
Undergraduates' Perception towards Online Learning During the COVID-19 Outbreak - A Study at Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna

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The nobility of online learning influence on multiple aspects particular in the higher education sector considering the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic catastrophic. The booming online learning systems have taken a headway providing a compatible solution for educators an opportunity to implement the use of technology during the lockdowns period for covering the essential course work. The responsible parties are making considerable efforts to optimally utilize the available online learning technology for continuing the process of education and diminishing the gaps that are going to result as a consequence of the current surroundings. However, the perception of the main affected party has not adequately explored yet in the existing literature, in particular with respect to the Sri Lankan context. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the perception of undergraduates of Agriculture towards online learning during the pandemic. Through an online survey consisting 334 students out of 760 purposively selected students, resulting in a response rate of 44%, the study assessed the preferences of students towards different attributes of online classrooms, perception of online learning and benefits and drawbacks students faced engaging in online learning during the pandemic. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. The study revealed that majority of the students (49%) are satisfied with online learning and they want to recommend it to others (45%) and make online learning a part of the academic curriculum in future (87%). The laptop was the first choice of device for the majority of students (56%) for online learning. Majority of the students wanted to arrange the online classes as per the schedule to the complete the semester (41 %) on weekdays (87%) during late morning (49%) from 8- 10 am {(55%, theory), (47%, practical)} with a duration of 1.5 hours (38%). However, majority of the students (41%) have faced a lack of connectivity/network issues as their main problem during the pandemic. Therefore, the study suggests to match positive attitude of students towards online learning with preferred time and device attributes while addressing the identified barriers in achieving a productive online learning environment to students in future.

Keywords: COVID-19, Online learning, Undergraduates