

LEARNING MODE: FACE TO FACE VS ONLINE; PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract: Sri Lanka has always been a country with a comparatively high literacy rate. The Government of Sri Lanka has always made a great effort to provide high quality education at all levels to its citizens. However, compared to other developed countries of the world the mode of education delivery remained unchanged until recently. It continued to be the age-old face-to-face method. The Covid 19 pandemic made it difficult for students to attend schools. So, the face-to-face mode of education delivery had to change. This pushed the country towards the online mode of education delivery. However, it faces several challenges, and its success depends on a number of factors. This study aims to analyse perceptions of students studying in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in Sri Lanka on Online Learning Vs Face-to-Face Learning. Data for this study was randomly collected from 500 numbers of current students at Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in the Western Province, Sri Lanka. A questionnaire was administered. The questions were categorized according to the conceptual framework developed based on the literature review. The data was analysed using computer-based software packages. The results of this study can be helpful to Sri Lankan Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in choosing the mode of delivery of their courses/programmes.

Keywords: Online Learning, Face-to-Face Learning, Education Delivery Mode, Students' Perception,

I. INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka has had a long history of education which runs back to several thousands of years. Currently Sri Lanka has a literacy rate of 92%, the highest in South Asian countries as well as one of the highest in Asia (MOE, 2021). In Sri Lanka there are government controlled as well as private higher educational institutes. There are 17 National Universities and 20 Postgraduate Institutes under the purview of University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka, which are controlled by the government. There are approximately 42 higher educational institutes controlled by the private sector (UGC, 2021).

In achieving sustainable development in a country, the education system plays an important role. The successful delivery of education relies heavily on its delivery mode.

Until recently up to the time where the world including Sri Lanka was hit by the COVID 19 pandemic, all the government controlled higher education institutes in Sri Lanka were using the face-to-face method as the sole delivery mode. Some of the private higher educational institutes used a very limited online mode or blended modes in education delivery. But after the spread of COVID 19 pandemic the situation changed. During the COVID 19 outbreak the temporary closure of schools, universities, and other educational institutions has forced over 91% of students worldwide, about 1.6 billion, to remain indoors, unable to attend their studies as usual (UNICEF, 2020). According to UNESCO, by the end of April 2020, 186 countries implemented nationwide closures, affecting about 73.8% of the total enrolled learners (UNESCO, 2020). During the period many educational institutes around the world including Sri Lanka has changed their education delivery mode to online in order to provide education without disruption.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As defined by Qureshi (2019) and Miles et al. (2018) face-to-face learning method is a teaching/learning method that enhances the teaching/learning process through interpersonal contact. Face-to-face learning is a more traditional type of learning instruction, and it involves the transmission of information from the lecturer to the students (Bandara and Wijekularathna, 2017). On the other hand, E-learning, also referred to as online learning or electronic learning, is the acquisition of knowledge which takes place through electronic technologies and media. E-learning is defined as "learning that is enabled electronically" (Abbad et. al. 2009). Typically, e-learning is conducted on the Internet, where students can access their learning materials online at any place and time. The term e-learning has been widely used in education since the mid-90s and different definitions have been given by researchers. Some researchers view e-learning as the delivery of teaching materials via electronic media, such as internet, intranet, extranet, satellite broadcast, audio/video tape, interactive TV, and CD-ROM (Engelbrecht, 2005). Others see e-learning as internet-based learning which utilizes web-based communication, collaboration, knowledge transfer, and training to add value to individuals and to organizations they work within (Kelly & Bauer, 2004). Currently in the global

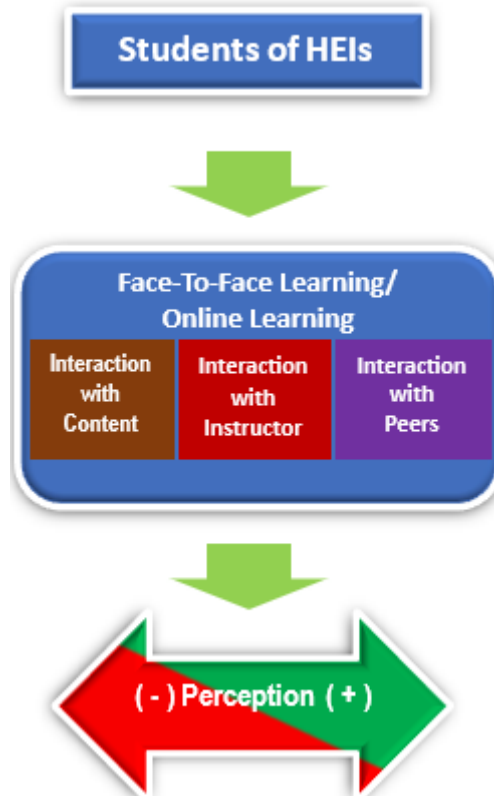
context, several types of e-learning tools are used which include Moodle, online conferencing tools, online chat tools, messaging tools, wiki, forum posts, community platforms, etc. The tool which can be used in Sri Lankan higher educational institutes depend on a number of factors which include financial capabilities of both the institute and the respective students of that institute. Convenience and flexibility of online learning fosters continuous learning opportunities, which is particularly important for those who have competing family priorities. (Dutton, Dutton & Perry, 2002). The millennial learners, having used technology from an early age, have greater ease navigating and applying technological tools. (Cole, Shelley & Swartz, 2014). Some researchers argue that the success of the learning mode mainly depends on the interaction of students with the key components of learning. The ways of interaction experienced by students in an online learning setting is significantly different from those experienced in face-to-face setting. In an online setting the interactions with the instructor and peers are mostly text based, and they usually occur through discussion boards, emails, and chat rooms (Reisetter, Lorelee, & Korsuka, 2007). The success of online learning experience is largely attributed to embedding of this “interactive dimension” (Reisetter, Lorelee & Korsuka, 2007). Kirmizi (2015), states that the online interaction of

students occurs when the students interact with course content and with instructors and peers. Kirmizi argues that if online learning tasks are well designed it would enhance greater interaction of students with the instructors, peers and the course content creating a proactive rather than passive participation of students. On the other hand, if lecture slides that are simply posted on a web page, otherwise useful in a traditional classroom, do not encourage engagement and interactive communication (Grosso, Teresa & Grosso, 2012).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted in the Western Province in Sri Lanka taking a sample of randomly selected 500 nos. of current students in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). Based on the past experience and the literature review the researcher has developed a conceptual framework. A questionnaire has been developed based on the information gathered from the literature review. 5-point Likert scale was used. To collect demographic data of the students, several questions were included in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed in English and was distributed electronically.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model





Three main categories of interactions were identified.

Namely,

- A. Interaction with the Content
- B. Interaction with the Instructor
- C. Interaction with the Peers

Among the three main categories several subcategories were created to obtain responses from the sample of students.

- A. Interaction with the Content
 - a. Class notes/Lessons
 - b. Assignments/Projects
 - c. Quizzers/Tests
 - d. Opportunity to apply critical thinking skills
 - e. Opportunity to apply problem solving skills
- B. Interaction with the Instructor
 - a. Active participation of the teacher
 - b. Individual attention given by the teacher
 - c. Prompt feedback offered by the teacher
 - d. Facilitated communication by the teacher
 - e. Knowing students by their name
- C. Interaction with the Peers

- a. Opportunity to solve problems together with peers
- b. Opportunity to share viewpoints with colleagues
- c. Sense of community created
- d. Encouraging to discuss ideas and concepts
- e. Prompt feedback given by peers

A questionnaire was developed taking into consideration the above categories/subcategories and distributed it to the randomly selected sample of students in higher education institutes in the Western Province in Sri Lanka.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Through this research the researcher tries to compare the perception levels of face-to-face learning vs online learning of students in higher education institutes in Sri Lanka.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SAMPLE

When the sample was analyzed 58% were male students while only 42% were female students (Fig. 2).

When the age distribution of the sample was analyzed 70% of the sample was in the age group between the ages 23 to 28 years (Fig. 3).

Figure 2: Gender of the Sample



Figure 3: Age Distribution of the Sample

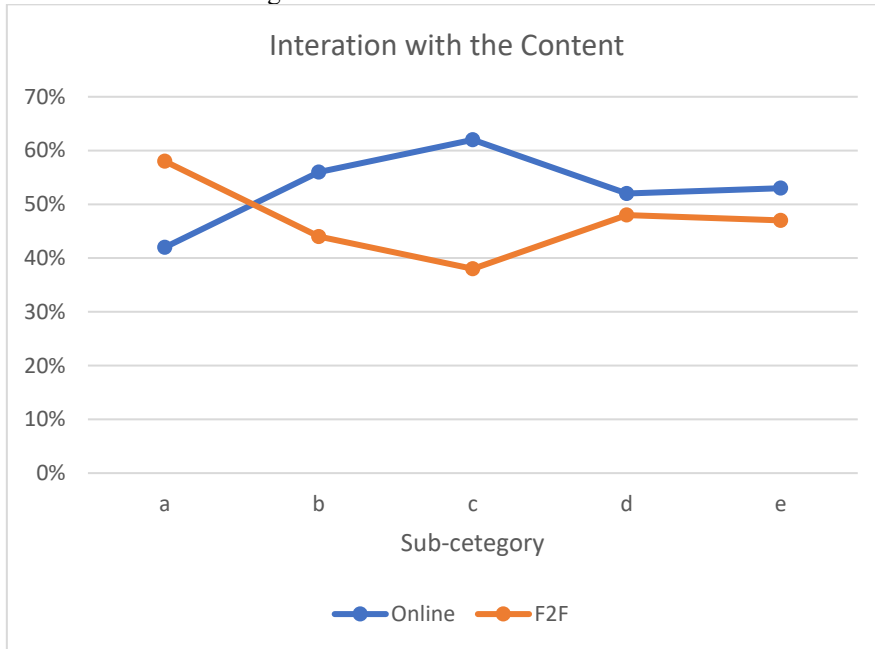
Age Range	Frequency (N)	Frequency %
17-22	96	19%
23-28	349	70%
29-34	42	8%
35-39	13	3%

The positive and negative responses received for both online and face-to-face method were analyzed for each category/sub-category using computer software.

INTERACTION WITH THE CONTENT

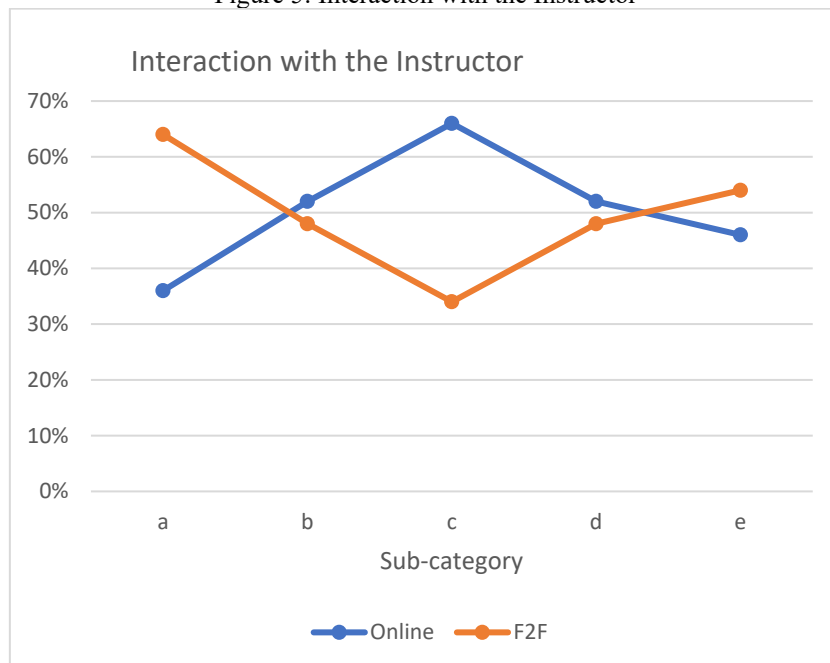
The positive responses given by the students for the Interaction with the Content is greater for the online method in four out of five questions. The positive responses given for the question related to “Class Notes/Lessons” were higher for the face-to-face method.

Figure 4: Interaction with the Content



INTERACTION WITH THE INSTRUCTOR

Figure 5: Interaction with the Instructor



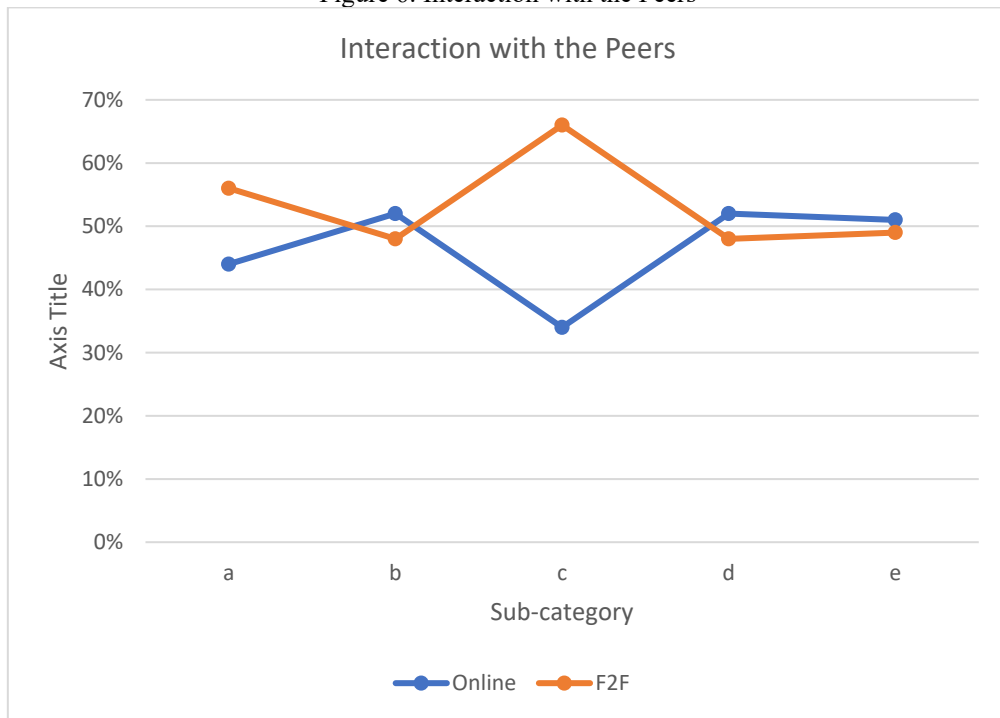


The positive responses given for Interaction with the Instructor were greater for the online method in three out of five questions. However, the responses given for questions “Individual attention given by the teacher” and “Facilitated communication by the teacher” were only slightly higher for the online method compared to the face-to-face method. The responses received for questions related to “Active participation of the teacher” and “Knowing students by their name” were higher for the face-to-face method. The responses received for question related to “Prompt feedback offered by the teacher” were very much higher for the online method.

INTERACTION WITH THE PEERS

The positive responses received for Interaction with Peers were greater for the online method in three out of five questions. However, in all three instances it was only slightly higher. The positive responses received for the question related to “Sense of community created” were very much higher for the face-to-face method compared to the online method. In addition, the positive responses received for the question related to “Opportunity to solve problems together with peers” were also higher for the face-to-face method compared to the online method.

Figure 6: Interaction with the Peers

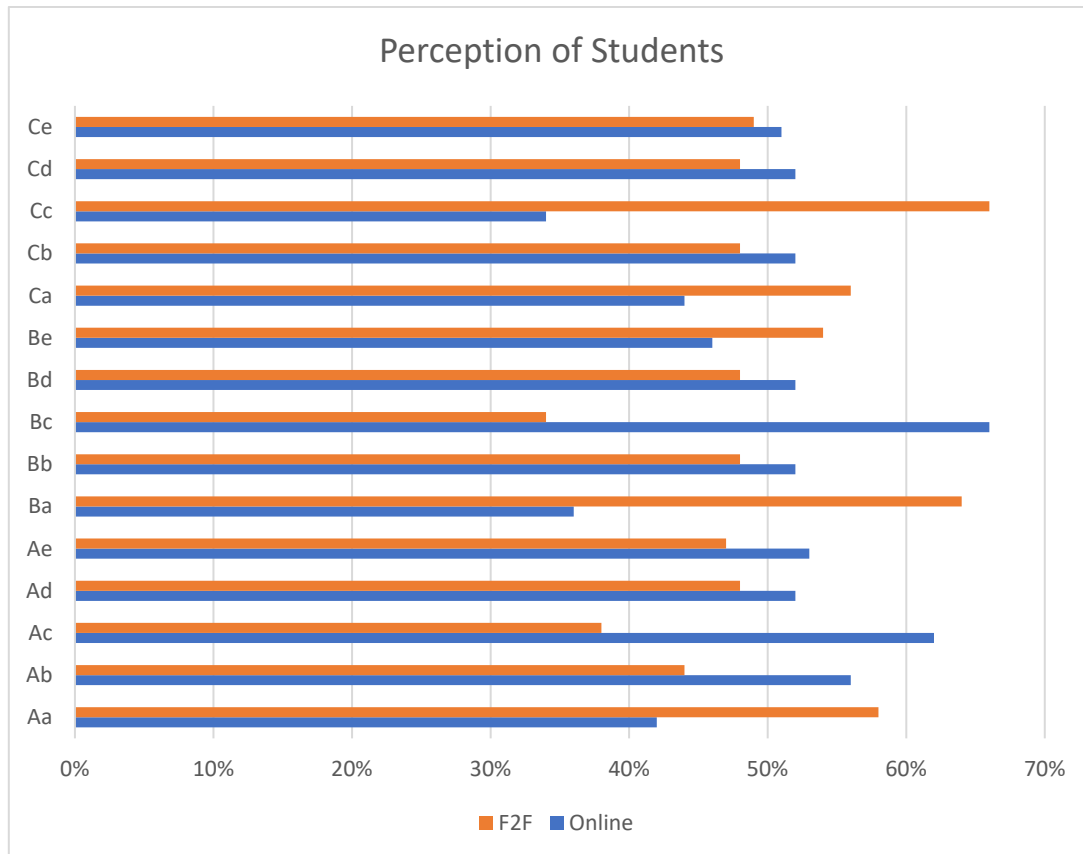


When all the sub-categories (factors) were analyzed together the most positively responded three sub-categories (factors) for the online method were;

- Prompt feedback given by the teacher
- Quizzers/Tests
- Assignments/Projects

The most positively responded three sub-categories (factors) for the face-to-face method were;

- Sense of community created
- Active participation of the teacher
- Class notes/Lessons



V. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The process of analysing the perception of online learning vs face-to-face learning is very complex. Through this research the researcher tried to identify several major factors and to compare the perception levels of these factors for online learning vs face-to-face learning. The results of this research would be useful to higher educational institutes to design the preferred mode of delivery for their programmes/courses more effectively.

According to this research the students have responded more positively to online learning than face-to-face learning in all three major categories. Out of the 15 sub-categories (factors) compared, for 10 sub-categories (factors) the students responded more positively towards the online method. Only for 5 factors out of 15 factors, students favoured the face-to-face method. They are namely, Class notes/Lessons, Active participation of the teacher, Knowing students by their name, Opportunity to solve problems together with peers and Sense of community created.

There were several limitations in the research as well.

- Responses were gathered from a sample of students from the Western Province. The Western Province includes approximately 28% of the total population in

Sri Lanka and a sample which includes students from other provinces/areas are needed for more accurate results.

- The computer literacy rate is much higher in the Western Province compared to other provinces in Sri Lanka. It may have affected the results of the research.
- The gender distribution of the sample shows that there are a higher number of males than females. The computer literacy rate among males in Sri Lanka is higher than that of females. This may have an effect on the results.
- For several questions, a considerable number of respondents have given neutral responses. This too may have had an effect on the results.

The researcher suggests further research on the subject taking into consideration the above-mentioned limitations.

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