

College Students' Behaviors in Face-to-Face Learning Versus Online Learning

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Introduction:

This research study examined the behavior of college students during face-to-face courses and compared them to their behavior during online courses amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. First, a selection of students participated in interviews assessing how they feel about face-to-face learning and online learning. The data was collected through interview transcripts that were typed up after the interview took place by the interviewee. Secondly, a hand-picked group of students enrolled at any college was chosen to participate by the students in our Communication Research Methods Course. These individuals participated in a survey assessing how many online courses they were enrolled in, what types of devices they used, and what platforms were used for online study, amongst other things. Although students preferred face-to-face learning, their feelings towards both learning methods were about the same because both methods had their perks, but they also had their disadvantages.

Literature Review:

Our topic of study for this research essay was the behaviors of college students in face-to-face and online learning. This topic is essential as we continue to move forward with teaching and learning while working through the global pandemic we are currently facing. The main concepts that we have discussed as a group through our research were whether students and faculty preferred online learning or face-to-face learning, whether they felt prepared, how they affected their relationships and social life, and whether they had the proper materials needed for online learning when the transition was made to remote learning. These variables are being studied together because they go hand and hand in providing students with education through a global pandemic where physical, in-person contact should be limited. Schools have had to adapt

their learning methods to accommodate limited exposure between students, faculty, and parents. From here on out, schools need to evaluate how their students are performing with the format of learning they are providing, and they need to reassess what the students need to excel in their learning.

We used a variety of sources to support our research; the first article used to support our research question, “We’re Not Sure We Like It, But We Still Want More: Trainee’s and Faculty’s Perceptions of Remote Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” compares faculty and trainees' perceptions of learning through the collection of an attitudes survey that was distributed at a single institution during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results were used to evaluate the impact of the brief training that faculty received in online teaching and how it affected their attitudes toward remote learning. This study helped us understand further and address the challenges that occurred during the transition between learning outlets. The survey was conducted three months after the transition to remote learning. There were 59 trainees in the adult psychiatry residency, 14 trainees in the child psychiatry residency, and 116 faculty whom all had taught at least one lecture in the curriculum in the preceding academic year and decided to be participants. They held a faculty training session on the best practices for online teaching after the survey. After the faculty attended the training session, they completed an evaluation survey. The results were that in-person learning is seen as more favorable for both the faculty and trainees across multiple domains. The authors found that Trainees and faculty perceived in-person learning more positively than remote learning on the majority of items assessed (Table 1). For example, over half of trainees and faculty indicated overall enjoyment, concentration during lectures, the connection between trainees and teachers, and participation in discussions were perceived more positively with in-person lectures than remote lectures. In contrast, trainees

and faculty stated that remote learning was more convenient compared to in-person learning (Heldt et al., 2020). Overall, this study's findings conclude that both the faculty and trainees perceive remote learning more negatively than in-person learning.

The research presented in "Discussion Groups and Multi-Formatted Content Delivery in an Online Module: Effect on Students' Self-Efficacy" examines the effects of theoretically-guided, instructional design strategies in an online learning module. This study took place at Illinois State University and was implemented in four undergraduate sport management and recreation courses. The participants were recruited during an informational presentation to four undergraduate foundations and management courses. An informational flyer was distributed to students during one of their class meeting times. The students who expressed interest and wanted to participate in the study were asked to fill out a registration form at the bottom of the informational flyer that was passed out or email the investigator. Two hundred thirteen students registered for the short online learning module on pay-for-performance appraisals. They randomly assigned one of the four modules to each student to complete before the two-week deadline. The approach they took was framed within Social Cognitive Theory, a well-studied model for adult learning, and several instructional design hypotheses were examined. Mulvaney states a quote from Gan and Balakrishnan's 2018 article that SCT is relevant to adult learning in online environments, as it emphasizes the interaction of the behavior, environment, and individual (Mulvaney, 2020). He looked further into the effects of online discussion groups and multiple formats on students' self-efficacy perceptions in online learning modules. Their results found that discussion groups' use helped produce significantly higher self-efficacy perceptions compared to the other instructional design strategies.

The research in the article “Students’ Satisfaction with Online Learning Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic” explores students' perceptions of online learning delivery. It also looks into how much support the teachers and schools are providing to students. They surveyed 238 college students ranging from grade 12 to 15. The survey was generated using google forms. The results were that college students were satisfied with the delivery of online learning. The researchers found that students preferred Moodle and Google Hangouts to be used for their courses (Almusharraf, Mansour & Hussain, 2020). The other survey results were that most students felt that support from professors and health services was easily accessible.

The research in the article “Emergency Online Learning: College Students’ Perceptions During the COVID-19 Crisis” was used to help researchers measure the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on college students and their studies. Their main goal was to determine the challenges that college students faced while they transitioned from traditional face-to-face classes to online learning platforms. The researchers used an online survey to complete this research study on the students. The survey results showed that academically, students struggled the most with connecting to a reliable WiFi source. It also proved that students had difficulty finding a quiet place to conduct their schoolwork and support themselves financially (Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021). There were not only academic struggles that students faced but there were social barriers as well. According to the survey, students felt that they lost social connections with their professors, peers, and the college community. Students also stated that they felt more exhausted and less inclined to participate in their courses. The researchers suggested that universities should implement ways for students to acquire healthy habits and reduce exhaustion.

“College Students Multitasking Behavior in Online Versus Face-to-Face Courses” is an article that examined college students’ multitasking in online courses and compared it with multitasking in face-to-face courses. It explored the significance of potential predictors of multitasking in each setting. A final sample of 296 students was used, which was formed out of undergraduate students at a large public university in the Midwestern United States. The paper surveys used in this study were completed during class time and were designed to be completed in 10 minutes or less. The surveys assessed multitasking in each setting, self-efficacy for self-regulated learning, internet addiction, multitasking tendency, age, and sex. The results showed that today’s undergraduate college students are frequent multitaskers, particularly while online. Multitasking tendencies are predicted to occur in online courses, but they were not predicted in face-to-face courses. This means students who have positive attitudes about multitasking and prefer to multitask appear to have better control of this during remote learning. In contrast, there is academically disadvantageous behavior in face-to-face courses. They cannot control this behavior as well in online courses. Only doodling was a common multitasking behavior in face-to-face courses, which was not beneficial in online courses (Barkley, Lepp, Karpinski, Singh, 2019).

The article “Adaptability to a sudden transition to online learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Understanding the Challenges for Students,” is a cross-sectional study that examined the associations between adaptability to the pandemic, personality, and levels of learning experience among higher education students forced to adapt to an abrupt transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. A sample of 1,217 students from Israel completed an online questionnaire. Their mean age was 27.42 years (mode and median of 25 years). As such, our participants were older than typical college student samples, and most were adults rather than

emerging adults. Comparisons were made between reactions to online learning vs. face-to-face learning. Results showed that students had pervasive adverse reactions to online learning.

Adaptability to the pandemic mainly was associated with positive reactions. It was also found that personality traits were associated with specific reactions to online learning (Besser, Flett, Zeigler-Hill, 2020).

The research in “Students’ perceptions of the twists and turns of e-learning amid the covid 19 outbreak” looks at how well students at Indonesian and Malaysian universities like and are adapting to e-learning. The results that the researchers gathered were that most students felt neutral about using e-learning but that they were able to see the advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are that it is easily accessible and can be done on one's own time, but the disadvantage is that it relies on the internet meaning everyone involved needs good access, which is not always possible. Overall, the study also uncovered that for students and teachers to succeed in an e-learning environment, the correct preparation is needed (Minghat et al., 2020). Using this research, we found a path that we wanted to follow within our research as long as we gave ourselves a good base of information. With the knowledge that we gained knowing that people in other countries need the correct preparation and time for e-learning, we could use that to develop the questions that might have been used in the questionnaire.

Methods

Participants:

Our target population was college students who have taken at least one online class in the past semester for our research. To gather our sample, we in class were asked to send the survey to 5 people we knew; doing this gave us the method of a convenience sample, which is under the

nonprobability type of sampling. This leads us to have a sample that consists of 105 participants within the age range of 18-23, your typical college-aged student, with 62 of the participants who answer being females and the other 43 being males. The majority of our participants were white/Caucasian at 92.4%, falling into that category, with the other races making up the rest with about 1% each. Out of all of the participants questioned, 98.1% are currently full-time college students, with 38.1% being sophomores, 32.4% being juniors, 19% being freshmen, 8.6 percent being seniors, and 1.9% identifying as others. Along with a survey, we also interviewed some students as well; the first was a senior attending UW Whitewater who is a social work major. The following 2 were both female freshmen at Saint Norbert, one was an international studies major, and the other was a sociology major. Our last interviewee was a third-year senior who is attending Saint Norbert under the pre-pharmacy program. Although our sample was haphazard, we still got a wide range of participants.

Procedures:

To answer our research question, “How do behaviors of college students differ in online vs. face-to-face classes?” We got our results from college students themselves. Each student in our communication research methods course was required to interview one college student using a script that Dr. Kim Smith created. The students that we selected to interview could be from any college including Saint Norbert. Before we conducted the interview we were required to send out a form explaining the interview process and we verbally asked for their consent to record the interview with the condition that it would be destroyed after a transcript was created. Once the participant agreed to partake, we continued following the script and getting their input on their personal experiences with online learning compared to face-to-face learning. There were a total of ten questions that we asked each participant to answer.

Measures:

Besides holding interviews, each student in the course sent out a link to at least five people that consisted of a survey for them to take. The survey consisted of questions that told us more about our demographic in terms of age, gender, race, status as a student (full or part-time), major, current GPA, year in school, number of hours spent on school a week, and the electronics used for online learning. The demographic that the survey was based on was college students and there were nine questions concerning their age, gender, race, and status as a student. 18 descriptive questions were used to have them describe how online learning made them feel in comparison to face-to-face learning. The questions were in the form of Likert scales and they were used to get an idea of the student's behaviors towards each form of learning. By collecting this information, we were able to analyze the data further to find correlations between the results and our conclusion from our literacy review.

Results:

The results of the survey showed that most students use a smartwatch, smartphone, tablet, and laptop to participate in online learning. The majority of the students who participated in the survey were current, full-time college students. When asked on the survey if students felt that online learning was effective on a scale of 1-5, the mean of all the answers was 2.88. Most students also felt that it was more difficult for them to pay attention to the online learning platform. The majority of the students also felt that it was more difficult to seek out help while enrolled in online courses. On a scale of 1-5, the mean of the student's answers was 2.67 when asked if they agreed that their grades were better while attending online classes. All in all, the survey showed that college students prefer face-to-face classes, but enjoy the flexible schedule

that online learning offers. Students also showed that online learning did not positively affect most of their mental health.

The interview transcripts between our group members indicate that our participants felt that even though online learning is not always the best, it does have its benefits. The benefits of online learning included a more flexible schedule, more opportunities to speak out in class, more organization from professors regarding assignments, and students' feeling that it is simpler to work at their own pace. Students also agreed that online learning is very impersonal, making it more difficult for students to connect with their professors or classmates. The interview transcript also showed that students felt it was more challenging to stay focused in an online learning environment vs. face-to-face learning. Another commonality between the interview transcripts showed that online learning made students feel more disconnected from their social lives.

Discussion:

What we found interesting about the survey results was that a majority of the students who participated in the survey felt that it was more challenging to pay attention during online classes than in face-to-face classes. It is surprising because we assumed that online classes have the potential to be more interactive. During a face-to-face classroom setting, it is easy to zone out, and at times, the professor drones on and on while the students just sit there and take notes. Rarely do most students participate in face-to-face settings if they feel they don't have to. But because there's a disconnect between the professor and their students online, it opens a door for more much-needed interaction and participation. We think it is fascinating that a majority of the participants felt the opposite. Although, the results also said that it was harder to seek help and

grades plundered while enrolled in online classes and that is understandable. The only way to contact your professors when online is through email, and busy schedules can hinder that. Not being able to seek help on concepts you do not understand can cause a decline in good grades and GPAs. The results tell us that, concerning the research question, students prefer face-to-face classes because they are more interactive, it is easier to connect with professors, and it is easier on grades and assignments.

Between the interview transcript results of our group, the interviewees felt that although online learning is not the preferred learning method, it does have its perks. Although the majority agreed that online learning was more impersonal and it is harder to pay attention to, it has the potential for a more flexible schedule, more organization from professors regarding assignments, and it is simpler to work at an individual pace. This made much sense because as college students, we are swamped, and things can change. Instead of having a set time to meet up in a specific place to learn, you can learn online from any device on the go and it means a more flexible schedule. It is also a lot easier to work at your pace because only having that time during class for specific assignments and meeting in groups can be a hassle. It is also better because a lot of students have a hard time conforming to another type of schedule so being able to work individually can lessen the burden. These results, regarding the research question, show us that although behaviors between face-to-face classes and online classes differ significantly from each other, neither one is all good nor all bad. Both have their benefits.

Conclusion:

Online learning is something that we just have to get used to at this point due to the pandemic, but that does not mean that everything about online learning is good or bad. The

survey that was conducted showed that focus is less in the online setting, thus a decrease in overall GPAs. In the interviews conducted, the point of having a more flexible schedule with online learning compared to face-to-face is what was enjoyed by students. Both the interview and survey have shown that online learning vs. face-to-face both have their weaknesses but they also both have their benefits. If students can pick between the two, they should pick which one works best for them, everyone has different learning styles. We do not know when the current situation we are in with the pandemic will end, so having a better understanding of how students feel about online learning will help better the online environment for those who continue to use it.

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