

STUDENTS' READINESS TO ADOPT FULLY ONLINE COURSES

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has created dramatic impacts on every part of social life including education. As the virus outbreak progressed, many colleges and universities in the world have shifted their classes online as a swift response to the situation. University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (UEH) can be considered as one of the institutions in Vietnam which show a steely determination to waste no time and keep providing students with lectures, seminars, and tutorials. This definitely deserves a round of applause. However, educationalists also argue that moving instructions online can be a double-edged sword. This brings us to ponder whether our students have been ready to adopt fully online learning. This research paper aims to study this issue.

Literature review on terms and definitions

Even though every teacher may have their own definitions for the term face-to-face (F2F) learning, we show a tendency to agree that F2F learning is a teaching method in which the knowledge is taught in person by a teacher to a learner or a group of learners. Although F2F learning varies across different cultures, the way people conduct it is pretty much the same. When it comes to “online learning”, scholars and linguists interpret this term from different perspectives. According to Carliner (1999), online learning is viewed as any educational material which is presented via a computer. As for Khan (2001), online learning is the delivery of instruction to a remote audience with the web used as an intermediary. Another definition of online learning is the use of information and communication technology to deliver education when people are separated by distance, time, or both (Keller et al., 2007). With the same focus on the method of delivery, Horton (2011) defines online learning as a set of instructions which is delivered via all electronic media such as the internet, intranets, and extranets.

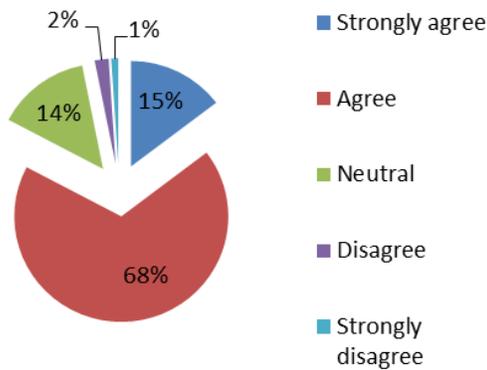
Methodology

With a view to learning whether students have been ready to adopt fully online courses, a survey, as a form of quantitative research method was conducted. A seven-item questionnaire had been composed to gather information about the learners' opinions and attitudes on the topic. For safety reasons, the questionnaire was then distributed online using Google Form. Participants

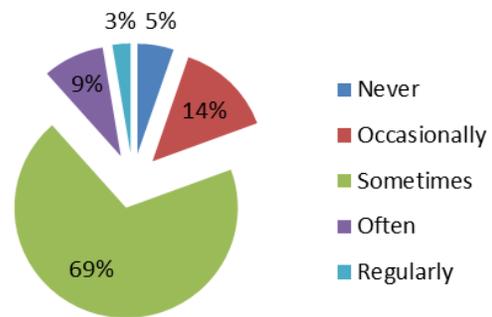
were 191 students aged 18 and 19. They were chosen equally from two proficiency levels. All of them have just completed an English for Business Communication online course. Additionally, they were clear about the purpose of the research, and as the collected information was anonymous, they felt no pressure or judgment.

Findings and discussions

You enjoy the online courses which the lecturers offer in this semester.

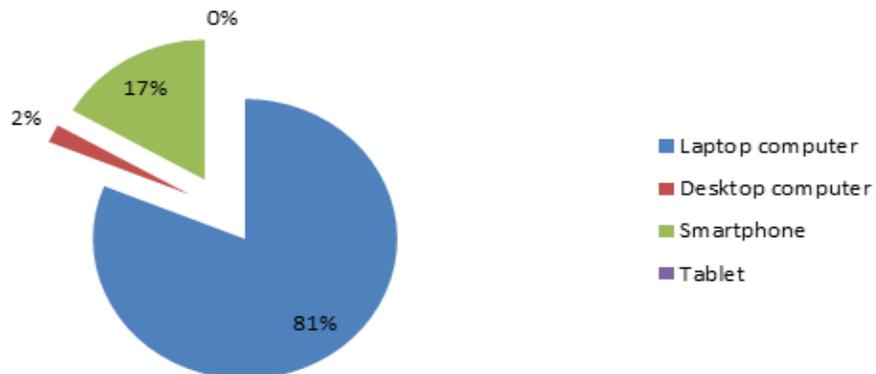


How often do you encounter technical issues (e.g. low bandwidth / weak internet connection) when learning online?



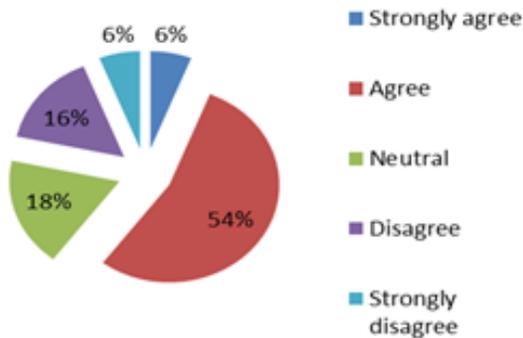
The survey starts with a five-option item to get a general view on the perception of students after taking the online courses last semester. The first pie chart shows that out of the 191 students that completed the questionnaire, only 3% of these underwent bad experiences when learning online. This figure becomes even more noteworthy as we learn from the second pie chart that a significant number of students (69%) sometimes encounter technical issues during their study process.

What digital device do you often use when learning online?

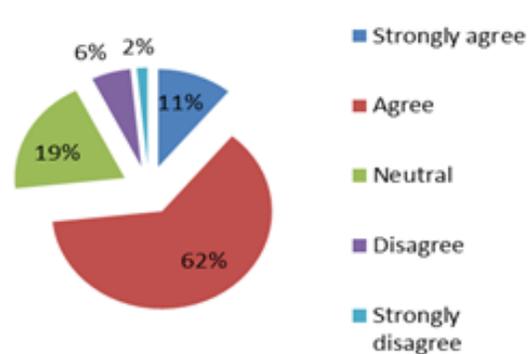


The next item on the questionnaire is to figure out the most popular digital device students used to get access to the internet. As we can see from the graph above, laptop computer was the most common, with over four-fifths of students using this. Interestingly, only a very small number, 2%, chose desktop computer as their most frequently used device. However, almost a fifth of the respondents studied on their smartphones. People may attribute this to the portability and convenience of this mobile gadget. As far as I am concerned, although the benefits of smartphones are undeniable, they are not without faults. For example, some learning programs or platforms are not responsive to certain phones; and phones are not in the least useful for longer assignments and papers. That is not to mention typing on a mobile keyboard poses its own challenges. However, phones may be the only accessible paths to online learning for low-income students. In that case, the reliance on smartphones is more than just a convenience factor.

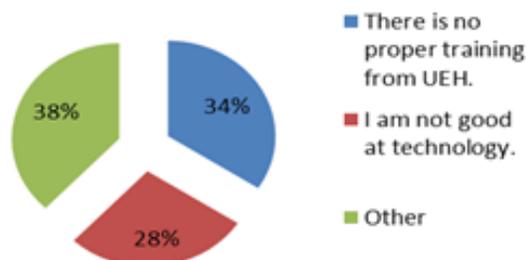
You have NO difficulty in using the learning management system (LMS) of our university (UEH).



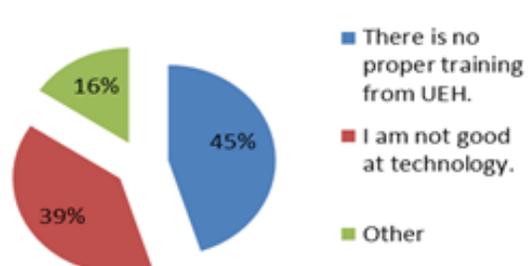
You have NO difficulty in using the current most popular online video conferencing tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Meet.



Why is it difficult to use the LMS? (This question is optional, only answer it if your answer for question 4 is "neutral", "disagree" or "strongly disagree".)



Why is it difficult to use Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Meet? (This question is optional, only answer it if your answer for question 6 is "neutral", "disagree" or "strongly disagree".)



The last four items of the questionnaire aim at figuring out students' difficulties in using the learning management system (LMS) of our university and the current most popular online video conferencing tools. As the survey revealed, the proportions of those having trouble with the LMS and the online video conferencing tools were at 22% and 8%, respectively. These figures came as a surprise owing to the fact that in compared to the applications as Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Meet, the LMS has been in use for a long time and therefore, students are supposed to be more familiar with it. As regards the reasons, more than a third of those surveyed thought that there should have been proper training from UEH. A similar percentage of them put the blame on themselves for not being tech-savvy. Although a significant number of students (38%) gave "other" reasons or did not give a reason why they had problems with the LMS, this accounted for only 16% with regards to online conferencing tools.

Conclusion

The coronavirus outbreak has exposed students, faculty, and institutions to unprecedented challenges. Meanwhile, we know for sure that threats may be opportunities in disguise as online learning proves to work in our university. Never before has the culture of autonomy and empowerment become this much widespread among both learners and instructors. Nevertheless, what we should bear in mind is while there are plenty of instructional resources available on the internet, the university needs to proactively seek more ways to provide expanded support as well as additional channels to support our students. Only by doing this will we get the most out of online learning during the course of the pandemic.

References

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Appendix

QUESTIONNAIRE ON STUDENTS' READINESS TO ADOPT FULLY ONLINE COURSES

We would like to ask you to help us by answering the following questions concerning online learning. This survey is conducted to better understand students' readiness to adopt fully online courses. Please give your answers sincerely as this will guarantee the success of the survey.

1. You enjoy the online courses which the lecturers offer in this semester.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

2. How often do you encounter technical issues (e.g. low bandwidth / weak internet connection) when learning online?

- Never
- Occasionally
- Sometimes
- Often
- Regularly

3. What digital device do you often use when learning online?

- Laptop computer
- Desktop computer
- Smartphone
- Tablet

4. You have NO difficulty in using the learning management system (LMS) of our university (UEH).

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

5. Why is it difficult to use the LMS? (This question is optional, only answer it if your answer for question 4 is “neutral”, “disagree” or “strongly disagree”.)

- There is no proper training from UEH.
- I am not good at technology.
- Other

6. You have NO difficulty in using the current most popular online video conferencing tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Meet.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

7. Why is it difficult to use Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Meet? (This question is optional, only answer it if your answer for question 6 is “neutral”, “disagree” or “strongly disagree”.)

- There is no proper training from UEH.
- I am not good at technology.
- Other

Thank you for your valuable feedback!