


Non-English Majored Students' Preferences of Online Learning during the Covid 19 Pandemic: A Case Study in Ho Chi Minh University of Food Industry (HUPI)

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ABSTRACT

The Covid 19 outbreak has had a significant impact on all aspects of life, including the economy, society, and security. This transformation cannot be avoided, especially in education. It made it difficult for employees and students to go to work and school. Many schools attempted to discover strategies to enable continuity of teaching and learning in such a case to secure the safety of students and instructors during the lockdown period. During the Covid 19 outbreak, practically every school in Vietnam and the Ho Chi Minh University of Food Industry changed their learning and teaching methods from the traditional face-to-face manner that learners were used to to a new knowledge approach - online learning or E-learning. From this perspective, technology can be viewed as the primary and most effective means of assisting teachers and learners. However, not all students will feel comfortable with this learning technique because it is new to them, and not all students will have good facilities and good wifi, to begin with. In such a situation, this study was conducted to determine how satisfied non-English-majored Hufi students are with online learning. Participants were HUPI students taking part in online courses during the Covid 19, and a link to an online google form questionnaire was sent to them. Results indicated that there were more disadvantages than advantages to online classes. The survey data can support filling a funding gap in designing a quality online lesson that will improve students' performance and happiness.

Keywords:

The Covid 19 outbreak, online learning, preferences, benefits, limitations

Introduction

Although online or e-learning was not popular until now, it has been applied in some universities in the world to teach learners who want to pursue a degree while they have to work. Buzzetto-More (2007) stated that:

“E-Learning is important for economic development, both of individuals and of society. Today's global economy requires a labor force that is educated, highly skilled, and

technologically literate. Moreover, as jobs evolve in response to the changing economy, workers need to learn new skills throughout their lives.” (p.1)

This kind of teaching and learning has become special and vital during the Covid-19 pandemic. Since this epidemic broke out in Vietnam, social isolation and lockdowns have altered how people work and study. Students and faculty members are stressed, as evidenced by a significant drop in learning satisfaction. Students study at home while learning activities in class are broadcast live on the Internet. The educational system evolved from face-to-face instruction to online instruction. From early childhood education to higher education and other institutions, distant learning is enforced throughout Vietnam. This also means that online has become the sole way to help teachers lecture and students perceive knowledge during the pandemic.

Because many schools had to implement online learning owing to the present epidemic quickly, it was vital to investigate how pupils viewed and reacted to e-learning, which had never been done previously. In such an emergent situation, HUFU is not an exception for conducting online classes. The infrastructure that is used most by HUFU is Zoom which contains features such as whiteboards, chat rooms, polls, and breaking forums that allow instructors and students to communicate online and share course content side by side.

As a result, this research was carried out to answer the question: “How did students feel about e-learning and what obstacles might they face?”. There have been a lot of similar surveys in this field, yet no one has been implemented in HUFU. The findings of the study can be useful to help HUFU develop more successful and relevant e-learning programs in the future.

Literature review

Definition of Online Learning

There have been a lot of definitions of online learning. According to Aboagye et al. (2020), online or elearning is the way of learning which can take place everywhere with the support of electronic resources where information technology and the Internet is the main elements. In a similar way, Amity (2020) defined online learning as a process in a virtual classroom setting in which teachers as instructors try to use various ways to present material and students as participants try to absorb as much information as possible before participating in daily sessions. Carliner (2004) characterized online learning as a new learning delivery format that bridges the transfer of learning materials by using technical means such as computers and the Internet. According to Hermanto & Srimulyani (2021), online learning is any learning process that uses learning apps or social networks. An online classroom's teaching and learning environment differ dramatically from a traditional classroom (Pinar, 2021). The researchers may conclude that online learning employs contemporary technologies in the learning process. Information Technology and Communications (IT&C), the teacher's expertise with IT&C, and the student's experience with IT&C all influence the online learning process's effectiveness, as Volery (2000). Although the instructor plays a crucial role in online education, the quantity of needed

study time and student discipline both impact the educational process.

In another definition, Haruna & Grema (2022) showed that e-learning is implemented with electronic applications to transfer skills and knowledge, including web-based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital collaboration.

Advantages and Disadvantages

E-learning has created more and more opportunities as well as challenges for learners and educational managers. The challenge educators face is finding ways to teach skills and transfer knowledge to learners effectively in an environment where they are not physically present with their students.

Nowadays, more and more learners who have to work are seeking a certificate or degree. In such a situation, they cannot participate in real classes, and online classes become their best choice. According to Chitra and Raj (2018), online learning has various benefits and drawbacks for students. The online learning system is like a coin with pros and cons. Its core benefit is that education is non-stop, even when face-to-face classes are impossible. No matter geography's distance, students can be gathered together in one learning environment. They can start the lesson everywhere provided it is supplied with the Internet or wifi. In fact, this is a flexible and favorite learning method for students who have problems going to university.

One more advantage, as definitions above, is that e-learning is conducted with the facilitation of electronic applications, then lectures can be saved, and students have a chance to review them. As Perveen (2016) said, "Lessons can be recorded and added to an e-library. Using the archived e-library, students can access and replay teacher's lectures as many times as necessary to master the material."(p.23). The advantages of online learning are that it caters to everyone's needs and that lessons can be repeated.

Moreover, online learning provides access to updated knowledge and lessons quickly. It becomes consistent, less expensive, and has a lower environmental impact. According to Maatuk et al. (2022), e-learning significantly reduces administrative labor, organizing, and recording lectures, attendance, and quitting courses. Teachers and students agree that online learning techniques enable them to take lessons from anywhere, even if they are unable to go to colleges or institutions. The student becomes a self-directed learner who can learn at any moment, both simultaneously and asynchronously.

A study by Muthuprasad et al. (2021) indicated the most important advantages of online learning are flexibility and ease. Online education allows students to study at their own speed, which is convenient for them at times. As a result, convenience and flexibility are important factors behind the surge in online learning. Another advantage that Gupta (2005) found was digital course materials, and interactive tutorials to online lectures can be updated at any time and are almost available. Therefore, it's easy for learners to access and learn themselves as needed.

Another benefit that can not be denied is the savings in terms of travel costs. In a study by

Pozgaj & Knezevic (2007), the statistics showed that students choose e-learning because it cuts down transportation costs and avoids traffic jams. It is really pleased for learners who have mobility restrictions or whose houses are so far away from the university.

Last but not least, under the view of teaching and learning quality, Pham's research (2022, p.8) showed that there was not much difference in teaching and learning quality between online and offline classes.

“The quality of teaching and learning online and offline is not so much different, which is proved by the high percentage of students who can successfully pass the Mid-term test. Furthermore, both lecturers and students have more freedom in selecting an appropriate location for their teaching and learning. The convenience that online teaching and learning offers can be a factor in making the teaching and learning environment more relaxing and enjoyable, leading to the effectiveness in the process of transferring and getting knowledge. Additionally, online courses may help both lecturers and students save related costs, reducing the burden of finance.”

The lack of physical interaction and tiredness, on the other hand, are disadvantages that can be easily recognized via the online educational system. In a traditional learning environment of face-to-face classes, students can move to the front and participate in short practice conversations or interviews. Many other activities, like role-play, pair work, group work, or presentations, make students wake up, absorb knowledge easier, and feel learning becomes more effective. However, this capability in an e-learning class is impossible because instructors can not see “*student's non-verbal behaviors and empathy development throughout the course*” Murdock et al. (2012). These authors' research showed that although videotapes were utilized to help learners imitate and to limit the disadvantages, the results could not be better. That meant the teachers still could not find the student's peer interactions and interpersonal relationships within the online classes. Lack of interaction between students and lecturers is also one of the inconveniences in an online class (Mahdy, 2020). This disadvantage might cause another drawback that was also shown through the outcomes of students who enrolled in online classes: their grades were lower, and they were likely to fail more on the exams than in on-campus learning (Harris and Parrish, 2006).

In addition, the constraints of technological gadgets and users' technology literacy, according to various research, are the barriers to online learning deployment. As a result, these restrictions limit communication and learning opportunities or lower students' satisfaction with their ongoing education. These studies showed that the most significant barrier to online learning is a lack of connectivity and internet infrastructure limitations. The situation is significantly worse for people who live in rural areas. Besides technological constraints, distractions, instructor's incompetency, learner's inefficacy, and health issues were considered disadvantages in online classes. Thamrin (2020) defined that the issue of students' distraction which is an external reason, is especially important when learning online, especially in families where students have to help their parents with selling things or taking care of family members.

Many studies have supplied the foundation for understanding students' preferences for online education from varying perspectives. Researchers have also identified possible obstacles to the effectiveness of online learning. However, few studies have tried to comprehend Vietnamese learners' preferences for online learning. Hence, we attempt to address this void with our research by framing the issue using insights from the literature and concentrating primarily on online learning in undergraduate education.

Research question

This paper aims to answer the question, "How did Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry students feel about e-learning, and what obstacles might they face?". After having the answer, some solutions to the problem will be suggested.

Methods

This article's aim is to examine students' choices for online learning. Therefore, the descriptive research approach of quantitative was used by answering an online questionnaire. This section details the research technique, including the study subjects, instrument, and data collecting procedure. It also highlights the study's flaws.

Subjects of the study

Participants are 200 non-English-majored students aged 18 to 21 of the Ho Chi Minh University of Food Industry, including 160 female and 40 male students. They are from the first to the third year and in different backgrounds, from relatively fair, average to excellent students.

Data Collection Instrument

The survey tool was developed based on the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) and some other similar questionnaires used in other studies (Smart & Cappel, 2006; Wang & Liu, 2019; Gurpinar et al., 2010). The design employed four-point rating scale questions, from 4=strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree. These are the questionnaires:

1. I can understand the content better in online learning.
2. Online learning stimulates my interest more.
3. I need less time and effort to learn the same amount of material in online learning.
4. Student discussion is better in online learning.
5. Student presentation as part of learning is better than online learning.
6. Teacher-student interaction is better in online learning.
7. Online classes help me to prepare for my exam better.
8. Online classes improve my communication skills.

9. I receive sufficient feedback from the instructor in online courses.
10. I can easily ask questions when I don't understand.
11. I retain information better from taking the online course.
12. Online courses help me to maintain my discipline in studying.

Data collection procedure

Students who participated in the study were told about the goal and methodology of the research. After they all agreed, they were given a link with a questionnaire that required them to check the agreed-upon rate. After about ten minutes, all documents were gathered.

Results/Findings and discussion

Table 1.

The results on online versus offline learning experiences

Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I can understand the content better in online learning.	2 1%	90 45%	106 53%	2 1%
2. Online learning stimulates my interest more.	4 2%	60 30%	120 60%	16 8%
3. I need less time and effort to learn the same amount of material in online learning.	2 1%	88 44%	108 54%	2 1%
4. Student discussion is better in online learning.	2 1%	40 20%	150 75%	8 4%
5. Student presentation as part of learning is better in online learning.	8 4%	50 25%	140 70%	2 1%
6. Teacher-student interaction is better in online learning.	4 2%	40 20%	152 76%	4 2%
7. Online classes help me to prepare for my exam better.	0 0%	56 28%	140 70%	4 2%
8. Online classes improve my communication skills.	2 1%	84 42%	112 56%	2 1%
9. I receive sufficient and quick feedback from the instructor in online courses.	0 0%	90 45%	100 50%	10 5%
10. I can easily ask questions when I don't understand.	0 0%	94 47%	106 53%	0 0%
11. IT support and wifi are good enough to access the online classes and to update information.	6 3%	40 20%	140 70%	14 7%
12. Online courses help me to maintain my discipline in studying.	8 4%	60 30%	120 60%	12 6%

The statistics shown in Table 1 are derived as percentages based on the number of participants. With a quick look, we could recognize that students in HUFU had a lot of problems with online classes since the percentages in the « disagree » and « strongly disagree » columns are greater than those in the « strongly agree » and « agree » columns.

In table 1, in terms of “I can understand the content better in online learning”, “I need less time and effort to learn the same amount of material in online learning”, and “Online classes improve my communication skills,” the results of the study indicated there was no significant difference. The percentage for “Strongly agree” is very low, just 1%, while the percentage for “Disagree” is much higher, including 53%, 54%, and 56%.

To understand how non-English major students react to online classes, term 2 of “online learning stimulates my interest more” was asked. There was a total of 8% of respondents strongly disagreed, and 60% of them disagreed. This number is much higher than the number of agreements. This meant that there was a great number of learners who didn't like online classes during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Regarding terms including student discussion, presentation, teacher-student interactions, exam preparation, quick feedback, question making, wifi stability, and maintaining their discipline in studying, the results of study inclined toward “disagree”. Among them, the dominant percentage of 76% is the failure of teacher and student interaction in an online setting. The next drawback is also a high percentage of 75% that referred to student discussion. The other high percentages whose disagreement accounted for 70% were better presentation, examination preparation, and wifi support.

Finally, there was a little asymmetry in terms of “ I receive sufficient and quick feedback from the instructor in online courses”, “I can easily ask questions when I don't understand”, and “Online courses help me to maintain my discipline in studying”. The number of students who had the “Agree” votes was less than the “Disagree”. Under this view, it could be easily found that students had a variety of difficulties in online courses.

Discussions

From the findings above, the answers to the research questions were exposed. First, The results showed that online learning for non-English majors at HUFU is not really effective and may not be their choice in the next semester. They feel like to face many obstacles in the e-learning environment. There is a similarity between the author's viewpoint and Pozgaj & Knezevic's (2007) that “For students, the biggest disadvantage of e-learning would be lack of communication and interaction with their fellow students. All in all, lack of direct communication is seen as the biggest problem with e-learning” (p.385). This disadvantage leads to corollaries like a distraction from concentration, uncared or getting bored with learning, which are the main reasons why students get failed on exams. In fact, some studies have shown that students rarely used online forums like discussion boards to interact with other students or

the lecturer (Van Doorn & Van Doorn, 2014), which posed certain challenges to some learning activities. In order to limit this drawback, Nguyen (2022) suggested using mobile apps such as Kahoot, Quizlet, or Quizizz. She said, “mobile apps like Quizlet have the potential to foster language learners’ motivation” (p. 39). Moreover, the teacher should apply more games or create competitions to make students get involved in online lessons. Several studies have shown that a lot of practice can reduce distractions, including using shorter videos to avoid overload, organizing words and pictures, and combining narration with animation simultaneously as visual cues to highlight essential information (Goffard et al., 2019; Mayer & Fiorella, 2014). Similarly, students tend to react more positively to some video styles. Students better-acquired lecture slides with illustrations and animations that visualized content compared to those with many texts and no illustrations (Choe et al., 2019; Kirkwood & Price, 2014; Morton et al., 2016).

Second, both lecturers’ and learners’ Internet stability and good skills in using online infrastructure are important factors contributing to the effectiveness of online education. In fact, online teaching and learning were rather new and urgent to instructors and students in HUFU; hence, both of them were not well-prepared and well-trained. Luu (2022) said that one of the barriers to virtual learning is the Internet access quality. The fact that the students who are usually in the disconnected situation feel confused, tired, and demotivated in learning. Research by Abdelsalam et al. (2022, p.34) concluded that “the introduction of e-learning is difficult and that the low-quality of internet services is the biggest obstacle to its application.” As a result, in order to continue e-learning in the future, university management should invest more in an enough strong and stable IT infrastructure to support teachers and learners. Building an e-library with flexibility and a variety of types of equipment to access the virtual environment is also vital. Besides, frequent training or seminar on online education for teachers to update applications is an indispensable mission of any university.

Overall, the findings showed that most non-English-majored students at HUFU preferred in-person over online classes during the Covid-19 epidemic.

Conclusion

This study aims to find out the satisfaction among HUFU students with online learning by conducting an online questionnaire. Data gathered from the survey may assist in designing effective online classes to facilitate students’ performance and satisfaction. Nonetheless, there are still limits to the study. Because this is small-scale research, the author did not achieve the desired outcomes. In addition, these are just a few surveys that may not cover all elements. Therefore, future research should include additional questions and a variety of questionnaire formats.

Despite these shortages, the study also suggests that HUFU should spend more time training teachers with apps or information techniques to design more interactive online handouts, which would help maximize the online learning benefits. In addition, online teaching is still being

conducted in HUFU and will be utilized in the future. Therefore, HUFU should invest in providing students and teachers with stable and high-speed internet access and provide more professional training for lecturers to catch up with new education trends.

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