Timorese University Students' Perception on E-learning: A Case Study

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Abstract: For the sake of maintaining academic continuity during the Covid19 pandemic that struck the world, particularly in East Timor, all students were required to adopt the distance learning format. Online learning, which allows flexibility in learning, is one of these formats. This study aims to describe how Timorese University students perceive online learning. 190 college students from Instituto Superior Cristal (ISC), East Timor, participated in this study. According to the study's findings, students generally have a favorable perception of online learning.

Keywords: behavioral intention to use e-learning, face-to-face learning, online learning, student's perception

1. Introduction

Setting up distance learning to serve all children, especially the hardest-to-reach children in remote or rural was not an easy undertaking for a tiny country like East Timor with a population of 1.3 million, and distance learning had never been undertaken at scale [UNICEF, 2020]. Not everyone has access to technology but suprisingly In East Timor, 109.7% of the population had a mobile connection in 2021, indicating that many individuals had several mobile phones, but the country's internet penetration rate was just 45.1% [Kemp, 2021]. The statistics does not yet demonstrate a fair allocation of community access to technology. As a result, UNICEF assisted the government in continuing to educate all children during the COVID-19 epidemic by offering learning opportunities through a variety of media, including TV, radio, the internet, mobile phones, and printed materials. Although practically everyone owns a cell phone, not everyone has access to technology [UNICEF, 2020].

Instituto Superior Cristal (ISC), one of East Timor's institutions, hosted a teaching and learning process utilizing a variety of online platforms for the first time during the Covid-19 pandemic, including zoom meetings, Google class rooms, Google Meet, social media YouTube, and WhatsApp. However, due to issues with the erratic internet network, exorbitant prices, and a lack of supporting infrastructure, the educational process was not carried out successfully and efficiently.

After Covid-19, East Timor's educational system now relies more on face-to-face instruction. However some professors still choose to employ online learning methods. The learning experience of using online platforms left a good effect on students and instructors despite the inadequate current infrastructure. Therefore, the goal of this study was to ascertain how East Timor students felt about the usage of online learning at an institute of higher education.

2. E-Learning in East Timor

Although East Timor's ICT infrastructure has advanced significantly since gaining independence in 2002, there are still many obstacles to overcome, including the fact that less than 1% of the country's population has access to fixed-broadband services and that both mobile and fixed-broadband services are regarded as being out of reach for most people [ESCAP, 2019]. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world, East Timor was one of the countries that were struggling due to the state of its ICT infrastructure. As a result, the East Timor government made the difficult decision to close schools in an effort to stop the virus'

spread, which resulted in the disruption of education for 400,000 students [Ramos, 2020].

3. Research Methodology

ISC, a private school of higher learning in East Timor served as the site for this study. In this study, there were190 student participants—57.9% female and 42.21% male that came from the faculties of education (41.6%) and health (58.4%).

The questionnaire in Table 1 requested replies on a scale of 1 to 5 from each participant. The survey adopted by Abbad (2021) research's study questions. Responses were provided using a Google form. The questions asked of the study's participants are included in Table 1.

Table 1. *Questionnaire on the Use of E-Learning*

Items	Questions
1	: What device was used to access e-learning?
2	: What was the most preferred learning model?
3	: Are you skilled in using the e-learning platform?
4	: Are you interested in using the e-learning platform in the future?

4. Findings and Discussion

The "new normal" age, in which new behavior developed following the Covid-19 epidemic, has arrived in the modern world, including East Timor. This is particularly true of the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in education. Particularly in East Timor, Covid-19 compelled the shift from non-digital to digital learning. According to research conducted at ISC, cellphones (53.44%), laptops (43.39%), and personal computers (3.17%) were the most common types of devices used to access E-Learning.
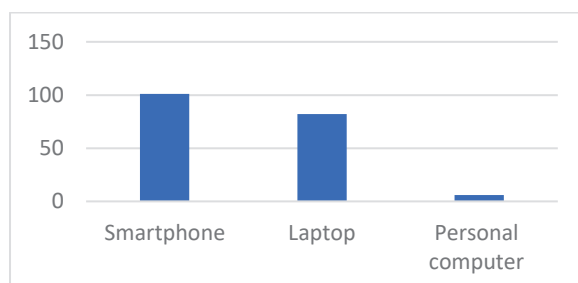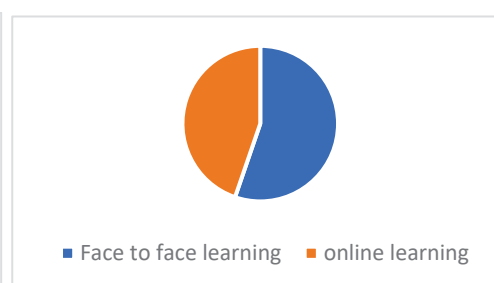

Figure 1 Type of Technology Ownership

Figure 2 Learning Mode Preference

Only a third of the population in East Timor has access to internet infrastructure as a result of the country's poor internet penetration [UNDP, 2021]. Consequently, not all students can effectively access online learning. However, employing e-learning gives students a unique experience. According to a poll of students' preferred learning modes (See Figure 2), about 55.26% of students select face-to-face instruction while 44.74% select online instruction. This can be because students feel comfortable utilizing e-learning platforms because it is not a tough process to utilize it (see Figure 3). strongly agree (23.68%), agree (65.79%), moderate (8.42%), disagree (2.11%), and strongly disagree (0%) are all depicted in Figure 3. Figure 3 shows strongly agree (23.68%), agree (65.79%), moderate (8.42%), disagree (2.11%), strongly disagree (0%). In line with the results of this study, it shows that in general there are no obstacles in terms of mastering the use of the e-learning platform. This ease of use is what allows it to have an impact on student learning preferences and behavioral intentions to use e-learning in the future.
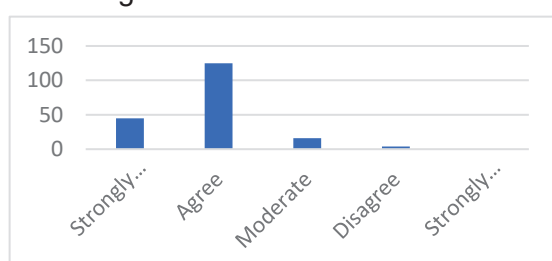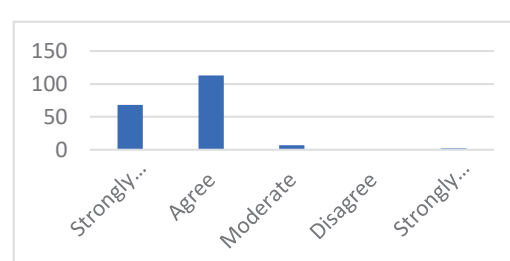

Figure 3 E-learning competency

Figure 4 Behavioral intention to use e-learning

Plans to utilize the e-Learning platform in the future (item 4) may be affected by the study findings collected from the survey (item 3). The behavioral intention to utilize e-learning is shown in Figure 4 as strongly agreeing (35.79%), agreeing (59.47%), moderately agreeing (3.68%), disagreeing (0%), and strongly disagreeing (1.05%). Since East Timor has been promoting the use of distant learning modalities for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in numerous policy papers, opportunities for the use of e-learning in the future in East Timor are becoming more and more abundant [UNESCO, 2023].

5. Conclusion

As one of the countries where the number of mobile phones exceeds the total population, it is not surprising that East Timor students prefer smartphones as a device to access e-learning. With the experience of using e-Learning during the Covid19 pandemic, student learning preferences have also changed, quite a few students have chosen online learning as their learning preference mode, even though face to face learning is still the dominant choice. This ease of use is what allows it to have an impact on student learning preferences and behavioral intentions to use e-learning in the future.

Acknowledgements

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