

Student Satisfaction with Online Learning: A Comparative Study of Theoretical and Technical Courses at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Student satisfaction with online learning is still an issue in higher education institutions, especially when it comes to courses with different pedagogical approaches. Theoretical and technical courses typically offer different learning experiences, but their effectiveness in the online mode is not yet fully understood. This study was conducted to compare the level of student satisfaction between two different types of courses: a theoretical course (Intercultural Pragmatics) and a technical course (Arabic Language and E-Content Development). Both courses were offered in a blended mode (online and face-to-face) to students of the Bachelor of Arabic Language program at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia. A total of 89 students who took both courses were selected as study respondents and were asked to fill out a questionnaire that covered aspects of motivation and enjoyment of learning, understanding and structure of the course, communication, learning challenges, effectiveness of the platform, overall satisfaction, and choice of learning mode with reasons. The study findings showed that students in theoretical courses recorded significantly higher mean scores in aspects of enjoyment of learning, understanding of content, effectiveness of course structure, and interest in taking similar courses in the future. Respondents found that theoretical courses were easier to understand, structured and suited to self-directed learning styles. On the other hand, students in technical courses, although they still showed minimal and acceptable levels of satisfaction, faced challenges in terms of stress, difficulty in focusing, and the effectiveness of material delivery. Overall, theoretical courses were more successful in meeting students' needs in the context of online learning compared to technical courses. This study suggests that the structure and teaching design of technical courses should be adapted to a more interactive, practical, and student-centered approach. Flexible pedagogical adaptation based on the nature of the course is expected to help increase student satisfaction with the course.

Keywords: student satisfaction, online learning, theoretical courses, technical courses, pedagogical approaches

INTRODUCTION

Recently, online learning has become an essential approach in the higher education system, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Although online learning has opened up flexibility and access to knowledge without physical boundaries, its effectiveness is still a question among instructors and students. Among the weaknesses identified are students' difficulty concentrating during online class sessions (Dhawan, 2020), technical constraints and unstable internet access (Adnan & Anwar, 2020), as well as a lack of interaction that affects student motivation and engagement (Lassoued et al., 2020). This is because the effectiveness of online teaching not only depends on the content delivered, but also involves course design, students' digital skills, communication opportunities, and the form of assessment carried out.

In general, online courses can be categorized into several types based on the teaching approach and learning goals set. Two categories that are often compared are theory-based courses and technical skills-based courses (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Theory courses focus on aspects of conceptual mastery, cognitive skills, and intellectual discussion, while technical courses emphasize practical application criteria, technology use, and product production (Merrill, 2002). Biggs and Tang (2011) also divide courses into two main categories: theory

courses that focus on conceptual understanding, and technical or practical courses that emphasize application and practical skills. Theory courses are said to be more suitable for self-study online, while technical courses require a more interactive approach and are based on direct experience. This is supported by Falloon (2011), who states that theory courses are easily delivered asynchronously, while technical courses require face-to-face interaction between students and instructors.

However, many courses today combine both theoretical and practical elements in line with an integrated teaching approach and an emphasis on cognitive, social, and instructional interactions as outlined in the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000).

In the context of this study, two courses were selected to be studied among Bachelor's level Arabic Language students at Universiti Teknologi MARA Malaysia, namely the Intercultural Pragmatics Arabic Language and E-Content Development courses. Both courses are taught in Arabic and differ in terms of approach and content; Intercultural Pragmatics is a theory-based course that focuses on mastery of concepts and scholarly discussions, while Arabic Language and E-Content Development is a technical course that emphasizes application skills and the production of digital materials. Both courses were delivered over a 14-week period using a blended learning approach that combined online and face-to-face sessions.

There is no doubt that various issues still exist regarding student satisfaction with online learning modes, even though the implementation of online learning has become the new norm in higher education. A study by Sun et al. (2008) showed that student satisfaction is influenced by several factors, such as the quality of the learning system, interaction, and course design. However, the form and nature of the course itself also play an essential role in shaping the learning experience. Students who take theoretical courses often report higher satisfaction due to the more flexible learning format, based on reading and discussion, and suitable for a self-directed approach. On the other hand, technical courses require a higher level of practical involvement and often face technical challenges and require direct guidance that is difficult to achieve through online platforms (Liaw & Huang, 2013). A study by Alias et al. (2020) reported that students are more likely to be satisfied with online theoretical courses than technical courses, especially when technical constraints, lecturer support, and task design are not optimized.

In addition, students also face differences in terms of level of understanding, motivation, and communication effectiveness in the two types of courses. A study by Kuo et al. (2014) found that low interaction in technical courses reduced student satisfaction, compared to theoretical courses that allowed more discussion, whether face-to-face or online.

Previous studies have presented several factors that influence student satisfaction in online learning. According to Sun et al. (2008), student satisfaction depends on the quality of the technology system, interaction with lecturers, learning materials, and technical support. Moore (1993) also introduced three essential forms of interaction in online learning, namely student interaction with content, lecturers, and peers. In the context of theoretical courses, students focus on reading materials, discussions, and presentations and lectures synchronously. On the other hand, technical courses require students to master specific software and complete practical tasks such as e-content development or teaching simulations.

Several learning theories also support the understanding of the effectiveness of online learning. Cognitivist Theory (Anderson, 2004) emphasizes the importance of thought processes and how students construct knowledge through active interaction with content. Social Constructivism Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) emphasizes learning as a social process involving interaction with peers and facilitators, which is more suitable for application in discussion-based theoretical courses. Expectancy-Confirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980) is also widely used to measure student satisfaction with e-learning systems, particularly in terms of the extent to which their expectations of the course are met. Studies on student satisfaction with online learning have shown varying findings depending on the institutional context, student background, and platform used. In Malaysia, a study by Nik Ahmad Hisham et al. (2020) found that public university students showed moderate levels of satisfaction with online learning during the pandemic. Among the aspects that influenced satisfaction were internet stability, suitability of learning materials, and communication with lecturers. In another study by Azlan et al. (2020), students stated that time flexibility and accessibility of materials were the main advantages of online learning. However, the lack of social interaction and personal pressure were constraints that affected satisfaction levels.

International studies have also shown similar findings. Alqahtani and Rajkhan (2020) conducted a study on university students in Saudi Arabia. They found that although students appreciated the ease of access and time savings, they expressed dissatisfaction due to the lack of technical support and lecturer involvement. Meanwhile, Chung et al.'s (2020) study on students in Malaysia found that students' readiness for online learning also played an essential role in influencing satisfaction. Students who were technologically savvy and had adequate equipment were more likely to be more satisfied with online learning.

A study by Cicha et al. (2021) in Poland also showed that students were more satisfied when online learning activities were interactive and provided them with opportunities to discuss and receive immediate feedback. This study also emphasized that teaching approaches that were too based on video recordings reduced student engagement and provided less motivation for students. All these studies showed that student satisfaction with online learning depended not only on technology but also on pedagogy, emotional support, and the effectiveness of communication between students and lecturers.

A study by Bolliger and Wasilik (2009) among distance learners found that the main factors influencing student satisfaction with online learning included flexibility, instructor support, and quality interaction. Liaw and Huang (2013) also showed that students' attitudes towards learning technology can influence their level of engagement and satisfaction. They supported the importance of technical courses with guidance and practical exercises.

Lee (2014) also emphasized that course design that is responsive to student needs is a factor in satisfaction, especially among students taking project-based or assignment-based courses. A study by Kuo et al. (2014) also stated that the effectiveness of student-lecturer and student-peer communication has a high correlation with satisfaction in online courses. Finally, a local study by Alias et al. (2020) showed that theoretical courses receive higher satisfaction than technical courses when conducted online, due to logistical and technical challenges and lack of direct support.

Critically, despite various studies discussing the effectiveness of online learning, there is still a significant gap in understanding the differences in student experiences between theoretical and technical courses. Therefore, this study is essential to contribute to existing literature by examining two courses with different approaches in the context of Arabic Language students at UiTM. At UiTM, although both Intercultural Pragmatics and Arabic Language and E-Content Development courses are offered in a mixed mode, namely face-to-face and online, to date, there has been no previous study that compares explicitly student satisfaction levels with both in the context of the Arabic Language program. Therefore, there is a need to conduct empirical research that can provide a more detailed examination of the level of student satisfaction and the factors that contribute to it for both types of courses. This study can not only give feedback to academic management and lecturers, but also contribute to the production of best practices in the design and implementation of more effective learning.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative approach in the form of a questionnaire for data collection. Purposive sampling was used to ensure the involvement of students who had direct experience in taking both courses online, namely Intercultural Pragmatics (theoretical course) and Arabic Language and E-Content Development (technical course). A total of 89 students of the Bachelor of Arabic Language at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) who had taken both classes in the same semester, online and face-to-face, were selected as the study sample. The instrument of this study consisted of a questionnaire that included six sections: (i) motivation and enjoyment of learning, (ii) level of student understanding, (iii) communication between students, lecturers and peers, (iv) challenges/burdens/difficulties, (v) effectiveness of the platform and learning materials used, and (vi) overall satisfaction. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the level of student agreement with each statement. In addition, two open-ended questions were provided to obtain qualitative feedback on student preferences for teaching modes for both courses.

To assess the reliability of the questionnaire instrument, Cronbach's Alpha analysis was conducted separately on two sets of items representing the two types of courses studied. The results of the analysis showed that Cronbach's Alpha value for the Intercultural Pragmatics (Arabic Language) course item was 0.917, while the value for the Arabic Language and E-Content Development course was 0.931. Both values exceeded the threshold of ≥ 0.9 ,

which is usually interpreted as a very high level of reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Therefore, this instrument is considered to have strong internal consistency and is suitable for use in measuring the construct of student satisfaction with online teaching in the context of the two types of courses.

Data collection in this study was conducted online using a questionnaire via the Google Forms platform. The questionnaire contained items designed based on constructs related to student satisfaction with online teaching. Links to the questionnaire were distributed to study respondents via the WhatsApp application, which is the main communication channel used by students and lecturers in their respective course groups. This method was chosen because it is easy to access, saves time, and allows students to provide feedback flexibly and promptly. Students were also informed that participation was voluntary and that the data provided would be confidential and used for academic purposes only.

The data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical approaches. Descriptive statistics will be used to see the frequency distribution and percentage for each questionnaire item, especially regarding the level of student satisfaction with the course followed. In addition, inferential statistical analysis was also conducted using a t-test (independent samples t-test) to determine whether there was a significant difference in assessing the level of satisfaction between the two groups of students who followed a theory-based course and a technical course. For open-ended questions that required students to give reasons for choosing their preferred learning mode, thematic analysis methods were also used to identify the main themes that emerged behind the justifications given.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following are the findings in this study based on the satisfaction level components of the Intercultural Pragmatics (Arabic Language) and Arabic Language and E-Content Development courses.

Level of satisfaction with the aspects of motivation and enjoyment of learning

The results of the analysis showed that out of the five items studied, three items recorded significant mean differences between the two courses, namely Intercultural Pragmatics (Arabic Language) and Arabic Language and E-Content Development. Students in the first course showed higher levels of enjoyment, interest in the topic, and ability to manage online learning. However, two items, namely self-motivation to learn and active involvement in activities, did not show significant differences, reflecting almost similar levels in these aspects between the two groups of students.

Table 1: Level of satisfaction with motivation and enjoyment of learning

Question Pairs	Mean A (Intercultural Pragmatics (Arabic Language))	Mean B (Arabic Language and E-Content Development)	T-Statistic	p-Value	Significant
1. I enjoy taking this course online.	3.69	2.96	4.33	0.00003	Yes
2. I am interested in following the topics taught in this course online.	3.618	3.1461	4.9157	0.0	Yes
3. I am very motivated to study independently in this online course.	3.22	2.87	1.89	0.06060	No
4. I can manage my learning well online	3.55	3.15	2.56	0.01122	Yes
5. I actively participate in this course's activities while studying online.	3.56	3.34	1.53	0.12876	No

Level of satisfaction with aspects of course understanding and structure

All five items in this section showed significant differences, with higher mean scores recorded by students in the Intercultural Pragmatics course. These included understanding of course content, application of knowledge in authentic contexts, understanding of learning materials, the staged delivery structure that aids learning, and the effectiveness of assessment in measuring student understanding. These findings indicate the effectiveness of the pedagogy and design of the Intercultural Pragmatics course in delivering content in a structured and easy-to-understand manner.

Table 2: Level of satisfaction with aspects of course understanding and structure

Question Pairs	Mean A (Intercultural Pragmatics (Arabic Language))	Mean B (Arabic Language and E-Content Development)	T-Statistic	p-Value	Significant
6. I understand the content of this course well through online learning.	3.60	3.24	2.36	0.01927	Yes
7. I can apply the knowledge I have learned in real situations through on-the-job learning.	3.65	3.33	2.19	0.03001	Yes
8. Learning materials delivered online are easy to understand.	3.71	3.33	2.64	0.00903	Yes
9. The structure of this course, which is conducted online, helps me build knowledge gradually.	3.5955	3.3258	3.5369	0.0006	Yes
10. The online assessments/ tests/assignments in this course help me measure my understanding.	3.85	3.51	2.85	0.00496	Yes

Level of satisfaction with aspects of communication between students, lecturers and peers

In terms of communication, only two of the five items showed significant differences. Students in the Intercultural Pragmatics course reported that they found it easier to communicate with the lecturer when facing problems and received more constructive feedback. The other three items, such as lecturer clarity, interaction with peers, and overall satisfaction with communication, showed no significant differences, suggesting that communication occurred almost similarly in both courses.

Table 3: Level of satisfaction with aspects of communication between students, lecturers and peers

Question Pairs	Mean A (Intercultural Pragmatics (Arabic Language))	Mean B (Arabic Language and E-Content Development)	T-Statistic	p-Value	Significant
11. Lecturers explain course content clearly through online teaching.	4.08	3.93	1.13	0.25852	No
12. I can easily communicate with lecturers when I encounter problems during online learning.	3.7865	3.573	2.647	0.0096	Yes

13. I received constructive feedback from lecturers during online learning.	3.90	3.57	2.36	0.01960	Yes
14. I was able to interact well with my classmates while taking this course online.	3.79	3.78	0.09	0.93176	No
15. Overall, I am satisfied with the communication process that occurred throughout taking this course online.	3.73	3.63	0.67	0.50359	No

Level of satisfaction with the aspects of challenges, burdens and difficulties

This section shows that two out of five items are significant, where students in the Arabic Language and E-Content Development course reported higher stress and difficulty focusing.

However, technical problems, internet access, and environmental disturbances did not show significant differences, indicating that technical and environmental challenges were faced relatively equally in both courses.

Table 4: Level of satisfaction with the aspects of challenges, burdens and difficulties

Question Pairs	Mean A (Intercultural Pragmatics (Arabic Language))	Mean B (Arabic Language and E-Content Development)	T-Statistic	p-Value	Significant
16. I am facing technical problems while taking this online course.	3.22	3.48	-1.59	0.11435	No
17. I have stable internet access during this course.	3.75	3.54	1.46	0.14514	No
18. There were many interruptions when I took this course online.	3.3596	3.4944	-1.7521	0.0832	No
19. I feel more stressed while taking this course online than when taking it face-to-face.	3.1461	3.573	-4.0331	0.0001	No
20. I have difficulty focusing during online sessions.	3.3708	3.6067	-2.7893	0.0065	Yes

Level of satisfaction with aspects of the effectiveness of the platform and learning materials used

Four out of five items in this section showed a significant difference in favor of the Intercultural Pragmatics course. Students of this course reported easier access to the learning platform, compatibility of materials with devices, ease of use, and ease of learning through the platform.

Only one item about technical interruptions did not show a significant difference. This finding indicates that the technical design of the Intercultural Pragmatics course is more user-friendly and efficient.

Table 5: Level of satisfaction with aspects of the effectiveness of the platform and learning materials used

Question Pairs	Mean A (Intercultural Pragmatics (Arabic Language))	Mean B (Arabic Language and E-Content Development)	T-Statistic	p-Value	Significant
21. The learning platforms used in this course (Google Meet, Zoom etc.) are easily accessible.	4.07	3.56	3.84	0.00017	Yes
22. The software/ learning materials used are compatible with my device	4.02	3.49	3.81	0.00019	Yes
23. I am comfortable using the applications /materials used in this course.	3.93	3.57	2.62	0.00953	Yes
24. I was able to take this course without major technical disruptions.	3.85	3.61	1.83	0.06840	No
25. This course platform (Google Meet, Zoom, Whatsapp, Telegram etc) makes it easier for me to learn.	3.98	3.52	3.47	0.00066	Yes

Overall Satisfaction Level

The analysis showed that four out of five items in this section were significant with students of the Intercultural Pragmatics course showing higher levels of satisfaction with the effectiveness of the delivery, the fulfillment of learning objectives, and the interest in taking such courses in the future.

Only one item related to overall satisfaction did not show a significant difference, indicating that both courses still met the minimum level of satisfaction despite the differences in the advantages of the Intercultural Pragmatics course.

Table 6: Overall Satisfaction Level

Question Pairs	Mean A (Intercultural Pragmatics (Arabic Language))	Mean B (Arabic Language and E-Content Development)	T-Statistic	p-Value	Significant
26. I am satisfied with the overall learning experience of taking this course online.	3.75	3.70	0.39	0.69418	No
27. This course, which is done online, can meet the learning objectives.	3.75	3.44	2.28	0.02351	Yes
28. This online course is delivered effectively.	3.7416	3.3708	4.2096	0.0001	Yes

29. I would like to take a course like this online in the future.	3.6517	3.1461	4.3825	0.0	Yes
30. I believe I can master this course well online.	3.6067	3.2809	3.6756	0.0004	Yes

It can be seen from the results above that, out of the 30 items stated, 20 items showed a significant difference in student satisfaction levels between the two courses. Ten items reported no significant difference in satisfaction between the two courses. The findings of this study clearly show that students who took theoretical courses, such as Intercultural Pragmatics (Arabic Language), recorded a higher level of satisfaction than students in technical courses such as Arabic Language and E-Content Development.

Significantly higher mean scores were recorded in the aspects of enjoyment, content understanding, the effectiveness of the course structure, and interest in taking such courses. Students in theoretical courses adapted more easily to online teaching, while students in technical courses faced more challenges in focusing and applying the material. Although the basic level of satisfaction was still achieved in technical courses, constraints such as the need for practical training and interactivity that were difficult to deliver online affected the learning experience.

However, aspects such as communication with lecturers and peer interaction showed almost equal satisfaction in both courses. Overall, theoretical courses met student expectations better in terms of content and delivery, while technical courses required a more practical and student-centered approach to increase satisfaction.

Choice of learning mode

Table 7 presents the results on students' preferred mode of learning for both courses.

Implementation mode	Intercultural Pragmatics (n)	Intercultural Pragmatics (%)	E-Content Development (n)	E-Content Development (%)
100% online	5	5.62	6	6.74
100% face to face	15	16.85	39	43.82
30% online, 70% face to face	27	30.34	28	31.46
50% online, 50% face to face	30	33.71	9	10.11
80% online, 20% face to face	12	13.48	7	7.87
	89	100	89	100

The majority of students in the Intercultural Pragmatics course chose a balanced blended learning mode, which was 50% online and 50% face-to-face (33.71%). This was followed by a choice of 30% online and 70% face-to-face (30.34%), indicating that students preferred a blended mode with more physical sessions. This choice may be influenced by the need for more effective face-to-face interaction and discussion in understanding the course content, which is both theoretical and pragmatic. The third highest choice was 100% face-to-face (16.85%), indicating that some students still preferred the traditional method without an online element. Meanwhile, 80% online and 20% face-to-face (13.48%) was less preferred, and 100% online mode (5.62%) was the lowest choice. This reflected that students in this course were less comfortable with fully online learning and preferred blended or face-to-face methods for a deeper understanding.

For the E-Content Development course, the top choice of students was 100% face-to-face, with the highest percentage of 43.82%, indicating a high need for direct guidance, likely due to the technical nature of the course content and its practical skills requirements. The second most popular mode was 30% online and 70% face-to-face (31.46%), reflecting that students still require significant physical presence in the learning process.

On the other hand, 50% online and 50% face-to-face only recorded 10.11%, indicating that a balanced blend mode was less prevalent in this course. The 80% online and 20% face-to-face modes (7.87%) and 100% online

(6.74%) also recorded low percentages. Overall, students in this course were more likely to choose modes that emphasized high physical presence compared to online learning. For the selection of each mode, students were also asked to give reasons. Based on the theme analysis, the researcher was able to formulate five aspects that were the reasons for the students' selection. Here are the 5 aspects:

Understanding / Clarity

Students from both courses chose the face-to-face or mixed mode because they found it easier to understand the course content when they could interact directly. The understanding factor is closely related to the method of delivery, clarity of voice, visuals, as well as the opportunity to ask questions and get immediate clarification. All of this is easier to achieve face-to-face.

Sample of students' feedback (Intercultural Pragmatics): a) "I understand better what is taught face-to-face than online because I can interact directly and get quick responses from lecturers and friends." * Choice: 30% online 70% face-to-face b) "When face-to-face, I can understand and focus better than online." * Choice: 100% face-to-face	Sample of students' feedback (E-Content Development): a) Face-to-face is more understandable than online * Choice: 30% online 70% face-to-face b) "Really, learning this IT topic is better face-to-face because I understand it better and it is easier to follow all the steps taught by the lecturer." * Choice: 100% face-to-face
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Interaction / Communication

E-Content Development students showed a higher need for direct interaction with lecturers, as the course is more technical. Students need interaction to ask questions, share opinions, or get direct feedback, and they feel more limited in online classes.

Sample of students' feedback (Intercultural Pragmatics): a) "Because of studying face-to-face, I can participate 100%." *Option: 100% face-to-face b) "Because it is difficult for students to ask questions in class during online time." *Option: 30% online 70% face-to-face	Sample of students' feedback (E-Content Development): a) It is easier to communicate with lecturers and friends." * Choice: 100% face-to-face b) "Because I can ask directly what I don't understand." * Choice: 30% online 70% face-to-face
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Subject/Experience Suitability

Some students choose a mode based on the suitability of the course itself, such as the abstract or technical nature of the course. Subjects that are theoretical or applied in nature are considered unsuitable for teaching entirely online as they require explanation, discussion, or hands-on practice.

Sample of students' feedback (Intercultural Pragmatics): a) "I think half online and half face-to-face learning is very suitable because I can still study at my own pace, but at the same time, I also need face-to-face sessions to practice communication and get direct explanations.." * Options: 50% online 50% face-to-face b) "because the notes provided are very helpful." * Options: 30% online 70% face-to-face	Sample of students' feedback (E-Content Development): a) "It's nice for the lecturer to correct what's wrong." * Choice: 30% online 70% face-to-face b) "because this subject is tough." * Choice: 100% face-to-face
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Flexibility / Time

A small number of students choose entirely online or blended learning to accommodate their time, location, and technical issues. While this theme is not the most dominant, it is still important for students with financial constraints, location, or flexibility needs.

Sample of students' feedback (Intercultural Pragmatics): a) "because it makes it easier for foreign students to always attend classes, especially during the rainy season." * Choice: 30% online 70% face-to-face b) "Because it saves time, money on car fuel." * Choice: 100% online	Sample of students' feedback (E-Content Development): a) "If there is a problem, you can ask the lecturer directly." * Option: 100% face-to-face b) "It is nice to consult with the professor." * Option: 100% online
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Technical / Practical

Some students mentioned that the subject (especially E-Content) requires practical skills, which are more effectively done face-to-face. Technical subjects such as E-Content Development require self-study, step-by-step demonstrations, and practice with devices/software.

Sample of students' feedback (Intercultural Pragmatics): "When I am in class, I am more focused than when I am at home, but this subject does not require practical." * Choices: 50% online, 50% face-to-face	Sample of students' feedback (E-Content Development): a) "Because it is more practical." * Optional: 100% face-to-face b) "Requires practical." * Optional: 30% online, 70% face-to-face
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The sample student responses above show that the choice of learning mode among students is strongly influenced by factors such as pedagogical needs and compelling learning experiences. Key factors such as comprehension, interaction, and subject suitability play an essential role in shaping students' preference for face-to-face or blended modes. Students feel that physical learning allows them to understand the content better, interact directly, and adapt to the course requirements, whether theoretical or technical. In addition, ancillary factors such as time flexibility and technical aspects are also taken into account, especially among students who face location constraints or study subjects that require practical training. Overall, these findings emphasize that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to choosing a learning mode; instead, a combination of several factors, including clarity of delivery, ease of interaction, and course content requirements, should be considered to ensure the effectiveness of the learning process.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the level of student satisfaction with the two courses differed, in line with the quantitative and thematic findings, which showed that the level of acceptance of online learning varied according to the nature of the course. The Intercultural Pragmatics course recorded higher levels of satisfaction, with students indicating comfort with online learning, good understanding of the content, and willingness to take similar courses in the future. In contrast, students in the Arabic Language and E-Content Development course reported lower levels of satisfaction due to challenges such as difficulty maintaining focus, constraints in understanding technical content, and a greater need for direct guidance from lecturers.

This difference was primarily influenced by the nature of the course. Theoretical courses such as Intercultural Pragmatics are more suitable for online delivery because they involve conceptual learning and discussion-based

activities that students can manage independently. In contrast, technical courses such as E-Content Development require demonstrations, hands-on practice, immediate feedback, and direct interaction, making them less suitable for fully online instruction. Therefore, teaching strategies should be designed according to the complexity of course content and the level of interaction required to support effective learning.

In terms of preferred delivery mode, students in the Intercultural Pragmatics course generally favoured blended learning, particularly a 50% online–50% face-to-face or a 30% online–70% face-to-face format, reflecting their preference for flexibility while maintaining opportunities for direct interaction. Conversely, almost half of the students enrolled in the E-Content Development course preferred 100% face-to-face learning, highlighting their reliance on lecturer guidance and practical classroom activities for developing technical competencies.

The thematic findings further reinforced the quantitative results. Understanding, interaction, communication, and subject relevance emerged as the dominant themes influencing students' preferences. Students expressed greater confidence when they were able to ask questions directly, receive immediate feedback, and observe demonstrations during the learning process. Although flexibility in terms of time and location remains a key advantage of online learning, it alone is insufficient to ensure student satisfaction if instructional delivery and lecturer support do not adequately meet students' learning needs.

These findings suggest that instructional design should be strategically adapted according to the characteristics of the course and students' learning requirements. For technical courses, a blended learning approach that integrates interactive, practical, collaborative, and visual learning activities is recommended. The incorporation of simulations, video tutorials, self-paced learning modules, and intelligent learning support platforms may enhance students' learning experiences and improve instructional effectiveness. In addition, lecturers should be continuously equipped with digital pedagogical competencies to ensure the effective delivery of technical content in online and blended learning environments.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted among students from a single academic programme at one public university, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other disciplines, institutions, and educational settings. Second, the findings relied primarily on students' self-reported questionnaire responses, reflecting their perceptions and experiences rather than objective measures of learning effectiveness or academic achievement. Although the inclusion of open-ended responses enriched the interpretation of the findings, employing more comprehensive qualitative methods such as interviews or focus group discussions could provide deeper insights into the underlying factors shaping students' satisfaction with different modes of online learning.

Finally, this study highlights the importance of aligning instructional approaches with the nature of course content and students' learning needs when implementing online or blended learning. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples across multiple universities to improve the reliability and generalisability of the findings. Researchers are also encouraged to adopt mixed methods approaches by combining surveys with interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, or learning analytics to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of students' online learning experiences. Furthermore, future studies should investigate the influence of lecturers' digital pedagogical competencies, instructional design, assessment practices, and technology accessibility on student satisfaction and learning outcomes across different types of courses.

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