

Higher Education Students' Online Instruction Perceptions

Subjects: Anthropology

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Online instruction has been one of the key delivery methods in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic due to school closures around the globe. In accordance with the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013–2025), maximizing the use of information/communication technology has been emphasized to scale up learning quality across Malaysia, including distance and self-paced learning. However, online learning in the country is at its infancy stage with raised issues, causing dropping-out and school leaving in higher education.

Keywords: online instruction ; higher education ; students' perceptions ; education quality ; online learning

1. Introduction

A controversy over online instruction perceptions has left people in unquestionable doubt. Due to the global pandemic, school closures have been considered an initiative measure in preventing the spread of viruses. Many educational institutions around the world have temporarily closed to cease the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic ^[1]. Many significant changes have been called upon for adoption, particularly education. With this sudden shift, online learning has been increasingly rising to continue the teaching and learning process. However, the pandemic has caused negative impacts on online education, such as learning loss ^[2] and exacerbated learning outcomes ^[3]. Online barriers can be hindrances, including cost ^[4], teachers' information and communication technology (ICT) skills and their demographic factors ^[5], poor infrastructure of the university ^{[6][7]}, lack of online resources ^[8], classroom management in terms of student participation ^[9], and teachers' behavioral intentions in adopting online educational technology ^[10]. To ensure the effectiveness and quality of higher education in online learning, synthesizing existing literature on the significance of online instruction perceptions is critical.

Based on The United Nations' (UN) 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), one of the goals is to achieve quality education. Quality education not only aims to empower educational opportunities but also to alleviate poverty all around the world by 2030 ^[11]. According to The Star (2021), urgent action should be called upon in minimizing the digital divide in Peninsular Malaysia ^[12]. A number of issues pertaining to online accessibility and basic requirements are found to be addressed promptly, such as Internet connectivity, lack of resources and devices, in order to provide equity and quality in the education field. In line with the Malaysian higher education institution students' learning experiences, immediate action should be taken by universities to avoid losing their students, by considering their dissatisfactions; for instance, virtual learning mode implementation, availability of instructors, and learning performances ^[13]. Ensuring healthy well-being is imperative to sustainable development. During the pandemic, a study shows that most participants feel apprehensive and helpless ^[14]. Similarly, another study reveals that excess electronic access can impact tremendously on students' mental health and education in a long term ^[15]. Hence, quality instruction is essential to reduce stress level. By providing quality education, considering students' perspectives is imperative for integrating proper online instruction.

The quality of online instruction has been given some considerable attention since the rise of online courses offered in education. ^[16]. Quality online instruction should adhere to the seven principles of instructional practice for an effective teaching and learning process ^{[17][18][19]}. According to Chickering and Gamzon (1989), these seven principles pertain to good instructional practice in undergraduate education: (1) encourage student–faculty contact, (2) encourage cooperation among students, (3) encourage active learning, (4) give prompt feedback, (5) emphasize time on task, (6) communicate high expectations, and (7) respect diverse talents and ways of learning ^[20]. For student–faculty contact, it is crucial to establish a good rapport, as it is considered a source of student's motivation in determining their engagement and involvement. It can foster students to think about their values and future plans. In developing reciprocity and cooperation, frequent working collaboratively can increase involvement in learning. Sharing ideas and responding to reactions can stimulate thinking skills. Moreover, students are active learners who relate their learning experience and apply it in daily

lives through active learning, such as discussions and projects. By providing adequate feedback on performance, it can enable students to assess and improve themselves. They require constructive and immediate suggestions to reflect on what they have learned. Next, effective time management is critical to high performance. Students are required to learn how to manage their time well for effective learning.

High expectations stimulate students to perform more and motivate them to be well-prepared. Last but not least, each and every student has their own learning style, therefore, chances should be given to students to show their talents and learn in their way. Hence, this scoping review was guided by two research questions:

- RQ1: What are students' online instruction perceptions?
- RQ2: What are the factors influencing students' online instruction perceptions?

2. Online Instruction Perceptions

In this section, both research questions are addressed to analyze and summarize the findings as follows:

- RQ1: What are students' online instruction perceptions?

Quality instruction was highly rated for satisfaction and motivation levels, effectiveness, and comfort and acceptance toward online learning. Quality instruction accounted for students' favorable online instruction perceptions [21][22][23][24]. Examples of quality instruction were timely responses, constructive feedback, and immediate grade posting. However, without instructors' presence in giving prompt feedback, students might experience disappointment and dissatisfaction in accomplishing challenging tasks. To some extent, this situation might heighten stress and anxiety levels among students. As a result, health conditions were deteriorated for excessive use of ICT, particularly mental health. Hence, quality instruction should come into practice in creating a healthy and conducive virtual learning environment [25].

Consequently, online interaction was given the second highest rating for students' positive online instruction perceptions. Good online engagement was critical in online instruction [26][27][28][29]. The findings suggested that increasing interaction through various online activities could have a great impact on the relationship between instructors and students, including live chat discussions, online quizzes, and online forums. For example, a research endorsed the usefulness of gamification, such as Quizizz and Kahoot!, in promoting better engagement and positive learning experience [30]. "Lack of communication" and "lack of interaction" were the most cited reasons that contributed to unpleasant learning experience. This finding suggested that online learning relied heavily on online instruction to construct knowledge and deliver relevant content in facilitating students' understanding and comprehension toward the online course. Three types of interactions were identified: student–student, instructor–student, and student–content interactions.

Most students evaluated instructional and technical support as significant to their academic performance and constant learning [31][32][33][34][35]. Students expressed their frustration and stress in dealing with software and hardware operations due to lack of technology competency. Fundamental ICT knowledge and skills should be acquired by learners to enjoy the pleasure of online learning. Moreover, preferences for learning styles related to technology were considered to increase students' fondness toward online instruction as a medium of communication during online learning. Students equipped with considerable ICT competence and skills showed a great sense of interest and community, thus yielding in satisfying learning outcomes. Instructional and technical support were useful and effective in providing assistance to students in terms of ease of navigation with supportive instruction.

- RQ2: What are the factors influencing students' online instruction perceptions?

Several factors influencing students' perceptions toward online instruction were identified. Most students expressed their concerns about the transition from face-to-face instruction to online instruction. In some developing countries, the common circumstances frequently faced by students were Internet accessibility, university facilities, resources, and financial support. As a consequence, these unsolved issues might accumulate students' tension level in facing the exacerbation of their academic performance without instructors' actual teaching presence.

Instructors' online instructional practice was one of the determining factors that could impact students' attitudes related to motivation and autonomy. When designing online instruction, instructors should apply optimal instructional strategies that are compatible with students' ICT competency. Instructional strategies can stimulate students' self-regulation for better personal development. In addition, the design of online instructional activities should integrate with interactive elements, notably group discussion and communication, to enhance the interaction between instructors and students. Through online interaction, students' active participation may increase throughout the learning process.

The nature and format of the work were also influencing factors in assigning tasks after the instruction was given. Assigned work was strongly associated with grading, performance, and feedback. It could provide room for improvement and development among students. Thus, flexibility and convenience elements should be considered in assigning tasks to enable students to complete their work on the basis of their time availability and capability.

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