College students' preferences and perceptions of online learning activities in a private school in Cavite

Elgien C. Padohinog[1]*, Nilda W. Balsicas[2]
[1,2]St. Dominic College of Asia, Bacoor City, Cavite, Philippines
E-mail: ecpadohinog@sdca.edu.ph

Abstract: The Covid-19 pandemic has generally disrupted students in their traditional learning which forced them to abruptly shift to the online learning. This descriptive survey research determined the preferences and perceptions of college students in the online learning. A total of six hundred and seventy-nine (679) students in St. Dominic College of Asia in Cavite took part in the survey that was conducted from November to December 2020. A researcher-made questionnaire was developed, validated, and reliability-tested. The online survey was made via Microsoft Forms and was distributed through the Blackboard App and e-mail. Results showed that majority of the students used mobile phones or smartphones for their online learning. Moreover, majority of the students expected that they can listen to an online lecture, which has the highest expectation of students in the online learning. Majority of the students have moderately agreed to their preferred online activities. These include listening to the lecture of the teacher during synchronous meetings and reading the articles according to their own pace or time among others. Implications include those increased utilization of interactive activities with students and integration of innovative and creative approaches to synchronous and asynchronous mode of teaching and learning delivery.

Keywords: college students; preferences; perceptions; online learning activities.
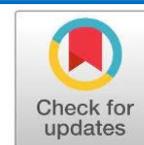
INTRODUCTION

Since the start of Covid-19 pandemic, millions of students are affected by the worldwide school closures whether in partial or full and prioritizing education recovery is a big challenge to reduce its impact of school closures and improve the educational systems such as online or blended learning against its losses particularly from disadvantaged communities (UNESCO, 2022). Many educational institutions adopted alternative educational systems such as online learning, blended learning, and home schooling. The education system has clearly been transformed and pushed to its limits because of this pandemic (Barrot et al., 2021). To support the use of e-learning, university-wide teaching and learning pedagogies, instructional designs, and e-learning policies should be addressed to the possible benefits and limitations (Mpungose, 2020).

Online engagement with people and content for academic purposes is referred to as online learning (Means et al., 2014). Therefore, this kind of learning is based on the student's interests, the content, and the instructional design to ensure that the pedagogies are suited to the current conditions. Online learning communities make beneficial to learners in enhancing the effectiveness of online learning; thus, active

collaboration and individualized participation should be recognized to all students who are eager to have this learning as much as successful as the traditional classes (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2013).

Mukhtar et al. (2020) noted that online learning, as what is expected by teachers and students, should be a flexible and efficient method of teaching and learning; thus, they felt that it promotes distant learning through prompt and simple administration, accessibility, and the effective use of time and resources. Online learning activities help students to gain their control in the educational experience. This will develop them to fully understand of their course and will open their education to continue what they learn through their goals and finish what they have started in enhancing the skills and knowledge to become more successful in their lives. However, challenges arise from the current educational system due to the current situation. Barriers such as poor internet coverage, limitation in internet data packages, lack of suitable devices, and varied educational platforms could affect both students and teachers in acquiring adequate knowledge and skills (Al-Balas et al., 2020).

In the Philippine context, education has been a challenge due to this pandemic. According to Commission on Higher Education – Department of Health (CHED-DOH) Joint Memorandum Circular No. 2021-001, during the pandemic, flexible learning remains the best and safest pedagogical strategy; although it can be said that limited face-to-face classes including clinical internships and clerkships are not mandatory in all higher education institutions unless they are permitted by the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) to conduct this kind of learning (De Vera & Duque, 2021). The education industry could advance if people took a step back and crafted a strategy that would incorporate educators, learners, parents, school administrators, and tech-based businesses; so, this solution will make every goal be achievable based on everyone's shared vision (Joaquin et al., 2020).

According to Nuncio et al. (2020), which further emphasized the use of technologies, students would excel and become well-versed for learning with different practical applications if they are given opportunities such as access to online educational resources and exposure to a secure and child-friendly learning environment. Thus, the effectiveness of e-learning programs lies within the internet connection. In a study by O'Shea et al. (2015), the difficulty for online educators is that learners' participation may be more challenging, requiring additional techniques to creating relationships between the learners, content, institutions, and staff. This means that when some things happen, students may feel that they are more isolated within the learning environment and that the academic institutions and their stakeholders should create an essential response based on the needs and circumstances to keep them in aligning to the curriculum nowadays.

Another study by Yeh et al. (2019), which determined the mechanisms between goal orientation and academic expectations for online learners, revealed that achievement goal orientations are critical for building and supporting self-regulated learning techniques that are aimed on the needs of the students; thus, the students' online learning readiness, academic achievement expectations, and the lowering of attrition

rates in online courses may benefit them with adequate resources on both self-regulated learning (SRL) methods and supportive online behaviors. In contrast to the study of Dumford and Miller (2018), students were less likely to participate in group discussions, student-faculty exchanges, or collaborative learning as compared to their peers in more conventional classroom settings; moreover, the authors revealed that the more numbers of online courses that students take would decrease the exposure to effective teaching practices as well as the quality of interactions.

It is challenging for students and teachers to create a safe, healthy, and conducive environment for learning because they are the ones who would know what ways they can get to interact with one another virtually. Those who are new to the learning environment may get confused and feel demotivated, so it is important to make a clear structure or guideline that everyone must be involved in the online learning together with proper communication and confidence. While online learning creates a big difference in the academic community, higher education institutions must ensure that the effective delivery of lessons is possible given that the journey for students in leading to an educational goal will be successful and uninterrupted even in this time of pandemic. Online learning continues to gradually develop in this educational system, as well as the understanding of its benefits and challenges.as well as the understanding of its benefits and challenges.

The study described the preferences and perceptions of online learning by college students in a private school in Cavite. Specifically, it answered the profile of the students in terms of the availability of devices and the internet use. Students' expectations and online learning class activities were also studied. The results of the study would help the higher education institutions assess the effectiveness of the implementation of online learning in this pandemic.

METHOD

This study employed descriptive survey research design. Descriptive research explains the characteristics of a condition or phenomena in which the subject or study is not manipulated to identify its cause and effect (Boudah, 2019). This design was used to determine the preferences and perceptions of college students with regards to online learning. A simple random sampling was utilized to ensure that all respondents available chose to participate in this research.

The research consisted of six hundred and seventy-nine (679) students at St. Dominic College of Asia in Bacoor City, Cavite, Philippines, which was conducted from November to December 2020. One hundred and one (101) students came from the School of Arts, Sciences, and Education (SASE); two hundred and seventy-nine (279) students from the School of Business and Computer Studies (SBCS); one hundred and eleven (111) students from the School of Health Science Professions (SHSP); and one hundred and eighty-eight (188) students from the School of International Hospitality and Tourism Management (SIHTM).

An online questionnaire was developed by the researchers and was used as the main gathering instrument. This research instrument was based on Balsicas et al.'s (2021) study. The questionnaire

comprises of items regarding preferences of online learning resources and perceptions and expectations of online classes and activities. Sixteen (16) activities were listed to determine if they are effective in the online learning that students attend (e.g., "Reading the articles according to my own pace / time"). The remaining statement "Online classes activities are preferred to traditional class activities" was also indicated. Answers were provided using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

The online survey was validated and reliability-tested before it was given to the students through Microsoft Forms and was also distributed through Blackboard App and e-mail. Participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire freely and honestly. Data from the questionnaire was collected with Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and was interpreted and analyzed using the descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage distribution, weighted mean). Descriptive statistics of the responses were presented in tabular forms to determine the preferences and perceptions of college students in the online learning to its extent.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Availability of Devices in the Online Learning of Students

Devices	Mean	Ranking
Mobile phone / Smartphone	1.96	1
Internet / Wi-Fi	2.36	2
Laptop	2.56	3
Desktop	3.60	4
Tablets	3.92	5

In Table 1, students ranked the use of devices in their online learning based on the availability. According to the given data, most of the students have their mobile phones or smartphones (Mean=1.96) when attending to their online class. This is followed by internet or Wi-Fi (Mean=2.36); laptop (Mean=2.56); desktop (Mean=3.60); and tablets (Mean=3.92). This means that students use more than one device in attending to their online learning.

It is revealed that of all the listed devices, majority of the students had access to mobile phones or smartphones for their learning, followed by laptops, desktops, and tablets. This result confirms with the study of Anshari et al. (2017), as students use mobile phones or smartphones mainly for teaching materials or other information that can be found from the Internet, to connect with teachers outside classes, and to collaborate within their group assignments. Therefore, the use of mobile phones or smartphones makes it easier for students to search for online learning platforms and other course resources. Another study from Kaliisa, Palmer, & Miller (2019) noted that higher education institutions in developing nations are more likely to embrace mobile learning than in the developed countries if the technological infrastructure becomes better where teaching and learning alternatives seemed to be numerous.

Table 2 below presents the internet use of students. Four (4) categories were described in determining the usage of internet, namely service providers, internet service, internet speed, and data usage per week. Based on the data, majority of the respondents use PLDT and Smart as the most widely used internet provider (44.62%). In terms of internet service, most of the students used fiber broadband for their online

learning (35.49%). About half of the respondents said that their internet speed ranges from 10 to 24 mbps (megabits per second) [53.61%]; while most of them used more than 1 GB (gigabyte) [60.09%] in terms of data usage per week.

Table 2. Internet Use of Students (n=679)

Category	Variable	n	%
Service provider	PLDT / Smart	303	44.62
	Globe	154	22.68
	Converge	97	14.29
	Mobile data	99	14.58
	Sky	26	3.83
Internet service	Fiber broadband	241	35.49
	Prepaid for mobile data	140	20.62
	Wireless broadband	99	14.58
	Postpaid plan	72	10.60
	Digital subscriber line (DSL)	72	10.60
	Cable broadband	50	7.36
	Satellite broadband	5	0.74
Internet speed	10-24 mbps	364	53.61
	25-49 mbps	152	22.39
	50-99 mbps	107	15.76
	100 mbps and above	56	8.25
Data usage per week	More than 1 GB	408	60.09
	500 MB-1 GB	128	18.85
	300-500 MB	93	13.70
	Less than 300 MB	50	7.36

This result shows that students use internet for their online learning, and they have different resources to choose from based on their affordability and accessibility. Various types of internet connections were provided to the needs of the people, especially students to get an improved internet connection. The use of internet is seen as a valuable source of information among students (Oducado et al., 2021). In Roslan and Halim's (2021) study, they showed that students have positively identified their internet usage when getting involved with the online learning but highlighted the Internet connection as a major issue when compared to device learning ownership. This is similar with the studies of Gocotano et al. (2021) and Bustillo and Aguilos (2022) as internet connectivity remained a challenge by most Filipino students. Furthermore, it is critical that for an optimum online learning environment, there should have a state-of-the-art technical infrastructure with robust Internet connections and digital e-learning tools to ensure that the techniques and models are kept updated and compatible (Al-Salman & Haider, 2021).

Table 3 below describes the expectations of students in the online learning. Based on the data, it is shown that majority of the respondents expected that they can listen to an online lecture (64.06%). Most of the respondents also said that they expected activities are self-paced (63.33%) and that they can participate in all class discussions (50.96%). Other students expected that they can complete a project as scheduled (46.39%); there is an immediate feedback on assessed activities or major exams (42.86%); they can collaborate and discuss with their classmates (37.70%); online lessons will be more flexible than in the

traditional classes (35.49%); online classes are cheap and affordable (24.15%); and online classes motivate them to study more (22.09%).

Table 3. Expectations of Students in the Online Learning

Rank	Expectations	n	%
1	I can listen to an online lecture.	435	64.06
2	Activities are self-paced.	430	63.33
3	I can participate in all class discussions.	346	50.96
4	I can complete a project as scheduled.	315	46.39
5	There is an immediate feedback on assessed activities or major exams.	291	42.86
6	I can collaborate and discuss with my classmates.	256	37.70
7	Online lessons will be more flexible than in the traditional classes.	241	35.49
8	Online classes are cheap and affordable.	164	24.15
9	Online classes motivate me to study more.	150	22.09

The study shows that students have varied expectations in the online learning engagement. These expectations provide students to create a better, active experience for their continual improvement and to feel more connected to their colleagues and their teachers, even at virtually. The results support the study of Olsen et al. (2020) who mentioned that online discussions can be made possible more than just looking a teacher on a computer screen and by rich class-wide learning activities, this can be implemented into online lectures to enable more cognitive engagement during the discussion. The evaluation and satisfaction of students with regards to their expectations can be attributed with their previous online experience (Wang et al., 2020).

Table 4 below determines the preferences of students in their activities during online classes. The table shows that students "agree" to the following activities: reading the articles according to their own pace or time (Mean=5.51); attending to a scheduled meeting with teachers and classmates for a brief discussion (Mean=5.71); attending to a scheduled meeting with teachers for question or content clarification (Mean=5.69); watching a pre-recorded or livestreamed lecture (Mean=5.60); reading notes in PowerPoint presentations (Mean=5.65); and listening to the lecture of their teacher during synchronous meeting (Mean=5.72).

Students also "moderately agree" that they prefer reading notes in Word documents (Mean=5.36); writing essays of a certain topic (Mean=5.10); responding to questions in a chat room or discussion board (Mean=5.22); brainstorming remotely within a class or group discussion (Mean=4.97); creating and uploading a video content based on the lesson (Mean=4.98); encouraging debates for a discussion (Mean=4.97); listening to relevant webinars (Mean=5.29); answering quizzes online (Mean=5.44); and answering major examinations online (Mean=5.20). It is notable that students are "neutral" in critiquing the output of their classmates (Mean=5.18). However, students "moderately disagree" that they find online classes activities better than traditional classes (Mean=3.48).

Table 4. Preferred Activities of Students During Online Classes

Activities	Mean	Interpretation
Reading the articles according to my own pace/time	5.51	Agree
Scheduled meeting with teachers and classmates for brief discussion	5.71	Agree
Scheduled meeting with teachers for question or content clarification	5.69	Agree
Watching a pre-recorded or livestreamed lecture	5.60	Agree
Reading notes in PowerPoint presentations	5.65	Agree
Reading notes in Word documents	5.36	Moderately Agree
Writing essays of a certain topic	5.10	Moderately Agree
Critiquing the output of my classmates	4.18	Neutral
Responding to questions in a chat room or discussion board	5.22	Moderately Agree
Brainstorming remotely within a class or group discussions	4.97	Moderately Agree
Creating/uploading a video content based on the lesson	4.98	Moderately Agree
Encouraging debates for a discussion	4.97	Moderately Agree
Listening to the lecture of the teacher during synchronous meeting	5.72	Agree
Listening to relevant webinars	5.29	Moderately Agree
Answering quizzes online	5.44	Moderately Agree
Answering major examination online	5.20	Moderately Agree
Online classes activities are preferred to traditional class activities	3.48	Moderately Disagree
TOTAL AVERAGE	**5.18**	**Moderately Agree**

Legend: 6.50-7.00 – Strongly Agree; 5.50-6.49 – Agree; 4.50-5.49 – Moderately Agree; 3.50-4.49 – Neutral; 2.50-3.49 – Moderately Disagree; 1.50-2.49 – Disagree; 1.00-1.49 – Strongly Agree

Among all the activities mentioned in the table, most students listen to the lecture of their teacher during synchronous meeting, which becomes the highest-ranked activity during online classes. As in the study of Stone and Springer (2019), The engagement, support, and encouragement of online students to stay with their studies can be improved by combining regular and prompt interaction between teacher and students with dynamic and engaging course design. This shows that discussions made by the instructor should be interactive and effective in a sense that the content and design must be up to date based on the current status in the world.

However, the item "*Online class activities are preferred to traditional class activities*" is the least-ranked activity among the preferred activities of students during online classes. This inferred that some students experience problems related to online learning such as slow internet connection and lack of interaction between students and teachers. The result supported with the study of Kim and Frick (2011) wherein some learners felt demotivated when they begin or continue self-directed e-learning even in the future generations and this implies that these students still prefer to personally meet with their instructors or peers while they are learning.

It was evident that activities during online classes are not in par with the traditional learning, whereas exposures to group activities such as debates, oral reports, and role-plays are restricted. Therefore, the study suggests that this learning has been changing into different ways, and students would be more active if they successfully adapt to the online learning by positively connecting with other people and finding the proper study techniques without any distractions. According to Salmon (2013), previous educational approaches are being examined, and the worlds of learning and teaching are at a crossroads. Students who are motivated in

the activities given by instructors are more likely to participate during online classes if they are involved into their experiences in the virtual classroom. This means that online activities, whether synchronous or asynchronous, help the learners to keep them being engaged, motivated, and active in the future of learning. Strategies can make students even instructors to increase their engagement in the learning (Bolliger & Martin, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Online learning has had a huge impact for students in continuing their education since the COVID-19 pandemic. This method offered numerous opportunities for students to explore their full potential through the use of technologies and the activities given by instructors.

Most of the students had access to mobile phones or smartphones for their learning. Moreover, majority of the students expected that they can listen to an online lecture, which has the highest expectation of students in the online learning. Most of the students have moderately agreed to their preferred online activities. This includes listening to the lecture of the teacher during synchronous meeting, reading the articles according to their own pace or time, reading notes in PowerPoint presentations, meetings with teachers that are scheduled, and watching a pre-recorded or livestreamed lecture. This implies that student and teacher interaction is one of the most favored activities of the online learner, in addition to other activities. It can be found that most of the students moderately disagreed that online classes are preferred to traditional activities. This implies that the traditional way of delivering learning remains the preferred way of delivering teaching and learning activities, rather than doing in online class.

To succeed in online classes, curriculum developers and teachers should consider the opportunities that the learning management system, the educational media use, and other software in the delivery of teaching and learning offer. Teachers should design activities that can provide various opportunities to students while in a self-directed situation and self-controlled time. Furthermore, innovative, and creative approaches to synchronous and asynchronous mode of teaching and learning delivery should be integrated into the online classes. It is essential that tasks which are genuine and relevant to the current situation will make the students more challenging and achievable through their course subjects and in their future professional lives.

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