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Students' Exposure and Perception of Blended Learning Approaches in the Post COVID-19 Higher Education System

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Background: The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a shift in higher education towards blended learning, combining online and in-person instruction. Blended learning offers flexibility, personalized experiences, and technological integration. Understanding students' perceptions of this approach is crucial for optimizing learning outcomes and student satisfaction in the post-COVID higher education system.

Objectives: To assess the correlation between students' exposure and perception of blended learning approaches in the post-COVID higher education system

Methods: A descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted among private and state university students in the Western Province. A self-administered questionnaire adapted from a modified version of the Web-based Learning Environment Instrument (WEBLEI) was distributed among the participants to assess their perceptions of blended learning. The data acquired under the WEBLEI scales (Access, Interaction, Response and Results) were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0 to interpret significant correlations between exposure, evaluated quantitatively by the Access-Interaction scales and perception, evaluated quantitatively by the Response-Results scales of the modified WEBLEI. Significant correlations were identified using a cut-off $p<0.05$.

Results: A total of 322 students participated in the study, with a response rate of 97.2%, and majority of the respondents were females (80.5%). The mean(±SD) of 3.45(±0.74), 3.67(±0.638), 3.39(±0.61), and 3.66(±0.65) were obtained for the Access, Interaction, Response, and Results scales respectively. In terms of access, 54% of students agreed on the feasibility and availability of online material in suitable locations, with 51% affirming flexibility in time management. The requirement for self-discipline and autonomy for inquiries was strongly supported by the Interaction scale with mean(±SD) 4.01(±0.92) and 3.86(±0.96) respectively. Response scale expressed satisfaction with the learning environment, but 33.2% had concerns about substituting on-campus classes and 31.6% with potential boredom. For the Results scale, students generally agreed on content clarity and its connection to campus courses with 39% disagreeing upon substituting printed references to online resources. The study revealed a positive perception towards blended learning (mean±SD; 3.559±0.62). Pearson correlation suggest a strong positive association (r=0.673) between students' exposure to blended learning and their perception, statistically significant at 0.01 level ($p\leq0.000$).

Conclusions: The study indicated a robust relationship between students' exposure and their positive perception of blended learning, with high agreement on convenient access and positive interactions to meet student satisfaction with minor concerns. These findings emphasize the need to address these challenges and enhance the design of blended learning approaches in higher education.

Keywords: *Blended learning, Higher education, Perception, Post-COVID, Student well-being*