

GEARING UP FOR THE NEW NORMAL: ASSESSMENT ON THE SATISFACTION OF GRADUATE STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON ONLINE LEARNING

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Abstract

The novel coronavirus triggered the educational institutions globally to pursue innovative approaches on relatively short notice, and during this time, most universities shifted to online platforms. The educational institutions' closure in response to the COVID-19 led to several issues was affecting access to education. As cited by (Gopal et al., 2020) [3], the closure of educational institutions has an obscure impact on students' performance. Moreover, school closure may also affect students due to the disruption of teacher and student's network, leading to poor performance and low satisfaction. Bridge (2020) stated that schools and colleges are moving towards educational technologies for student learning to avoid constrictions during the pandemic. Several institutions go for online classes (Sehzadi et al., 2020), as UNESCO recommends distance learning programs and open educational applications during school closures due to COVID-19.

Keywords: Student, Satisfaction, COVID, Online.

Introduction (TIOC Approach)

The novel coronavirus, also known as the COVID-19, had spread worldwide, and many countries have ordered a total shutdown, including educational institutions. The educational institutions have come to closure to protect students from contagious exposure, which is likely high in socializing student community. By mid-March of 2020, schools and universities were globally closed due to the COVID-19. As reported by UNESCO, by the end of April 2020, nearly 186 countries implemented nationwide closures, which affect 73.8% of the total enrolled learners (UNESCO, 2020). Despite the lockdown and social distancing to prevent the spread of the novel corona virus, the closure of the educational institutions has affected numerous students worldwide.

From the indefinite closure of schools and universities, both the educational institution and students experimented with their prescribed syllabi stipulated time frame aligned with the school's academic calendar. The measures unquestionably brought inconvenience but prompted new examples of innovating education through digital interventions. This paves the way for hopeful prospects considering the static pace of reforms in the academic institutions, which pick up the threads for old lecture-based approaches in teaching, ingrained institutional biases, and outmoded

classrooms. The novel coronavirus triggered the educational institutions globally to pursue innovative approaches on relatively short notice, and during this time, most universities shifted to online platforms.

The educational institutions' closure in response to the COVID-19 led to several issues was affecting access to education. As cited by (Gopal et al., 2020) [3], the closure of educational institutions has an obscure impact on students' performance. Moreover, school closure may also affect students due to the disruption of teacher and student's network, leading to poor performance and low satisfaction. Bridge (2020) stated that schools and colleges are moving towards educational technologies for student learning to avoid constrictions during the pandemic. Several institutions go for online classes (Sehzadi et al., 2020), as UNESCO recommends distance learning programs and open educational applications during school closures due to COVID-19.

Preliminary studies reiterate the fundamental role of student satisfaction in determining the success or failure of online education (Gopal et al., 2020) [3] opposes that the completion rates, as learners' satisfaction reflects how they perceive their learning experiences (Kuo et al., 2014). Interaction in a fully online learning setting has been regarded

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as a crucial factor in determining the extent of student satisfaction in online learning (Cidral et al., 2018). The lack of interaction often leads to poor student engagement and lower student satisfaction (Rahmatpour et al., 2021).

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework (SEC Approach)

This theory is anchored on Holmberg's Theory of Distance Education wherein it asserts that communication between the teacher and the student plays a vital role in the success of distance education. According to Ouzts (2006), communication between teachers and students ensures the success of a student enrolled in Distance Education. Moreover, Holmberg's theory of distance education involves three key components: individualism, approaches to learning, and relationships, Holmberg (2003). According to Holmberg, there are learners who prefer distance education over traditional or face-to-face instruction; for this reason, courses in DE are designed to cater to the needs of individual learners (Holmberg, 2003). In the same manner, Lee et al. (2011) emphasized that student satisfaction is considered in DE, and it can be achieved through communication between teachers and students.

This study is based on how Holmberg's theory of distance education has affected their level of satisfaction especially during the pandemic because all of the classes are delivered online. This theory contributes in understanding the individuality, learning strategies and interaction of students due to the sudden shift from traditional learning to online learning.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the satisfaction of graduate students and their perception of online learning. The survey satisfaction results will be used to enhance and improve the online learning strategies of the Graduate Studies department.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of satisfaction of graduate studies students in terms of online learning?
2. What challenges in online learning do the students experience?
3. What improvement in online learning can student suggest?
4. What implications can be derived based on the results of the study?

Scope and Delimitation

The study focused on graduate studies students only in a private university in Bulacan. Thus, the results of the study cannot be generalized due to the limited

number of respondents. This study also aimed to determine the perceptions of the students and their level of satisfaction in online learning. Specifically, 567 students who are enrolled in the school year 2021-2022 willingly participated in the study. The data gathering procedure and other aspects in completing the study lasted for 4 months equivalent to one trimester.

Ethical Consideration/s

For ethical compliance, the study asked the voluntary participation of the students in answering the online survey disseminated via Google Form. Moreover, the initial part of the survey noted if the participants agreed to answer the following questions for the research. The data and information of the respondents were kept confidential, while any basic information will not be disclosed to protect them from any harm as participants of the research.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive type of research wherein its goal is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. The data may be collected qualitatively but analyzed quantitatively using frequencies, percentages, and averages in this research. It also involves a rich collection of data from various sources to understand individual participants, including their opinions, perspectives, and attitudes (Nassaji, 2015) [4].

Thus, this research focused on the level of satisfaction and perception of the graduate studies students on online learning and is only limited to the qualitative data gathered from the respondents with no statistical analysis for correlation or regression. The study gathered the data from 567 participants enrolled in the programs offered by the Graduate Studies Department for the School Year 2021-2022.

The instrument of the study is adopted from the study of Lamoree and Aguirre (2010) in conducting online satisfaction survey in online learning classes. It is composed of 22 questions in a 4-point Likert Scale interpreted as Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. Meanwhile, the latter part of the instrument asked the challenges encountered by students during the online learning class and their suggestions in improving online learning.

Results and Discussion

Problem 1. What is the level of satisfaction of graduate studies students in terms of online learning?

Table 3 presents the level of satisfaction of graduate studies students in terms of online learning. The highest among the indicators is that the objectives for the online courses were provided at the

beginning of the course and were clearly described with a mean of 3.99. This is followed by the statements I find it important to be provided with the learning objectives of a course with 3.75; I find it important to be provided with the course assessment methods at the beginning with 3.72; The course objectives were closely related to what I expected to learn with 3.71; The course objectives in the online learning assisted with guiding my learning activities with 3.70; I am comfortable with online learning technology with 3.69; The online classroom was always functional with 3.68. Both of the statements There is a clear introduction including the overall design, navigation, and faculty information available at the beginning of the course or subject, and The course content was communicated effectively got a mean of 3.66. Meanwhile, the statements The online learning enabled me to become engaged with the professor during the class discussion; I enjoyed the online group discussions, and I would take other online classes in this program with the same mean of 3.63. Other statements

include Technology support was available for using the online learning modality with 3.62; I am satisfied with the amount of communication I had with the professor with 3.61; The online learning enabled me to become engaged with other students during class discussions with 3.59; The feedback on the assignments was helpful with 3.56; There were many opportunities to interact with peers with 3.49; I felt as though as was able to develop a relationship with my peers during this course with 3.42, and I felt as though as was able to develop a relationship with my professors during this course with 3.41. All of the abovementioned statements are interpreted as Very Satisfied.

On the other hand, the following statements are interpreted as Satisfied, including I often had lingering questions about the course content that were left unanswered with 2.53; I had difficulties in submitting my assignments, and I felt confused or lost at times due to the online learning modalities used in the class with 2.29.

Table 1: Level of Satisfaction of Graduate Studies Students in terms of Online Learning

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
I am comfortable with online learning technology.	3.69	Very Satisfied
A clear introduction includes the overall design, navigation, and faculty information available at the beginning of the course or subject.	3.66	Very Satisfied
Technology support was available for using the online learning modality.	3.62	Very Satisfied
I find it essential to be provided with the learning objectives of a course.	3.75	Very Satisfied
The objectives for the online courses were provided at the beginning of the system and were clearly described.	3.99	Very Satisfied
The course objectives were closely related to what I expected to learn.	3.71	Very Satisfied
The course objectives in online learning assisted with guiding my learning activities.	3.70	Very Satisfied
I find it essential to be provided with the course assessment methods at the beginning.	3.72	Very Satisfied
The online classroom was always functional.	3.68	Very Satisfied
I had difficulties in submitting my assignments.	2.34	Satisfied
The feedback on the assignments was helpful.	3.56	Very Satisfied
The online learning enabled me to become engaged with the professor during class discussions.	3.63	Very Satisfied
The online learning enabled me to become engaged with other students during class discussions.	3.59	Very Satisfied
I am satisfied with the amount of communication I had with the professor.	3.61	Very Satisfied
The course content was communicated effectively.	3.66	Very Satisfied
I often had lingering questions about the course content that were left unanswered.	2.53	Satisfied
I enjoyed the online group discussions.	3.63	Very Satisfied
There were many opportunities to interact with peers.	3.49	Very Satisfied
I felt as though as was able to develop a relationship with my peers during this course.	3.42	Very Satisfied
I felt as though as was able to develop a relationship with my professors during this course.	3.41	Very Satisfied

I felt confused or lost at time due to the online learning modalities used in the class.	2.29	Satisfied
I would definitely take another online classes in this program.	3.63	Very Satisfied
General Mean	3.47	Very Satisfied

It can be implied from the study results that graduate studies students are very satisfied when it comes to online learning. It may be about the instruction, interaction with peers, and taking online classes for the next trimesters to come. To further understand their perceptions, the study also gathered the challenges they have encountered and their recommendations in terms of online learning.

Problem 2: What challenges in online learning do the students experience?

Table 4 shows the challenges of the graduate studies students as they dwell into online learning wherein

the poor internet connection got the most number of occurrence based on the emerging themes with 317 followed by overloaded requirements, distracted by other tasks at home, and lack of interaction with peers with seven occurrences. Moreover, their perceptions of the challenges brought by the pandemic include malfunctioning devices and time management with four occurrences and library resources and not maximizing GSuite accounts with three occurrences. In contrast, extended screen time garnered the least among the perceptions with only one occurrence.

Table 2: Challenges in Online Learning

Students' Perceptions	Number of Occurrences
Poor internet connection	317
Overloaded Requirements	7
Malfunctioning Devices	4
Distracted by other tasks at home	7
Long screen time	1
Library resources	3
Lack of face to face engagement	2
Time management	4
Lack of interaction with peers	7
Not maximizing the GSuite accounts	3

This implied that the problems of graduate students are mostly connected with unstable internet connections, which hinders them from attending fully online classes due to the poor services of internet providers and lack of strong signal in their area. They also mentioned that power interruption still occurs in their places, making it a hindrance to attending online classes.

Problem 3: What improvement in online learning can student suggest?

Table 3 shows the suggestions of the graduate studies students in terms of online learning wherein the majority of the respondents mentioned continuing the distance learning in the Graduate Studies Department with 14 occurrences. This is followed by improvement in the Learning Management System, where the online classes usually occur with 11 occurrences. At the same time, both of the perceptions, including academic break and lesser requirements, got seven occurrences. On the other hand, the students have suggested maximizing the use of Google Classrooms with five occurrences.

Table 3: Suggestions for the Improvement of Online Learning

Students' Perceptions	Number of Occurrences
Academic break	7
Continue distance learning	14
Improvement of Learning Management System	11
Lesser requirements	7
Maximizing the use of Google Classrooms	5
Considerate professors	

Therefore, it is implied that online learning helped the graduate studies students during the pandemic as they suggested continuing online classes even if the

situation is already getting back to normal. This is due to students being assigned and located in remote places or far away from the school's location. The

survey also suggested considering graduate students in giving requirements and conducting asynchronous classes to make up for the course or subject.

Problem 4. What implications can be derived based on the results of the study?

The study results showed a need to continue distance learning in graduate studies, as presented in the data above. Despite the poor internet connection and lack of interaction with peers, this is part of the challenges that the students experience in their classes. This is because the majority of the students are satisfied with the mode of instruction and quality of learning that they gained in online courses.

Many comparative studies explored whether face-to-face or traditional methods are more productive or whether online learning is better. Results of the studies showed that the students perform much better in online learning with a high rate of satisfaction due to flexible time arrangements and self-pacing learning materials (Rajabalee & Santally, 2020) [5].

Moreover, developing a learning management system and other online resources may be improved to further support the students in terms of online classes where they can easily navigate courses while having an adequate amount of learning resources to comply with the requirements. This was supported by the research of Song et al. (2014) [6], as they identified both flexibility and convenience as strengths of online learning. Weaknesses were also mentioned, including delay of responses, lack of interaction, and technical problems, common challenges indicated in the study results.

Indeed, online learning is still improving and developing as a mode of instruction in the education system. This may not be new, but the sudden and drastic shift from traditional learning to online learning brought many changes to how the students learn and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. It is essential to know their perceptions in online education, especially since they are also professionals handling other tasks aside from being a student. This study opened up insights in terms of their level of satisfaction and determining the challenges they have encountered during online learning.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, the following findings have been derived:

1. It was found out that the graduate studies students are Very Satisfied with the online learning modality in the graduate studies department with the highest mean in terms of

accurate and precise description of course objectives, comfortability in navigating the online courses or subjects, and engagement with professors and peers.

2. The graduate students mentioned that the biggest challenge is the poor and unstable internet connection of their respective internet providers. At the same time, they recommend offering online learning or classes for the next trimesters to come.
3. Based on the study results, there is a need to continue distance learning in the graduate studies as presented on the data above. Despite the poor internet connection and lack of interaction with peers, this is part of the challenges that the students experience in their classes. This is because the majority of the students are satisfied with the mode of instruction and quality of learning that they gained in online courses.
4. Furthermore, it was found out that the development of a learning management system and other online resources may be improved to further support the students in terms of online classes where they can easily navigate classes while having adequate learning resources to comply with the requirements. It was also found out that scheduling academic breaks may help the students to become more engaged with online learning and adapt to the changes brought by the pandemic in terms of their learning experience.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were derived from the findings of the study:

1. It was recommended to conduct studies exploring the relationship of online learning to the demographic profile of the graduate students since it was found out that elderly students have difficulties in navigating online classes as perceived on the challenges they encountered.
2. The researchers also recommended developing and improving the learning management system (LMS) to support further and strengthen the department's online learning modality. This includes more accessible online class features, such as submission links, assignments, and learning resources in a specific LMS. This is also to recommend evaluating the use of Google Classroom in graduate studies students to know its effectiveness in online classes.
3. It was recommended to provide asynchronous classes for students to adjust with the lack of internet connection and poor services from the internet provide since it was considered to be one of the most challenging parts for the learners. In this way, scheduling of activities may help them develop effective study habits

and balance their work, career and life in general.

4. It was also recommended to conduct mental health webinars as students mentioned the need for academic breaks despite being in their graduate studies courses due to the aftermath of the pandemic. This will also allow students to acquire techniques and coping strategies as they dwell on other challenges brought by the sudden shift to online learning.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest between the authors in this manuscript.

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