





ONLINE LEARNING MOTIVATION AND SATISFACTION: A CASE STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATES VS POSTGRADUATES



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ABSTRACT

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The pandemic has accelerated the need for online learning. Educators in schools and institutions of higher learning have no choice but to improvise their teaching methods using online platforms. Instructors assumed learners assumed adapted well with online learning as classes have been going on well. Assignments and tests are all properly done as planned. However, learners attending online classes have mixed reactions over the effectiveness of their learning via online applications. The motivation model (Keller, 1979) states four main factors for learners' satisfaction in learning; attention, relevance, confidence and finally satisfaction. The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the perceived online learning motivation and satisfaction among both undergraduate and postgraduate students. The instrument used is an open-ended questionnaire and contains questions pertaining to life commitment, peer communication, module support, confidence, approach to learning. 34 participants responded to the open-ended questionnaires. Findings revealed that learners perceived some factors caused them to be less satisfied with online learning, while some factors are perceived as giving positive online experience.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature of online learning that is gaining popularity. It focuses on learners' motivation and satisfaction. Findings of the study can further encourage researchers to investigate what learners feel towards learning in the new norm and thus improve online teaching and learning in the future.

1. INTRODUCTION

More people are learning to adjust to being at home more than they had imagined. Many were making preparations for online learning prior to the pandemic. Students (and instructors) were free to make their preferred choices—face-to-face or online learning. While some enjoyed online learning sessions, some still prefer the face-to-face learning method. There are some learners who are satisfied with the course content they received whether it is face-to-face or via online learning. What makes a learner satisfied with what they have learnt? The motivation model by Keller (1979) explains what makes a learner satisfied with his/he learning.

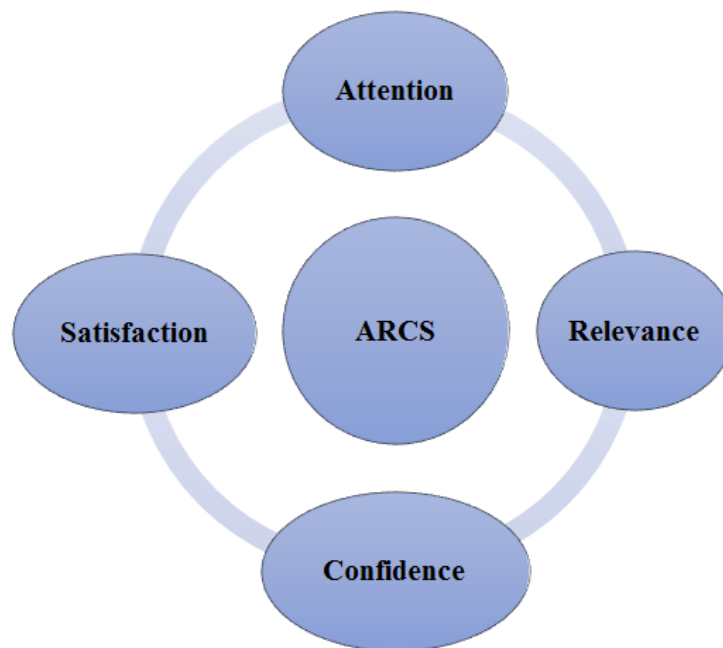


Figure-1. Interpretation of ARCS motivation model.
Source: Keller (1979).

Figure 1 presents an interpretation of what Keller (1979) meant by ARCS model. This is a motivation model by learners. The learners will begin to give (a) Attention to the lesson content if he/she see the (b) relevance of the content to his/her academic /personal needs. If the knowledge is not of use to the learners, he may not give much attention to the learning or may soon forget the content learnt. Once, the learners have understood what he /she has learnt, he /she can now use the knowledge in (c) confidence. For many learners, to have reached (a) –(c) would give them (d) satisfaction.

Unfortunately, 2020 and 2021 has accelerated the need to online classes. Students (and instructors) are still struggling with this type of learning. Some are not in favour of online learning and defended why online learning is not their choice when it comes to learning. There are students in the higher institutions chose to postpone their studies to the time where face-to-face learning is made possible. The question is; will face-to-face /traditional learning return after the pandemic is over? What is online learning is the new norm in schools and institutions of learning?

On the other hand, many are in favour of online learning predict that online learning is the type of learning in the future-with or without the pandemic. This study is done to explore learners' perceived satisfaction on online learning. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

- (a) How do undergraduate and postgraduate students balance Life Commitments with online learning?
- (b) How does the influence of Peer Community differ for undergraduate and postgraduate students?
- (c) How does the perception of Module Supports differ for undergraduate and postgraduate students?
- (d) How does Confidence differ for undergraduate and postgraduate students?
- (e) How does Approach to learning differ for undergraduate and postgraduate students?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

Online learning is the future of learning. While there are some drawbacks to online learning, many will agree that online learning has (and can) benefit both learners and instructors in many ways.

2.2. Drawbacks of Online Learning

One of the main complains by the learners of online learning is that the learners' are sometimes in a dilemma to juggle between responsibilities at home and learning online. The study by [Abdullah, Rahmat, Zawawi, Khamsah, and Anuarsham \(2020\)](#) reported that family values improved. Family members found that they had more time with spouse and also improve relationship with their children. However, some can be less understanding of their family members either work or study from home. The constant presence of family members sometimes gave the illusion that that family member (who is either working for studying from home) is free. Nevertheless, this is just one drawback of online learning for some students-balancing life commitments at home while attending a course online.

2.3. Online Learning: Way Forward for Future Learning

Figure 2 shows 6 dimensions known to influence perceived online learning satisfaction.

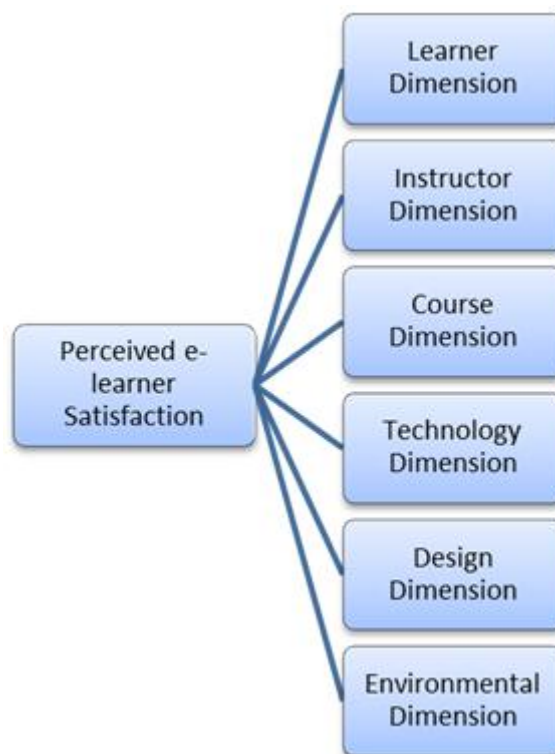


Figure-2. Dimensions of perceived e-learner satisfaction.
Source: Sun, Tsai, Finger, Chen, and Yeh (2008).

2.4. Learner and Instructor Dimension

Despite drawbacks, many have accepted the fact that online learning is the way to learn in the future. Past studies have revealed that learners are satisfied with peer commitment and module support from the instructors. This satisfaction can further enhance confidence in learning and may pave the way for future learning experience.

Firstly, the contents of the course prepared for online learning is the pulling factor for learners to stay in the online course. The study by [Sun et al. \(2008\)](#) revealed 8 positive factors when it comes to course content. The first factor is (1) understandability (understandability of the vocabulary used in the online course), the next factor is (2) illustration (the amount of illustration that is used in online modules to explain the material). The third factor is (3) level of expectation (online modules' expectations from students). Next, the (4) difficulty (the difficulty of the online materials), (5) lack of clarity (unclear instructions), (6) pace (the pace of lessons), (7) enthusiasm (presenting the material with enthusiasm) will influence the satisfaction of the learners towards the course content. Finally, learners

also asked for the content to (8) foster attention (holding students' attention) to enable them to stay motivated in learning. Next, satisfaction towards online learning involves the learners' attitude. Sun et al. (2008) felt that attitude influenced the learning interest. Learners' attitude refers to how the learners use their computers as assisting tools. This also involves what learners do when they feel they need to help in their technical knowledge to maximise their learning. Next, attitude could also refer to the way the learner handles his/her surrounding environment so that he/she can focus on the learning activity. The study by Eller, De Araujo, and De Araujo (2016) reports that postgraduate learners learn to combine study and work, family. So, they approach learning online part of their multi-tasking at home. Nevertheless, learners' satisfaction is also influenced by the instructor's dimensions. Studies revealed that the instructor's quick and prompt response can positively influence learners' satisfaction of online learning. Learners expect instructors to not only present the content as clearly as possible, they also expect the instructor to be well versed in the handling of e-learning activities, as well as respond to learners' problems promptly.

2.5. Course, Technology and Environment Dimension

Students' satisfaction towards e-learning is one way or another dependent on the course, technology and environment dimensions. Learners are satisfied when the course content is flexible to suit their learning diversity. This means the content needs to be easily accessed by learners regardless of whether their online connection is good or otherwise. The course content needs to also cater to a variety of students' category of age, previous background, or even employment status whether that full-time student or working adults. Next, students' satisfaction can also be influenced by technology dimensions. E-learning enables learners to sharpen their skills on the use of gadgets and applications. In the world where gadgets have become society's way of life, many welcome the use of gadgets to their formal education. It is as if the learners were able to incorporate something new (new knowledge) using something old -something that they are familiar with (gadgets). Finally, learners' perceived satisfaction towards online learning is also due to the environmental dimensions. With no restrictions on time and space in e-learning, students can communicate instantaneously, anytime, anywhere. This concept of learning "anywhere and anytime" is a liked concept as learners would be able to learn from a less formal environment in the comfort of their own residences.

2.6. Past Studies

Several factors can affect learners' perceived satisfaction of online learning. The study by Sun et al. (2008) developed an integrated model with six dimensions: learners, instructors, courses, technology, design, and environment. A survey was conducted to investigate the critical factors affecting learners' satisfaction in e-learning. The results revealed that learner computer anxiety, instructor attitude toward e-learning, e-learning course flexibility, e-learning course quality, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and diversity in assessments are the critical factors affecting learners' perceived satisfaction. The results show institutions need to improve learner satisfaction and further strengthen their e-learning implementation. In addition to that, Nguyen (2016) also investigated factors affecting students' satisfaction when they are in online learning classes. The instrument used was a survey. 107 students responded to the survey. Findings revealed that factors such as Interaction, Collaboration, Communication, Assessment, and Results influenced the students' online learning experience. The results showed that the students were excited and felt very comfortable when they participated in learning activities. Findings also showed that interaction, collaboration, and assessment could become good predictors of the student's satisfaction. Studies showed that students' satisfaction towards online learning can lead to positive and negative attitudes towards the learning experience. Ghaderizfreh and Hoover (2018) investigated 29 graduate students taking a required blended course. They completed a series of questionnaires on characteristics of online learning, their emotions concerning their online learning, and their satisfaction with the online learning experience.

The findings revealed that (a) students' understanding depended on whether they had positive learning experiences. Next, the findings revealed lack of clarity lead to more negative feelings towards the learning process. that The findings also suggested that higher understanding lead to increased enthusiasm towards learning. Next, Cole, Shelley, and Swartz (2014) conducted a 3 year study of graduate and undergraduate students' level of satisfaction with online instruction. 553 students responded to a questionnaire. Findings showed that there were no statistically significant differences in the level of satisfaction based on gender, age, or level of study. Data revealed "Convenience" was the most cited reason for satisfaction. "Lack of interaction" was the most cited reason for dissatisfaction. The study by Chen et al. (2020) used a survey to investigate learners experience on online learning .Findings showed that that users' personal factors have no direct influence on user satisfaction. Platform availability has the greatest influence on user satisfaction. Finally the study by Wahid, Rahmat, Dzuradeen, and Kadir (2020) looked at the function of different types of engagement during online learning. A set of survey consists of 24 items were distributed and completed by fifty- five students from a public university in Malaysia. The results showed that learner-to-learner, learner-to-instructor, and learner-to-content engagements are important factors in the online classroom. Learner-to-instructor engagement plays the most significant role in maintaining students' engagement.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Conceptual Framework

Based on Keller (1979) motivation model, learners will be satisfied if they achieved the other three levels; attention, relevance and confidence. Figure 3 presents the conceptual framework of the study. The framework is rooted from Keller (1979) and Sun et al. (2008) and Nguyen (2016). The framework is rooted from Keller (1979) motivation model with the four main components (a)attention, (b)relevance, (c) confidence and (d)satisfaction.

The success or failure of online learning depends on how the learners perceive the learning experience. To begin with the (a) attention learners give to a lesson can be labelled as either negative attention or positive attention. Negative attention like life commitments occupies the learners' mind and giving attention to that will take the learners' mind from the learning at hand. On the other hand, positive attention like peers interaction/help in the learning community is helpful to the learner. Spending time(giving attention) to the peer community in a positive way can lead to more positive learning experience. Next, learners need to make sense of the course content and to relate its (course content) relevance to their study programme or even to their life. This sense of relevance can further motivate the learner to want to explore the knowledge. The more the learners see the relevance, , the he/she understands, he/she will be confidence applying the knowledge to cater to his/her current needs. This confidence leads to the learner feeling satisfied with the online learning experience

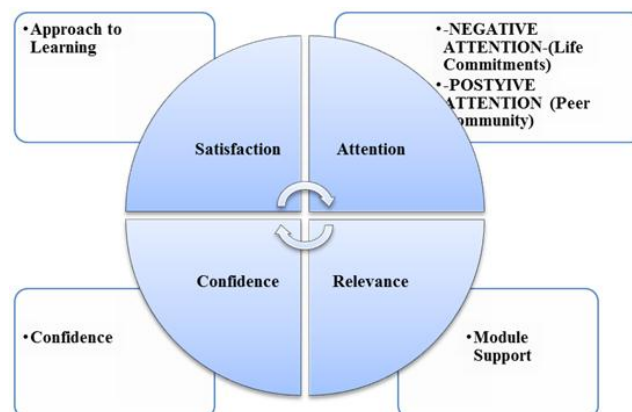


Figure-3. Conceptual Framework of the Study: Perceived Satisfaction for online learning for Undergraduates and Postgraduates.

Source: Sun et al. (2008); Nguyen (2016) and Keller (1979).

3.2. Population and Sample

The population of the qualitative study is students who have completed one semester of online learning. Responses from a class of 34 undergraduate and post graduate students were purposively chosen for this qualitative study.

3.3. Instrument

The instrument used in this study is a set of open-ended questions. The most important benefit of open-ended questions is that they allow the researcher to find more than anticipated. Respondents may share more factors and the researcher did not expect and mention behaviours and concerns that the researcher did not know about. The study by Cole et al. (2014) also use open-ended questions as their instrument to gain a wealth of responses from the respondents otherwise not visible in surveys.

The open-ended questions for this current study contain 6 sections. The first section has questions about the respondents' demographics. The second section has questions about Life Commitments, the third section contains questions about Peer community, the fourth section has questions about Module Support, the fifth section contains questions about Confidence and the last section contains questions about Approach to Learning.

3.4. Method of Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data is collected at the end of a semester of online learning for the undergraduate and postgraduate classes. Participants were asked to respond to a set of open-ended question via online. The responses were then analysed based on the responses given by the participants. The responses were then coded to reveal 5 main categories; (a) Life commitments, (b) Peer Community, (c) Modul Support, (d) Confidence and (e) Approach to Learning.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Life Commitments

Undergraduate students were seen as better able to balance life commitments while studying from home. Their family members left them alone during class time.

(a) Undergraduate Students

“My other commitments often starts after class.”

“My parents did not bother me during class hours.”

On the other hand, postgraduate students had mixed feelings about balancing their life commitments and studying online. They found that family members expected more from them with their physical presence at home.

(b) Postgraduate Students

“Family, environment not very supportive”,

“Family distractions, children”

The difference for life commitments could stem from the fact that some postgraduate students were older adults who already had their career and family before they began studies. On the other hand, undergraduate students were mainly full-time students who still depended on their family members to support them.

4.2. Peer Community

As far of peer community, both undergraduate students and post graduate participated in discussions with peers via online. They felt the peers were active participants in their group tasks.

(a) Undergraduate Students

“A little difficult because of distance between group members but alhamdulillah it could be solved with WhatsApp group, Google Docs, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams”

“really helpful”, “divide the tasks “ “meet the deadline given”.

“did the task in google docs so everyone can check everyone’s work and edit them if something is wrong”

“the whole class work as a team”

“When each task was given, we discussed unclear instructions among us or one of us asked the lecturer”

(b) Postgraduate Students

“Discussion done online,”

“peers big help”

“Meet actively via goggle meet, whatsapp group”

4.3. Module Supports

Both undergraduate and postgraduate were satisfied with (a) other sites that can help them in the course, (b) extra guidance about the assignments, and (c) the engagement with the lecturers regarding the assigned work.

(a) Undergraduate Students

“Overall, the padlet and slides are really helpful when we were doing the assignment.”

“Lecturer’s explanation is very clear and concise”

“I really thank lecturer for the effort in making custom templates for each group before giving the assignment, it is something very extraordinary and awesome”

“course content is really clear”

“easy to understand”

“assignment/test for this course is more suitable to be doing it online”

“the instructions are clear and sharp”

“ lecturer also used colour code in each new task, which can make doing it easier”

(b) Postgraduate Students

“Course content thorough”, “a lot of assignments, little time”

“Powerpoint slides clear,” ”lecturer extremely helpful”

4.4. Confidence

4.4.1. Undergraduate Students

For EWC661 and third language, I think I have a high confidence on it, but for other subjects especially calculation subjects, I have lack of confidence, maybe because there is no real interaction with lecturer and other students.

If it was a scale out of 5, my confidence for this subject’s online learning is 4. This is because I love English and the lecturer were fun as well. Instructions were given clearly. Overall, we had a fun class time and that is why I think I am confident with this. For other subjects, not so much.

4.4.2. Postgraduate Students

More confident to speak, ask questions.

Has adapted to online learning -can feel the learning environment.

4.4.3. Approach to Learning

4.4.3.1. Undergraduate Students

My approach to online is a little bit different with the face-to-face learning, I take notes on virtual notebook with pen tablet instead of real paper and pen. I am also using laptop and phones more often.

I would describe my approach to online learning as engaging. If I do not understand a particular question, I will ask my friends first then the lecturers. I think engagement is really important in online learning. It what makes the class understandable. It differs very much with face-to-face learning. This is because, face-to-face learning is already engaging because of the face-to-face interactions and observations but online learning, you have to face your gadget the whole day which is why you definitely have to interact to stay on track.

4.5. Postgraduate Students

Lack of interaction between lecturer and peers online learning is much better than face-to-face learning and even more effective. Despite learner's geographical location, everyone can access and participate through digital platform anywhere, also anytime without constrained with a date and time.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary of Findings and Discussion

5.1.1. Balancing Life Commitments

Undergraduates were able to balance better than postgraduate students. Perhaps the postgraduates were more mature adults who already had family commitments to attend to. This is also reported by [Eller et al. \(2016\)](#) who found that postgraduate learners learnt to negotiate the “level of permeability” between boundaries between work, school and home.

5.2. Peer Community

It is interesting to note that in the midst of online interaction, peer interaction is still sought for. The findings in this study revealed that peer engagement was successfully carried out via online platforms and students managed to complete their group work without meeting face-to-face.

5.3. Module Support

“Module support” here not only referred to how the content and assignment was presented, it also referred to how engaging the lecturer was in the course.

Both undergraduate and postgraduate were satisfied with (a) other sites that can help them in the course, (b) extra guidance about the assignments, and (c) the engagement with the lecturers regarding the assigned work. This is also reported by [Wahid et al. \(2020\)](#) who mentioned the need for learner engagement in “learner-to-content” and also “learner-to instructor”.

5.4. Pedagogical Implications

With reference to the theory of motivation in [Figure 3](#) again, to reach the end of the cycle “satisfaction”, learners need to give the right amount of attention to the online learning process regardless of the attention he/she need to give to his commitments. With regards to life commitments for students, instructors should think of more ways for the students who have to juggle family and classes to participate actively in the class activities. The use of suitable applications can help learners who cannot be present during class time can still “attend “ the class and participate in discussions as much and as often possible. Learners learn to give positive attention to the peer community around them to support their learning.

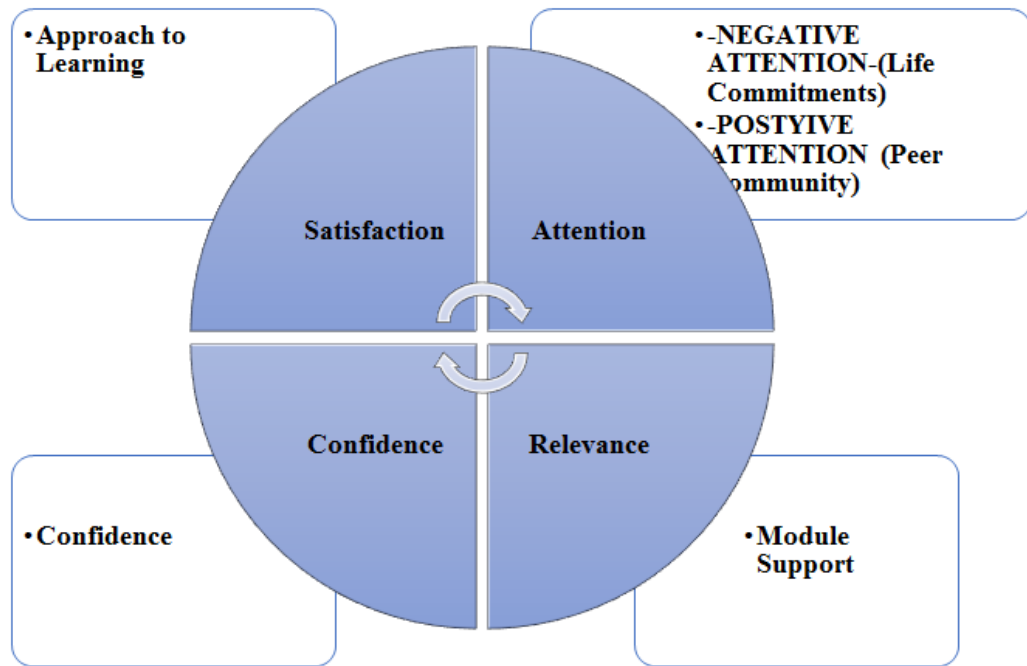


Figure-3. Conceptual Framework of the Study: Perceived Satisfaction for online learning for undergraduates and Postgraduates.

Source: Sun et al. (2008); Nguyen (2016) and Keller (1979).

Findings of this study also suggest that sometimes instructor may be prepared for online learning activities; however, the course content needs to be more aligned towards online activities. Since online learning may be the learning approach in the future, more learners need to be well equipped and prepared for such learning, Instructors need to upgrade their learning content and learning method more online “friendly. Learner’s confidence comes from being comfortable with the knowledge they received. This confidence with then gives a sense of satisfaction to the learners.

5.5. Suggestion for Future Research

It is suggested that future research look into more factors that hinders and encourage online learning among learners. Future studies could also look at whether there is a relationship between online / application skills and online earning satisfaction. In addition to that, researchers could also look at whether age groups, status of learner (part time or full time) and even types of courses influence perceived online satisfaction.

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