

# **Corona and Education: Are Students Really Ready for Digital Schooling?**

Evi E. Konstantinidou

## **The Rise of Distance Learning**

During recent months, mitigating COVID-19 has meant the severe curtailment of normal life, including global closures of schools. This approach to control the spread of the virus has produced an unprecedented wave of disruption in the education of more than 80 per cent of students worldwide, as reported by UNICEF. In light of this, educators, students, learning material providers, policymakers and parents have been forced to engage in distance learning. In order to facilitate distance learning, a vast majority of countries use the power of technology. Presently, there is a global movement towards an ‘open access’ approach to learning content, as many publishing houses and other material providers open up their platforms and other online resources. One of the critical imperatives under discussion is whether countries and their schools are capable of supporting online learning. Preparedness of schools, including access to educational platforms and the provision of online school resources and learning support are vital. However, while this supply-side debate continues, the elephant in the room is the demand-side question. Namely, are students prepared for online learning? Can they accept, engage and flourish with technology-integrated education for an unspecified period of time?

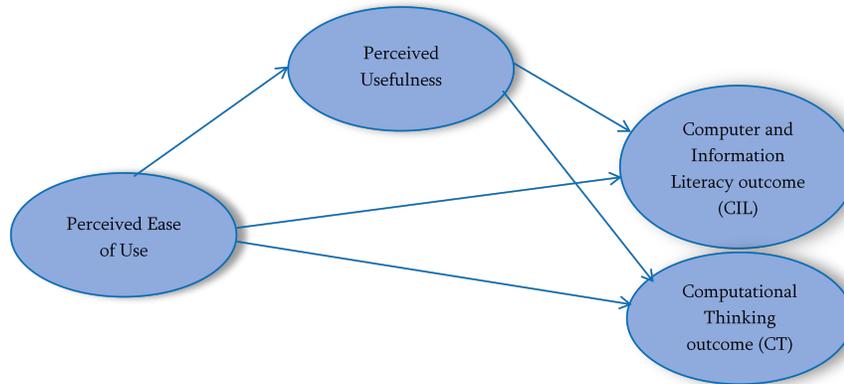
## **Are Students Prepared for Online Learning?**

To understand possible pitfalls in the move towards online learning it seems useful to refer to Davis’ (1986) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Davis suggests

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**Fig. 1** Conceptual model of this study considering the two core aspects from TAM model.



that both the ease of use and usefulness of a technology affects users' intention to engage.

Perceived usefulness means that the students believe that the technology will improve their performance, while perceived ease of use refers to the belief that using the technology will be free of effort. In a recent study, we used data from the International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS)<sup>1</sup> to investigate these issues. The study asked 8th grade students how well they feel prepared to use computers for various tasks, how frequently they use computers, and administered a test on how well students can actually handle computers for learning.

### So, What about Students' Technology Acceptance?

For all 12 countries<sup>2</sup> it is found that the effect of students' self-efficacy is positive and significant for both student outcomes while it also positively affects how much students use Information and Communications Technology (ICT). For example, in Finland it is found that if students' self-efficacy increases by one standard deviation, student performance in Computer and Information Literacy (CIL) increased by 0.33 standard deviations, implying a moderate effect.

The effect of students' use of ICT on Computer and Information Literacy (CIL) is found to be significant in 9 out of 12 countries, whereas its association with Computational Thinking (CT) was significant in 4 out of 8 countries. Similarly, the indirect

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.iea.nl/studies/iea/icils>

<sup>2</sup> Sample of the study: Chile, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Kazakhstan, Republic of Korea, Luxemburg, Portugal, United States, Uruguay

effect of students' self-efficacy via students' use of ICT was more significant for CIL and specifically in 9 out of 12 countries.

These findings imply that the provision of resources by educational systems in order to support digital learning is crucial – but not enough. It is also important to consider whether students find technology useful for their learning and if they feel comfortable using it.

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