

# Chapter 16

## Student Preferences After Taking Online, Face-to- Face, and Hybrid Courses on Educational Technology: Findings and Practical Recommendations

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### **ABSTRACT**

*A survey-based study aimed at improving the course of educational technology was conducted with undergraduate students from 2018 through 2020. The study is based on an online survey. The results suggest that there is no “one-size-fits-all” mode of teaching; a considerable fraction of responses suggest a preference for online instruction, while the responses demanding face-to-face assistance are less numerous. The largest proportion of choices suggest demand for the blend of both. The study also looked at age and gender as factors influencing the preference of a teaching mode. Teacher presence in online/hybrid courses was found critical. Recommendations for designing an online course based on the study are offered.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The issues of online, face-to-face and hybrid modes of teaching have been actively discussed since early attempts to teach online. The online communication is rapidly becoming a normal part of university curricula. There is little reason to believe that information and communication technologies will not be the defining transformative innovation for higher education in the 21st century (Bosch, 2016). The advantages/disadvantages of online communication versus traditional face-to-face teaching and the related issues have been widely researched and discussed (Bosch, 2016; Boyd, 2004; Brocato et al., 2015;

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D'Errico et al., 2018; Egan & Akdere, 2004; Miranda, 2020; Mohd Feham et al., 2014; Mohr & Mohr, 2017; Nicholas, 2020; Sanz-Sánchez et al., 2017). Tellakat et al., 2019). The pandemic of COVID-19 has made this discussion especially significant with millions of students having to take classes remotely. The multiple recent studies looked at different aspects of e-learning amidst the pandemics: from its gender-related impact (Shahzad et al., 2020; McKenzie, 2020) to the stress caused by it (Dennon, 2020).

Researchers in this field report negative and stressful experience on the part of the students (Sindiani et al., 2020; John, 2020).

In the conditions of massive transition from face-to-face communication best practices and useful practical suggestions on the teaching strategies have become urgently necessary. However, the factors that may affect the character of online communication may be numerous including age, subjects of on-line educational communication, level of education (community college, higher education, professional development), pedagogy involved, etc., which limits the generalizability of the findings (US Department of Education 2010).

While this study is based on the results of the surveys administered largely during the semesters prior to the measures caused by the pandemic (Fall 2018 through Spring 2020), the results may suggest certain patterns important to consider in teaching remotely. The study also includes some additional observations made by the authors and findings offered by other authors in the research on the issue. The practical recommendations based on the study and the pertinent literature may appear useful for university instructors.

## **SETTING AND DATA COLLECTION**

The data were collected from the students taking a class of technology applications in school education. The students were enrolled in a teacher-preparation program at a mid-size university in the south. There have been online, face-to-face and hybrid sections of the same class with identical content; however, in the face-to-face sections most explanations were offered “live” by the instructor, all discussions and project presentations were performed in class. In the hybrid sections, only the most critical explanations were offered in class while other instructions and discussions were held online. No synchronous online communication was executed during the period in questions. The students were offered a choice between synchronous and asynchronous sessions two times during semesters. No student opted for synchronous online communication (using Zoom). By the end of each semester the students were offered to participate in the survey. The survey was anonymous, voluntary and approved by the university’s IRB committee. The students signed a consent form acknowledging anonymity and confidentiality of the survey and its results. The validated survey was aimed at studying the students’ satisfaction of the course and explore suggestions how to improve it.

The survey also contained a number of questions to determine student demographics (age, gender, GPA). Three questions were created to specifically illicit student preference of the mode of teaching: face-to-face, online or hybrid. The respondents were encouraged to comment on the survey questions to illicit student choices of the three modes of teaching and learning. The survey questions that follow were subsequently analyzed through descriptive analysis and qualitative coding and thematic procedures.

The survey was not designed specifically to determine student preferences in the modes of instruction (online, face-to-face, hybrid), but the pertinent questions generated data that may suggest certain trends. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or

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