

INVESTIGATING STUDENTS' PREFERENCES BETWEEN ONLINE LEARNING AND FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING: A STUDY FROM UiTM SEREMBAN CAMPUS

Ida Haryanti Mohd Noor^{1*}

¹*Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Seremban
70300 Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia*

**Corresponding author: idaharyanti@uitm.edu.my*

Abstract

COVID-19, short for "Coronavirus Disease 2019," has rapidly spread across the globe, resulting in a global pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has a profound impact on social, economic and health worldwide including in the field of education. Educational institutions including colleges and universities have faced significant disruptions and challenges due to the pandemic. Many higher education institutions temporarily closed their campuses, disrupting traditional classroom-based learning, which relied heavily on face-to-face interactions to provide educational information. With this closure, there has been a rapid shift towards remote learning or online education to ensure the safety of students, faculty and staff. Lecturers have adopted various online platforms and virtual learning tools to deliver lectures, facilitate discussions and conduct assessments. This transition presented various challenges including digital inequality, lack of interaction, heavy workloads and distractions at home. The objectives of this study are to investigate students' preferences between two methods of learning which are online learning and face-to-face learning. It will also examine the students' perspective relating to the advantages and disadvantages of online learning as compared to face-to-face learning. Additionally, the study also seeks to identify the students' learning effort during online learning session. The study found that the majority of the students preferred online learning as their learning method due to its advantages in terms of flexibility and accessibility. Nonetheless, there are some drawbacks to online learning for students such as technical difficulties with internet connection and a lack of engagement. Furthermore, the efforts made by students in the learning process during an online session are equal to those made during face-to-face learning. Thus, the findings of this study could help educational institutions, lecturers and related party to improve their teaching and learning method in delivering educational contents by taking into consideration various factors including students' preferences.

Keywords: face-to-face learning, online learning, students' preferences, higher education

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Introduction

COVID-19, short for "Coronavirus Disease 2019," is an infectious respiratory illness caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). COVID-19 has rapidly spread across the globe, resulting in a global pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant social, economic and health implications worldwide including in the field of education. Every nation's progress is supported by education. The COVID-19 outbreak, however, has caused a global education crisis and most education systems around the world have been significantly impacted by education disruptions and have faced unprecedented challenges (United Nations). COVID-19 has significantly impacted higher education institutions, including universities and colleges, in several ways (Singh et. al, 2021; Prasetyo et. al, 2022). Many higher education institutions temporarily closed their campuses as a preventive measure in order to minimize the spread of the virus (Schleicher, 2020). This

led to the disruption of traditional classroom-based learning which used face-to-face learning as its main method to deliver educational contents.

With physical campus closed, there has been a rapid shift towards remote learning or online education to ensure the safety of students, faculty, and staff. Lecturers have adopted various online platforms and tools to deliver educational content and engage with students remotely. Online platforms and virtual learning tools were utilized to deliver lectures, facilitate discussions and conduct assessments. This transition highlighted both benefits, such as flexibility (Li, 2022; Stoian, 2022), and challenges, including unequal access to the internet, gadgets and other technologies (Tadesse and Muluye, 2020; Garcia and Cruz, 2021).

Despite the challenges, the pandemic has also fostered innovation and creativity in higher education sector. Lecturers have explored new teaching methods, technology integration and alternative assessment strategies to deliver effective remote education. Institutions explored new ways to engage students, such as virtual labs, collaborative online platforms and immersive learning experiences. The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted discussions about the future of education. It has emphasized the importance of flexible learning models and digital literacy to ensure students will have equitable access to quality education.

Face-To-Face vs. Online Learning

Face-to-face education and e-learning are two distinct approaches to education that differ in various aspects. Face-to-face learning is an instructional method where course content and learning material are taught in person to a group of students (Top Hat). In face-to-face education, educators often rely on traditional teaching materials like textbooks, handouts and physical resources while the assessments often involve in-person assessments, such as exams conducted under supervision or practical demonstrations.

Online learning is defined as learning experiences in synchronous or asynchronous environments using different devices (e.g., mobile phones, laptops, etc.) with internet access. In these environments, students can be anywhere (independent) to learn and interact with instructors and other students (Singh and Thurman, 2019). These synchronous and asynchronous online environments will promote the development of social and collaborative skills, as well as personal relationships among participants (Huang et. al, 2020). In online learning, digital resources such as e-books, multimedia presentations, online videos and interactive modules are commonly used and assessments typically will be utilizing through online method.

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that both face-to-face education and online learning have their own strengths and limitations. The choice between the two depends on factors such as the learner's preferences, the subject matter, available resources and the educational institution's goals and infrastructure. Some educational institutions even incorporate a blended approach, combining face-to-face instruction with online components to leverage the benefits of both methods.

Universiti Teknologi MARA incorporated blended learning as a complementary approach to teaching and learning a few years ago (Mohd Yunus et. al, 2021), in addition to the face-to-face learning method. Due to the Movement Control Order (MCO) that was announced by the government in March 2020, the education institutions in Malaysia, including Universiti Teknologi MARA, have shifted their teaching methodologies from traditional face-to-face or blended learning to fully online learning.

This shift posed several challenges such as poor technology accessibility (Ag-Ahmad, 2020; Ab Latif and Ismail, 2021; Amir and Borhan, 2022; Zakwan Amir et. al, 2022), lack of interaction among students (Zakwan Amir et. al, 2022; Mohammad et. al, 2023), higher workload (Ag-Ahmad, 2020; Ab Latif and Ismail, 2021; Amir and Borhan, 2022) and distractions at home (Ag-Ahmad, 2020; Zakwan Amir et. al, 2023).

Thus, the objectives of this study are to investigate students’ preferences between two methods of learning which are online learning and face-to-face learning. It will also examine the students’ perspective relating to advantages and disadvantages of online learning as compared to face-to-face learning. Additionally, the study also seeks to identify the students’ learning effort during online learning session. The findings of this study could help educational institutions, lecturers and related party to improve their teaching and learning method in delivering educational contents by taking into consideration various factors including students’ preferences.

Methodology

This research adopted a questionnaire by Gherhes et. al (2021) with minor modification in order to collect data. All of the questions were purposely designed to investigate students’ preferences between two methods of learning which are online learning and face-to-face learning.

In addition, the questionnaire also will ask the students’ perspective relating to the advantages and disadvantages of online learning as compared to face-to-face learning. Furthermore, the questionnaire also will seek to identify the students’ learning effort during online learning session.

The research used convenience sampling as its sampling method. It is a non-probability sampling technique where researchers gather data from individuals who are easily accessible or readily available (Simkus, 2023). This method is often used due to its simplicity and convenience.

The data collection method was carried out by using online survey and Google Form was used to disseminate the questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed among Bachelor of Corporate Administration’s students from Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies. The respondents were largely drawn from Part 4 and Part 5 students who had enrolled Individual Taxation subject in their course. Both parts had previously participated in online learning and now that the university has resumed regular operations, hence, the students are returning to campus to continue their face-to-face education.

Of the 99 questionnaires distributed, 70 questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 70.7%. All 70 questionnaires were completed and were descriptively and statistically analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results

The results of the survey are summarized according to i) students’ demographics, ii) students’ preferences between two methods of learning which are online learning and face-to-face learning iii) students’ perspective relating to the advantages and disadvantages of online learning as compared to face-to-face learning and iv) students’ learning effort during online learning session.

i) Students’ demographics

The demographic profiles of the students participated in this study are illustrated in Table 1. Out of the 70 students, 71.43 percent (N=50) were female students while 28.57 percent (N=20) were male students. The percentage of students aged 21 – 24 years old were 97.14 percent (N=68) while 2.86 percent (N=2) were aged 25 – 30 years old. The students were heavily drawn from Part 4 with 54.29 percent (N=38) followed by Part 5, 45.71 percent (N=32).

Table 1. Respondent Background

		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	20	28.57
	Female	50	71.43
Age	21 - 24	68	97.14
	25 - 30	2	2.86
Part	4	38	54.29
	5	32	45.71

ii) Students’ preferences between two methods of learning which are online learning and face-to-face learning

The main objective of this study is to investigate students’ preferences between two methods of learning which are online learning and face-to-face learning. The students were asked to rate their preferred form of learning method based on ten-point scale where scale 1 standing for face-to-face learning method and scale 10 for online learning method.

Based on the percentage score provided in Figure 1, majority of the students preferred online learning as their learning method based on the highest percentage score at scale 10 which is 25.71% followed by face-to-face learning method at scale 1 which is 20%.

In addition, the preference for online learning method resulting in higher total percentage which is equivalent to 57.14% by accumulating the percentages at scale 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10. As compared to preference for face-to-face learning method which contribute to the total percentage of 42.86% by accumulating the percentages at scale 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Thus, the study found that majority of the students preferred online learning as their learning method as opposed to face-to-face learning. There were many factors that lead to this preference which can be found from next part; students’ perspective relating to the advantages of online learning as compared to face-to-face learning.

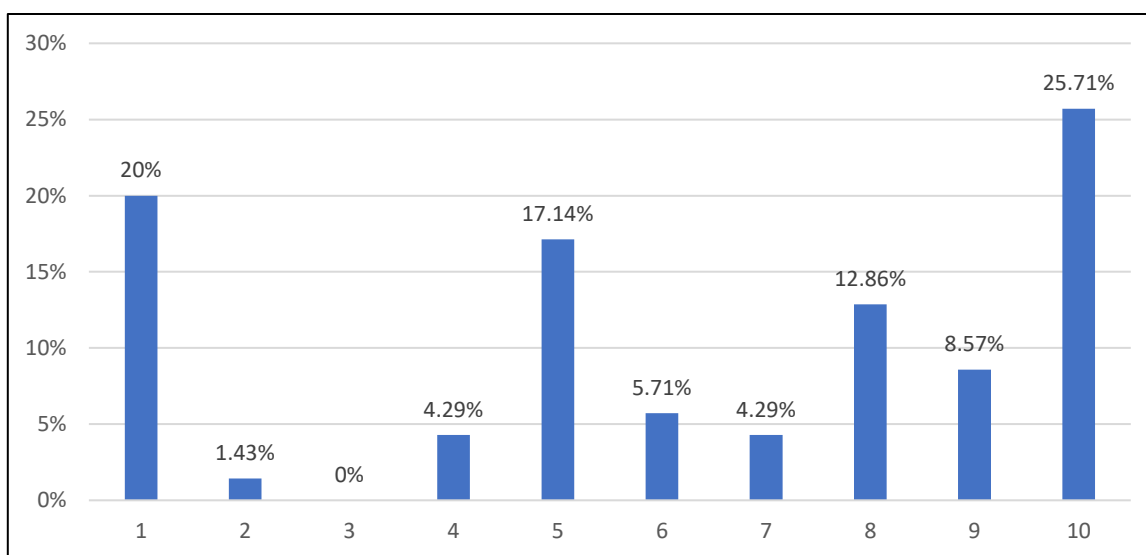


Figure 1. Students’ Preferences Between Two Methods of Learning Which Are Online Learning and Face-to-Face Learning

iii) Students’ perspective relating to the advantages and disadvantages of online learning as compared to face-to-face learning

The second objective of this study is to examine the students’ perspective relating to advantages and disadvantages of online learning method as compared to face-to-face learning method. As can be seen in Figure 2, the main advantage of online learning method as indicated by the students is “flexibility” (44.29%). This result is consistent with evidence from prior research by Li (2022) and Stoian (2022); which stated that flexibility is one of the benefits that can be earned from online learning platform. It was then followed by other advantages which are “accessibility” and “time efficiency” with percentage score of 15.71% and 12.86% respectively.

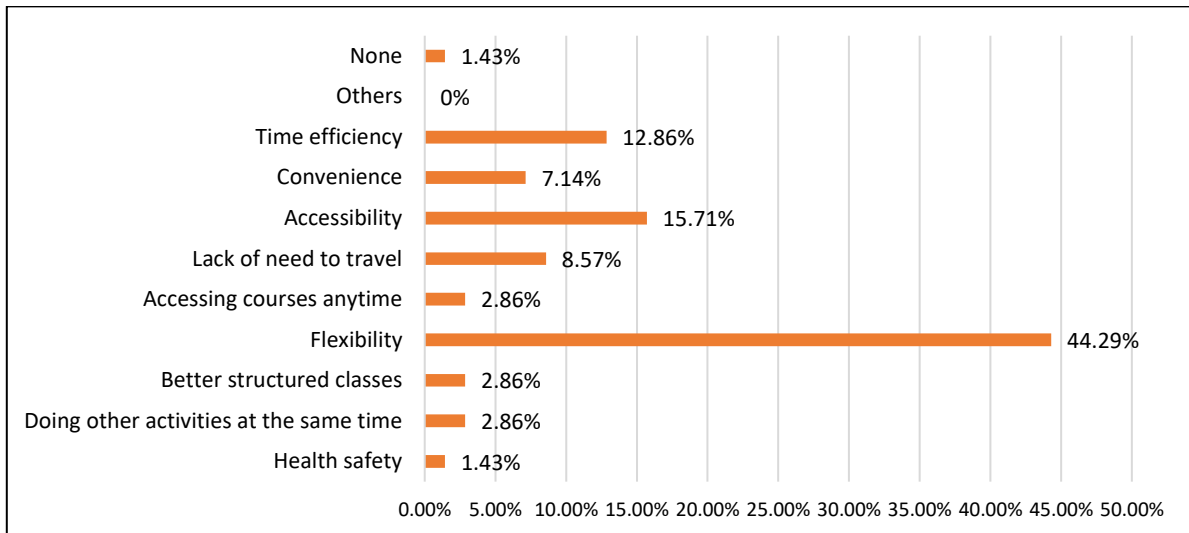


Figure 2. Students’ Perspective Relating to The Advantages of Online Learning as Compared to Face-to-Face Learning

Meanwhile, as can be seen in Figure 3, “technical problems during internet connection” has been indicated by students as the main disadvantage with percentage score of 35.71%. This result is consistent with evidence from prior research by Tadesse and Muluye (2020) and Garcia and Cruz (2021); which stated that unequal access to the internet is one of the challenges that can be found from online learning platform. It was then followed by lack of interaction and lack of practical applications with percentage score of 30% and 11.43% respectively.

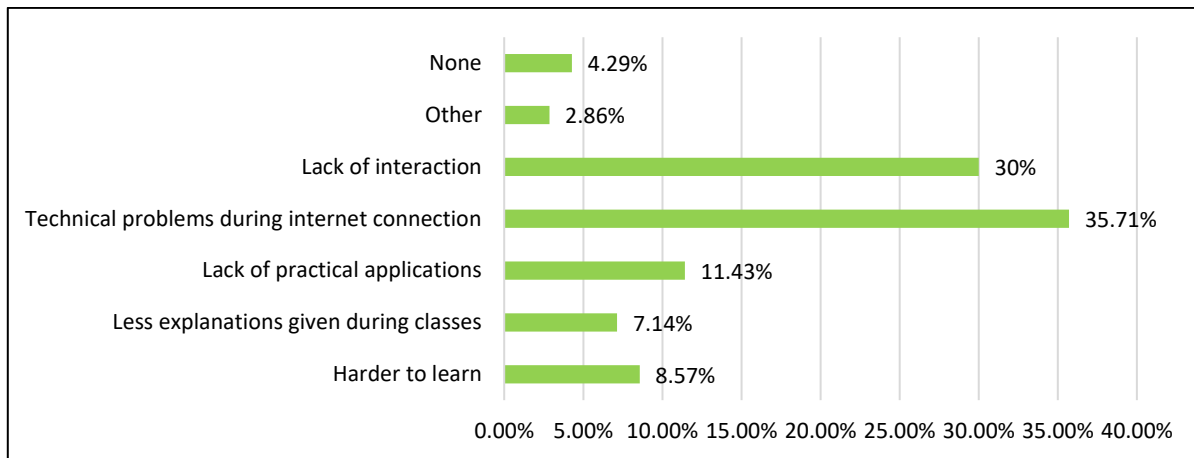


Figure 3. Students’ Perspective Relating to The Disadvantages of Online Learning as Compared to Face-to-Face Learning

iv) Students’ learning effort during online learning session.

Another objective for this study is to identify the students’ learning effort during online learning session. According to results as shown in Figure 4, it stated that the learning effort during online learning session is equal with learning effort during face-to-face session. This is consistent with finding from study by Gherhes et. al (2021); which indicated that the students’ learning effort during e-learning is the same as it is during face-to-face learning.

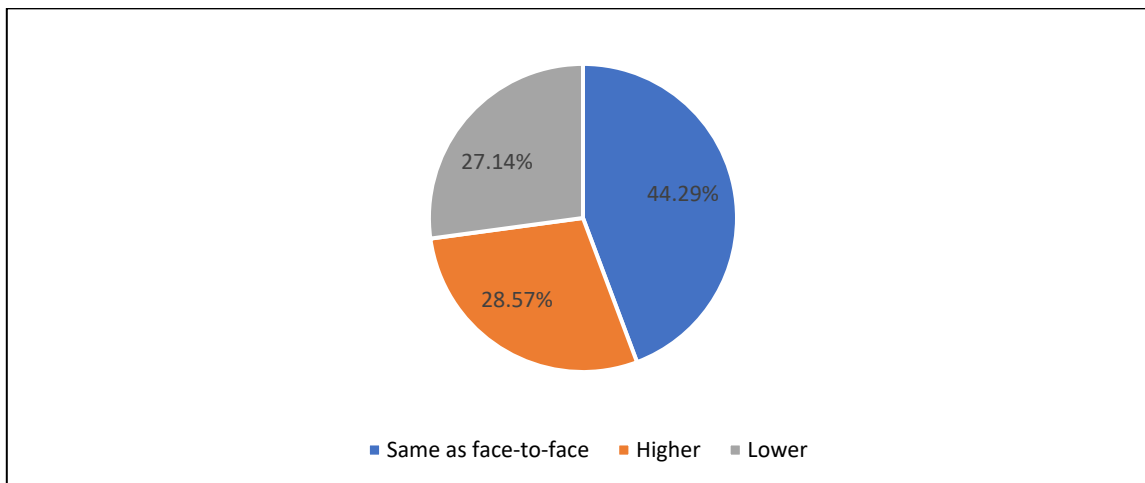


Figure 4. Students' Learning Effort During Online Learning Session

Conclusion

The purposes of this study are to investigate students' preferences between two methods of learning which are online learning and face-to-face learning. It will also examine the students' perspective relating to advantages and disadvantages of online learning as compared to face-to-face learning. Additionally, the study also seeks to identify the students' learning effort during online learning session.

The study found that majority of the students preferred online learning as their learning method as opposed to face-to-face learning. One of the reasons that lead to this preference because online learning method provide main advantages in terms of flexibility and accessibility as compared face-to-face learning method. Despite of all the advantages discussed previously, online learning method also did provide several disadvantages towards student's learning session and the main disadvantages of online learning method as opposed to face-to-face learning method are having technical problems during internet connection and lack of interaction. In addition, the efforts taken by the students in learning process during online session also is equivalent to the effort taken by them as per face-to-face learning.

This finding implied that online learning method has become important platforms to deliver educational content and engage with students where it can be used as tools to deliver lectures, facilitate discussions and conduct assessments. According to Gherhes et. al (2021), e-learning, like every other kind of education, has both positive and negative features, thus, decoding and understanding them will assist educational institutions in developing strategies for more efficient transmission of educational content to the beneficiaries of this process.

Thus, the findings of this study could help educational institutions, lecturers and related party to improve their teaching and learning method in delivering educational contents by taking into consideration various factors including students' preferences.

Despite the fact that the study gave some insights into online learning versus face-to-face learning, it had limitations due to a limited sample size, hence the results cannot be generalised. Future research should include opinions from students from various courses or from other educational institutions in order to gain a thorough knowledge of learning methods and their impact on beneficiaries.

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Author Contribution

Ida Haryanti Mohd Noor – Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Supervision.

Conflict of Interest

Author declares no conflict of interest.

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