.317	-	0.753	-	0.618	-	0.519
	<b>0.048**</b>		<b>0.015*</b>		<b>0.024**</b>		<b>0.031**</b>	
			*					
Changes in sexual life	-	0.728	-	0.398	0.059	0.218	0.058	0.225
	<b>0.017**</b>		<b>0.040*</b>					
			*					

\*= Statistically Significant Value \*\*= Negative Correlation



Table 6: shows Pearson Correlation of Cognitive Load Scale and COVID-19 Stress (Scale B)

		Task Comprehension		Exhausting Task		Inconvenient Task Design		Difficulty in Understanding	
		r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value
Risk of Contagion	-	0.375	0.177	<b>0.001*</b>	0.139	0.003	0.029	0.546	
		<b>0.042**</b>							
Social Isolation		-0.009	0.846	0.196	<b>0.001*</b>	0.149	<b>0.002*</b>	0.026	0.589
Relationship with relatives		0.009	0.846	0.113	<b>0.017*</b>	0.088	0.064	<b>-0.27**</b>	0.572
Relationship with Colleagues		0.051	0.281	-	0.508	0.080	0.093	-	0.777
				<b>0.031**</b>				<b>0.013**</b>	
Relationship with professors		0.072	0.130	0.093	<b>0.050*</b>	0.081	0.088	-	0.449
								<b>0.036**</b>	
Study Experience		0.028	0.556	0.039	0.058	0.133	<b>0.017*</b>	0.061	0.196
Changes in sexual life		0.029	0.544	-	<b>0.019*</b>	-	0.404	<b>-0.81**</b>	<b>0.090*</b>
				<b>0.122**</b>		<b>0.040**</b>			



Table 7: shows Pearson Correlation of Cognitive Load Scale and IPAQ (Scale A)

	Keeping Things in Mind		Task Complexity		Understanding the task		Understanding Correctly	
	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value
Vigorous Physical activity	0.028	0.555	0.066	0.168	-	0.771	-	0.330
					<b>0.014**</b>		<b>0.046**</b>	
Time Spent on Vigorous activity	0.008	0.873	-	<b>0.009*</b>	-	0.499	-	0.656
			<b>0.123**</b>		<b>0.032**</b>		<b>0.021**</b>	
Moderate physical Activity	-	<b>0.001*</b>	0.016	0.730	-	0.561	0.008	0.866
	<b>0.172**</b>				<b>0.028**</b>			
Time spends on moderate activity	-	<b>0.019*</b>	0.009	0.857	-	0.094	-	0.539
	<b>0.111**</b>				<b>0.080**</b>		<b>0.029**</b>	
Walk for 10 mints	-0.033	0.489	0.108	0.023	-	0.001*	-	0.149
					<b>0.150**</b>		<b>0.069**</b>	
Time Spend while walking	0.012	0.799	0.072	0.132	0.019	0.695	-	0.839
							<b>0.010**</b>	
Time Spend while sitting	-	0.481	-	0.863	-	0.813	-	0.814
	<b>0.034**</b>		<b>0.008**</b>		<b>0.011**</b>		<b>0.011**</b>	

\* = Statistically Significant Value, \*\* = Negative Correlation

Table 8: shows Pearson Correlation of Cognitive Load Scale and IPAQ (Scale B)

	Task Comprehension		Exhausting Task		Inconvenient Task Design		Difficulty Understanding		in
	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value	
Vigorous Physical activity	0.001	0985	-	0.098	-	0.365	-	0.355	
			0.079**		0.043**		0.044**		
Time Spent on Vigorous activity	0.037	0.439	-	0.914	0.036	0.451	-	0.255	
			0.005**				0.054**		
Moderate physical Activity	-	0.125	0.094	0.047*	0.058	0.221	0.109	0.022*	
	0.073**								
Time spends on moderate activity	-	0.001*	0.012	0.799	-	0.895	0.052	0.276	
	0.152**				0.006**				
Walk for 10 mints	-	0.154	0.184	0.001*	-	0.001*	0.183	0.001*	
	0.068**				0.167**				
Time Spend while walking	0.024	0.614	0.089	0.061	-	0.878	-	0.825	
					0.007**		0.011**		
Time Spend while sitting	-	0.001*	0.092	0.052	-	0.009*	0.026	0.595	
	0.155**				0.124**				

\*= Statistically Significant Value, \*\*= Negative Correlation

## DISCUSSION:

The current study found a weak but positive association between cognitive load and variables like physical activity and general self-efficacy. Several previous studies align with these findings:

Cristian V. et al (2011) examined university students and reported a direct association between self-efficacy and cognitive load, similar to our findings. The difference in strength may be due to sample size or outcome measures used.

A. Pardo et al (2019) also found a significant positive correlation between self-efficacy and cognitive load in students, supporting our results.

David F. Feldon et al (2018) reported an insignificant association between self-efficacy and cognitive load among undergraduate biology students, aligning with our study's weak correlations.

Saied Bishara et al (2021) observed a positive association between cognitive load and self-efficacy in students without learning disabilities, which supports our findings despite variation in participant types.

Santi Wahyuni et al (2020) found that increased self-efficacy reduced cognitive load in online nursing students during COVID-19—similar to our finding of negative correlation in some self-efficacy variables.

Chun-Hao Wang et al (2016) concluded that moderate physical activity improves cognitive functioning, partially supporting our study where moderate activity was negatively correlated with cognitive load.

Jim Horne (2013) found that regular exercise helps reduce cognitive load and improve sleep in aging populations, partially aligning with our findings on physical activity.

Inguna Griskevica et al (2021) reported a significant relationship between cognitive load and self-efficacy in student-directed distance learning, which contrasts with our weak association.

Roman Goenarjo et al (2019) found a strong association between physical activity and cognitive load in athletes, differing from our study's weak correlation among general students.

## CONCLUSION:

The findings of this study suggest that engaging in physical activity significantly contributes to the reduction of cognitive load among students during online learning. Furthermore, higher levels of self-efficacy are associated with lower cognitive load, whereas elevated stress levels related to COVID-19 tend to increase cognitive burden. These results underscore the importance of physical and psychological well-being in optimizing students' learning experiences in virtual environments.

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