

A Review on University Students' Perception to Online Class Delivery Methods during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this review is to further elucidate how COVID-19 has impacted educational class delivery methods at the university level. To evaluate this issue further, focus group interviews were conducted with students at universities in two countries (South Korea and Malaysia); measuring characteristics related to universities moving towards online and blended learning during this pandemic period. Student focus groups allowed the study to concentrate on several key areas for analysis, including: (1) assessment of student satisfaction level with learning under COVID-19, (2) success of the delivery method, and (3) the quality of the online learning programs. Results suggest that online learning success requires a mix of blended education to bolster learning. Results also advocate for greater communication between lecturers and students as a fundamental factor for success in all class category.

Keywords: Hospitality education; Class delivery methods; COVID-19; Bolster learning

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the way people travel, work, interact with one another, and even educate themselves. The continuous spread of the virus had brought about strict isolation measures which delayed educational institutions across the globe from continuing with classes. As this pandemic continues, the issue of fully restarting educational institutions has gain traction [1]. While governments and various other institutions decide on the best way to commence with classes, support has grown for the implementation of technological tools into the learning process; including online learning [2].

While a move towards online learning has been encouraged in many nations, contradictory views relating to the matter of online course characteristics still exists, especially in higher education [3]. Research seems to suggest that university learners are principally vulnerable to changes in teaching practices, especially since the recent pandemic has brought about greater levels of anxiety, and other psychological impact on students [4].

It has been noted that because of these stressors, learners in higher education often have contradictory opinions relating to their satisfaction and preference towards online learning techniques [3].

While COVID-19 has influenced the learning practices of many university courses and majors; tourism and hospitality education has been particularly affected due to the nature of the courses [2]. Tourism and hospitality education requires students to conduct a certain amount of offline work to gain practical experience in the field of tourism [5]. Consequently, this study has considered the perspectives of learners in the field of tourism and hospitality as these individuals consider the impact online classes are having on their overall learning experiences. Two learner groups, from South Korea and Malaysia, involved in an inter-country university hospitality program took part in a focus group style interview to test and measure the study parameters. Following these interviews, several important outcomes of the research are noted. Firstly, the current review aims to contribute to hospitality and tourism research by investigating the perceptions and satisfaction of students towards

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online learning in these disciplines. Second, this review differentiates between several online delivery methods to interpret which methods were well received by learners. Finally, this review measured delivery methods, student satisfaction and educator-learner communication techniques from a bi-country perspective. This study was therefore able to explore university students' perception related to the issues of online learning delivery methods and the matter of quality improvement as it relates to online classes in hospitality education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Higher education and the COVID-19 pandemic

Among the industries most predisposed to the devastation of the COVID-19 virus is the education sector. Many classes were canceled, and a large proportion of international students were forced to return to their home countries [2]. Consequently, educational institutions are forced to find alternative solutions to combat the postponement or cancellation of classes and other learning activities. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, educators worldwide are faced with familiarizing themselves with an unusual existence of having to use new technologies, or of having to introduce new teaching theories to implement learning to students.

Although some countries continue with regular offline classes as best possible, other countries have taken more drastic measures to reduce the spread of the virus. Of these new measures, the concept of blended learning has become popular to mix technology-enhanced learning with traditional learning experiences [1]. To add structure to the current review and provide sustenance to the literature review, elements of the Online Collaborative Learning (OCL) theory have been adapted to contribute to this review. OCL focuses on the internet, or online learning as a source of learning through the establishment of nurturing collaboration, and building of knowledge in learners [6]. This form of learning would thus entail the integration of both face-to-face interaction and technologically facilitated interaction between students and teachers when utilizing learning resources.

The impact of COVID-19 on hospitality education and the hospitality industry

Education in tourism and hospitality is related to the tourism industry, as the education of students is dependent on 'real-world' sessions, and are thus influenced significantly by the virus [5]. Also, hospitality businesses are expected to make considerable changes to their operations (such as using AI technology) in the wake of a COVID-19, as these organizations are continuously required to ensure employees' and customers' health and safety, and enhance customers' willingness to patronize businesses in the future; with these outcomes have a direct effect on the way hospitality education will change [2].

The nature of the travel and tourism industry requires that educators take a very active approach to manage programs and establish active learning strategies that can complement the

education [7]. For hospitality education, the role of technology has transformed the teaching and learning processes geared towards hospitality curriculums over the past several decades [8]. The movement of classes into digital platforms is especially useful for hospitality students who often work part-time for experience in the sector. Thus, online learning practices afford students more flexibility to customize the learning experience with family and work commitments.

An opportunity exists for the hospitality industry where the virus has exposed the need for educational institutions to consider an alignment with the needs of the industry as a whole. However, the characteristics of online learning do create several issues addressed in the current review. For example, the nature of tourism and hospitality-based education dictates that students commit to a certain level of practical learning. This approach to learning is near impossible under the current global situation. Thus, a move towards a greater degree of online learning may be perceived as a negative overall experience for students in this industry.

Delivery methods in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic

One massive factor that has helped to curb the negative effects of the virus on the general population has been a renewed reliance on technologies, especially visual communication technology for people to communicate through online means [2]. There are many advantages that can be found under the format of online education including; personalization, reduced costs, flexibility, time saving and convenience [8].

Effective online learning comprises of a combination of several modes, or classifications including face-to-face learning using web-based tools and varying degrees of blended learning [9]. Thus, the use of online presentation techniques may be determined by factors such as the role of students, or the type of class assessment, class size, pedagogy, or feedback methods etc. [10]. With regards to online learning in hospitality education, several programs and products have been used such as Zoom, Cisco's WebEx, or Google Meets etc. the advantages of each of these products varies greatly with regards to their effectiveness in meeting the needs of educational institutions and students alike.

Recently [5] measured the satisfaction levels experienced by tourism and hospitality students with their online learning involvements during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings suggested that online learning and student satisfaction was complimented by diversification in the curriculum, and the ability of the university to quickly understand the needs of students when deciding on an online delivery method which had little to no disruptions. While the overall perceptions of online learning are not universally aligned, the importance of improving the quality of classes cannot be denied. Further, it must be noted that the success of online learning is ultimately contingent on the contents and design of the course, and the interaction between educators and students [2]. It is essential however to note that technology is not always able to replace the work of teachers. Educators are still at the center of providing

advice to students, designing assignments, and conducting large numbers of students as best possible.

DISCUSSION

The current review has focused on the perceptions of hospitality and tourism students as they engage in online learning. This review has also considered the impact various class delivery methods would have on learners from Malaysia and South Korea as they conducted classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. To establish meaningful results in tourism and hospitality literature as a reference for future scholars to consider, the current review adopted a qualitative research approach using focus groups. Based on the focus group interview, this study collected data from university students in Korea and Malaysia.

The results of this review suggest that learners showed a greater level of satisfaction at an above average rate with their online courses. Several reasons are cited for these interesting findings. Some students quoted the availability of more than one mode of class as the greatest reason for their overall satisfaction with the online delivery methods. While students were not able to always choose how to take classes, this insight provides an interesting point of reference. Results found that learners tried to choose classes based on their preferred delivery method. For example, some students indicated that choosing recorded classes allowed them to utilize their time at home much better. It also allowed students to take up part-time jobs, study English, prepare for certificates related to future job prospects etc. while taking online classes through the universities.

Also, findings note that educators should consider the possibility of offering students a course that matches the needs of students during the pandemic period. For example, a lecturer could offer a 'real-time' class to students that are recorded. Students unable to attend the class should be allowed to watch the recording without being penalized for missing the live class. Alternatively, a lecturer could record their class and offer the designated class time to have live discussions with students in smaller groups.

Within this review, communication tools applied between students and faculty during non-class times included social network services such as E-CLASS (intra-network system called groupware), and Kakao Talk (free mobile messenger application) mainly for all students. Supplementary technology incorporated to enhance the educator/learner relationship included more traditional technologies such as e-mail and cell phone text message, which provided for personal interaction between the educators and learners. A closer inspection of the communication technology found that instant messaging apps were considered more popular than traditional messaging tools. In particular, Kakao Talk and WhatsApp were deemed to satisfy students the most. It seems that, while some students enjoyed the freedom of not having to attend class, most students appreciated a regular level of contact with their lecturers. The two instant messaging apps also gave students an opportunity to form groups on the apps and communicate with one another as well as with the lecturer in real-time.

Students in the test sample were encouraged to express any issues they experienced with the online learning process. While some students championed the idea of more diverse online education tools; technology improvement and better teaching methods to online techniques incorporated by educators were listed as issues. Participants also noted that lecturers needed to have a greater understanding of the problems that students faced in online learning. Within this spectrum, issues with slow internet connection, or the sending and receiving of information during online classes were noted as areas that could be improved.

From the study it is therefore recommended that universities introduce greater mechanisms for enhancing blended learning while addressing technology problems to encourage class quality. A move towards blended learning would give certain students an additional avenue with which to participate in class; especially if this hybrid style of learning is not compulsory. This would allow learners to operate in smaller groups at the university, where issues related to internet connection are almost nonexistent.

With regards to student concerns about the quality of online classes conducted by certain lecturers, several recommendations are presented: (1) encourage lecturer workshops, providing lecturers with intimate knowledge to assist in building competencies to manage online classes more effectively; (2) universities should acquire the assistance of outsourced firms to contribute their expertise to the learning process by facilitating lecturers during their classes; (3) universities are encouraged to provide lecturers with additional time with which to prepare for classes; and (4) universities are encouraged to support educators with quality technology with which to conduct their classes.

CONCLUSION

Finally, to improve the quality of online courses, universities might choose to open greater levels of dialogue between students and other stakeholders, and thus encouraging the acceptance of students' suggestions. Moving classes online requires a sacrifice and commitment from all stakeholders involved in the process. For university administrative departments, new policies and processes need to be developed to satisfy the requirements of individuals and organizations associated with the university. From the educator's point of view, new lesson plans and teaching materials need to be designed as classes move online.

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