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Online Learning in the New-normal: Perspective of Undergraduates of Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, University of Ruhuna

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Background: Most of Sri Lankan universities started practicing online education, with the emergence of COVID-19. Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, University of Ruhuna (FAHS, UOR) has adopted LMS and Zoom technology as online teaching platforms since mid-2020 in order to continue the education program during the pandemic.

Objectives: To assess the views of undergraduates of FAHS, UOR on lectures and practical sessions conducted via different forms of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods: Data were gathered from a convenient sample of undergraduates of FAHS, UOR during the 3rd wave of the COVID-19 epidemic. The questionnaire focused on demographic data, student satisfaction in online teaching and practical, work-based training and clinical attachments, mentoring and financial circumstances during the pandemic. The questionnaire was distributed among all the undergraduates of FAHS, UOR via a google form and voluntary respondents were included to the study. Data were analysed using SPSS version 26.0. Data on student satisfaction in online teaching and practical classes are presented in this abstract.

Results: Among the participants (n=238) 56.3% were Nursing undergraduates while Pharmacy and Medical Laboratory Sciences (MLS) were 23.9% and 19.7%, respectively. The majority of the students preferred onsite lectures (86%) and practical classes (86%) compared to online platforms. Regarding online lecturing, 73% preferred live lecturing with switched on lecturer's camera and satisfaction reduced when cameras are turned off (60%). Only 35% preferred lecture recordings without conducting a live online lecture. Health science undergraduate satisfaction on online practical classes was comparatively low; Online demonstration of practical with turned on lecturer's camera-60%, simulated laboratory method-42%, sending video recording of the practical without live demonstrations-40%. Approximately 64% of Nursing undergraduates followed by 57% of MLS and 52% of Pharmacy undergraduates were satisfied with online practical classes with turned on lecturer's camera. Around 30% of female undergraduates and 45% of male undergraduates were satisfied in video recordings.

Conclusions: Majority of students preferred the live delivery of online lectures with switched on cameras than the passive delivery. However, their preference for online practical sessions were low. These observations will be helpful to improve the quality of teaching activities conducted via online modes in future for health science undergraduates.

Keywords: COVID-19, Online learning, Onsite learning, Student satisfaction