International Journal of
Education,
Psychology and
Counseling
(IJEPC)

eISSN: 0128-164X

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY AND COUNSELLING (IJEPC)

www.ijepc.com

GAE
GLOBAL ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ONLINE LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A SURVEY STUDY AMONG PRE-UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

Uswatun Nurrahmah Noorhassanah[1], Wardatul Akmam Din[2*], Suyansah Swanto[3], Nik Zaitun Nik Mohamed[4]

[1] Preparatory Centre for Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah
Email: uswatunnurrahmah@ums.edu.my

[2] Faculty of Pshychology and Education, Univerisiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah
Email: wardadin@ums.edu.my
Faculty of Pshychology and Education, Univerisiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah
Email: suyansah@ums.edu.my

[4] Faculty of Pshychology and Education, Univerisiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah
Email: nzaitun@ums.edu.my

* Corresponding Author

Abstract:

The Covid-19 pandemic that lasted more than a year affected the smooth running of education around the world. Starting with the closure of all schools in China in March 2019, the starting point of the Covid-19 pandemic virus was followed by the closure of all schools in many countries for long periods of time, which certainly affected teaching and learning in most countries including Malaysia. The honorouble mention includes the process of education which involves co-curriculum, physical education, and social skills. This study is a quantitative study to analyse students' perception of learning the English language using online learning throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. SPSS statistical software was used to calculate and compare the mean of each variable in online learning and face-to-face learning consisting of knowledge acquisition, skills in language learning, social skills as well as their acceptance of online learning. In this survey study, it has been indicated that although there is a slightly different mean between online learning and face-to-face learning the perception of both learning strategies is positive. It also has been indicated that students found that online learning eased the access to online materials whilst it also bounded by technical problems that they encounter during online classes as well as their own disciplinary actions that have limited their online learning.

Introduction

In the context of global exchange and knowledge exchange, the role of ICT and technology has become inevitable in order to sustain the interactive and dynamic scenario of information sharing which parallels the nature of ICT (Ammanni & Aparanjani, 2016). In fact, utilising technology in teaching and learning in the classroom as well as distance online is widely implemented. This scenario has started to rise to its peak after the Covid-19 Pandemic outbreak hits the world starting in early 2020 (Estrella, 2022). The World Organization (WHO) declared a new virus a pandemic at the end of January 2020. It was announced by Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in his opening remarks on the 10th of April 2020 during a media briefing regarding the Covid-19 outbreak.

Covid-19 was known as a global public health emergency and was first identified as a novel coronavirus disease epidemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) in January 2020, and then as a pandemic in March 2020 which was first detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China in the middle of December 2019 and declared as an epidemic in 2020, with a total of 79, 968 cases and 2873 fatalities (Guo, Cao & Hong, 2019; WHO, 2020; Chan, et. al, 2020). The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was described as 'Never before have we witnessed educational disruption on such a large scale' by UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay in 2020, which has caused the implementation of partial or complete shutdowns to prevent the spread of the virus (Demuyakor, 2022; Jan, 2022). Hence, Covid-19 is a serious case that affected all nations, which has made the education sector fully utilises technology to carry out learning activities. Students will be better shielded from the COVID-19 pandemic with online education in order to allow teaching and learning to happen without students having to leave their homes (Yahaya & Adnan, 2021).

Literature Review

Changes in Education System during Covid-19 Pandemic

Due to the spreading of the Covid-19 outbreak, not only has the administration of each country been afflicted caused by the sudden changes it also affected the political situation throughout the world and became chaotic. The declaration of Covid-19 as a pandemic and the precautions it inexorably to remain in our air for a long time may affect our everyday routine, management, freedom, and democracy will be significantly affected. Numerous researchers have written about the "new normal" that people have to endure today and, in the future, assuming that Covid-19 will remain viable for a long time (Sekkides Dalla-Vecchia, 2020). The spreading of the Covid-19 pandemic has also highly affected educational institutions, to embrace online learning in conjunction to the lockdown closure of campus (Kamal, et al., 2020). School's regular activities especially teaching, and learning could not be carried out normally and face-to-face teaching has shifted to online learning and e-learning was done fully Xia, 2020).

China was the first country to implement online learning and teaching in regard to preventing the spreading of the virus (Cai & Wang, 2020) as mentioned, the Covid-19 virus was first tracked in Hunan, China. "*School's Out, But Class's On*" is the name of the programme launched in every school in China to ensure students do not miss their school classes despite staying at home due to the outspread of the Covid-19 pandemic (Cai & Wang, 2020 & Xia, 2020). In the case of "*School's Out, But Class's On*", it was implemented to enhance students' autonomy, which required teachers and students throughout the school to employ protocol-guided learning as the carrier and online teaching platforms as the base for online teaching activities. The school resolutely and thoroughly executed the teaching concept of "learning first and then teaching," along with the way students' study autonomously during the pandemic, and developed a six-step teaching method for online learning based on the school's teaching facts (Cai & Wang, 2020 & Xia, 2020).

Online Learning in Malaysian University During Covid-19

As the Covid-19 pandemic subsides, the world has entered a challenging time of life normalcy. No one can foretell how this pandemic will affect the entire industry and the welfare of people around the world, particularly in Malaysia. On March 17, the virus claimed the life of its first victim, which was a priest from Sarawak, Malaysia. Due to the first death toll, a special meeting of ministers on the implementation of the Movement Control Order (hereafter MCO) in Bahasa Malaysia *Perintah Kawalan Pergerakkan* (PKP) the National Security Council (MKN) on 16 May 2020 approved the proposal of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) on the conduct of academic activities at the campuses of Institutions of Higher Learning (*Institusi Pendidikan Tinggi: IPT) during* and after MCO. MOHE through a press statement dated 27 May 2020 informed that all teaching and learning activities must be implemented online until 31 December 2020. All face-to-face teaching and learning activities were not allowed except for some categories of students who need to return to campus in stages to implement teaching and learning in full compliance with the Procedure Standard Operations (SOPs) set and prioritise security measures as well as social incarceration.

The spreading of this virus not only has affected the economic aspect of Malaysia, but the educational institution was also highly affected and the shift from face-to-face teaching and learning to fully online classes was a huge challenge for both teachers and students. The spreading of this virus has put all activities on hold. Education is one of the fields that are very much affected on a high scale all around the world because of the spreading of this virus (Tadesse & Mu-Luye, 2020). Almost every industry, including education, was hit by this unexpected pandemic. This pandemic has indeed caused the learning process to be traditionally delayed or disrupted in the education sector, but it has also required students to adjust to new living norms and habits that necessitate the learning process to be executed online. This situation has led to the implementation of online teaching and learning from home in order to make sure that no students are left out of their learning (Roslan, 2020).

The government was forced to implement more restrictive laws as the number of cases increased to over 500 by mid-March. This abrupt change pushed educators and students to come up with solutions and make rapid modifications in order to completely integrate technology into their curriculum, teaching, and learning. The closure of higher education institutions and schools due to the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the structure of teaching and learning. Malaysia implemented a form of teaching and learning fully online starting from the first day of MCO was implemented. Teaching and learning or in Bahasa Malaysia

Pengarajan dan Pembelajaran (hereafter PdP) a form of face-to-face classes was shifted to *Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran di Rumah* (hereafter PdPR) which is a form of teaching and learning directly from the institution to completely online Bernama, 2021).

The study will tackle students' advantages and disadvantages, and perceptions of learning English language through online learning during Covid-19 Pandemic. Students' perception of each skill such as writing, listening, reading, and speaking will be compared between online and before Covid-19 in-situ learning strategy.

Research Methodology

This study aims to investigate the advantages and disadvantages, and perceptions of studying the English language of students from Preparatory Centre for Science and Technology, University Malaysia Sabah. The objectives are as follows:

- To determine the advantages and disadvantages of online learning throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.
- To determine students' perception of learning the English language online throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire is adapted from a Polish study on students' perception of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic Polish medical students (Baczek, 2021). The questionnaire was then adapted to fit into the background of learning English language as a second language. After 2 semesters of online learning, an anonymous questionnaire was distributed to students from the Preparatory Centre of Science and Technology through google form. Students from both foundations (Foundation of Science and Foundation of Technology) filled up the questionnaire without any exclusion criteria and each student was only allowed to answer the questionnaire once.

This questionnaire has 4 parts of questions. The first part of the questionnaire is the demography part and students were also asked about their technology skills and state whether they have participated in any online course before. In the third part, students were asked to compare online and traditional classes and their ability to grasp learning objectives in terms of knowledge, skills, and ability to socialise using the Likert Scale (1= extremely ineffective, 2= ineffective, 3= natural, 4 = effective & 5 = extremely effective). In the last part of the questionnaire, students were asked to rate their acceptance of the online classroom using Likert Scale (1= extremely unenjoyable - 5 = extremely enjoyable).

Students were briefed about the objective of the questions on the questionnaire page and agreed to voluntarily participate in this study. A total of 117 students from Preparatory Centre of Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sabah participated in this study.

Statistical Analysis

The data were analysed using SPSSV28 statistical software. Advantages, disadvantages, and levels of acceptance were analysed using descriptive analysis. The one-sample test was used to compare face-to-face and online learning of English language. If the mean of the variable is more than 3.0 the perception is considered positive.

Results and Discussion

Characteristics of Respondents

The characteristics of Preparatory Centre for Science and Technology students are summarised in Table 1. Among 117 students who answered the questionnaire 88 (75%), students were females and 29 (25%) were males and all students and all students were in age of 18-20 years old. Of 177 students a large number of 109 (93%) students were from the Foundation of Science and 8 (7%) from the Foundation of Technology.

Table 1 Characteristics of The Population of The Study (n=117)

Variables	n(%)
Gender	
Male	29 (25%)
Female	88 (75%)
Age	
18-20	117 (100%)
Foundation	
Foundation of Science	109 (93%)
Foundation of Technology	8 (7%)
Online learning Experience	
Yes	69 (58%)
No	49 (42)
IT Skills	
Low	9 (7%)
Moderate	102(87%)
High	6 (5%)

More than half of the respondents with the number of 69 (58%) have ever participated in any type of e-learning before the pandemic and only 49 (42%) students have not participated. A total of 102 (87%) students indicated that their IT skills are moderate, 9 (7%) students chose low and only 6 (5%) students described they are skilful in IT.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Learning

From Table 2, access to online materials has the highest frequency with 107 (91.5%), followed by the ability to stay at home with 93 (79.5%) then learning at their own pace with 91 (77.8%). The next variables share the same frequencies which are the ability to record meetings and comfortable surroundings with 73 (62.4%) respectively, then finally class interactivity has the lowest frequency with 13 (11.1%).

The findings on the advantages of online learning highlighted mostly the flexibility of the implementation of online learning. This is because, educational institutions must offer more flexibility and individualization to students in order to fulfill the expectations of a digital society (Bernard, 2014). Students nowadays This will give students the chance to modify the learning process to suit their own needs and particular time and place, besides, through the incorporation of technology in the teaching and learning process usually highlighted the use of texts, videos, sounds, collaborative sharing, and interactive graphics, e-learning makes sure that all of the students are actively participating in the learning process. (Al Rawashdeh et. al, 2021).

The popularity of online learning can be ascribed to several factors, including family obligations, enrolment requirements, economic necessity, the need for time and place flexibility, a lack of available classroom space and evolving technologies and e-learning prepares all the aspects for the students and teachers (Kelly & Rebman, 2014). Besides, with full access to materials and being able to record the meeting of their teaching and learning sessions, students should be able to be independent in acquiring new knowledge at their own pace and time (Muller & Mildenberger, 2021). Being at home in the surroundings that they are familiar with, brings comfort to students to learn on their own.

However, online learning does have its own disadvantages to students. In the findings, lack of interactions with friends, reduced interaction with the teacher, and self-isolation are connected with each other and each of the aspects has large numbers of frequency. This indicated that by implementing online learning has the tendency of students to feel isolated is very high and may feel withdrawn from their teaching and learning sessions. Students with lack of motivation may easily lose sight of their original goals, and would later become lost in the course material, and eventually withdrawn and feel unattached from the course (Raspopovic et al., 2017).

Another disadvantage with the highest frequency is the technical problem faced by the students. Due to the outbreak, students and teachers were forced to have their classes online without any preparation and training. This finding is parallel with the results from Agnoletto and Queiroz (2020) which have addressed the issues of complexities and nature of emergency switching from face-to-face learning to online learning considering students' and teachers' redness in terms of dealing with online learning tools, fluency in digitalised materials, and dealing with the emotions.

Table 2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Learning Frequency

Variable	n=117 ; Frequency (%)
Advantages of Online Learning	
Access to online materials	107 (91.5%)
Learning on your own pace	91 (77.8%)
Ability to stay at home	93 (79.5%)
Ability to record a meeting	73 (62.4%)
Classes interactivity	13 (11.1%)
Comfortable surrounding	73 (62.4%)
Disadvantages of Online Learning	
Reduced Interaction with the teacher	88 (75.2%)
Technical problems (Internet/Laptop/Camera etc)	101 (86.3%)
Lack of interactions with Friends	61 (52.1%)
Lack of self-discipline	101 (86.3%)
Social isolation	61 (52.1%)
Poor learning conditions at home	53 (45.3%)

Comparison between Traditional and Online Learning in the Learning of English Language
The statistical difference in terms of students' perspectives between online learning (m=3.405) and face-to-face learning (m=4.0098) is measured through the mean from both variables in terms of the effectiveness in enhancing skills such as writing, listening, speaking, reading, students' engagement as well as the activities done. In the increase of knowledge online

learning (m= 3.5470) has a slightly lower mean to be compared to face-to-face learning (m= 3.8803). In terms of knowledge acquisition in grammar, face-to-face learning has a slightly higher mean of 3.8803 to be compared to online learning with a mean of 3.5470. The comparison of the two teaching strategies has the same situation as the previous variables in the enhancement of skills with a mean of 3.9829 for face-to-face learning and 3.5812 for online learning.

In terms of engagement and activities done, face-to-face learning (m= 4.111; engagement in face-to-face learning, m=4.1453; activities done in face-to-face learning have higher means to be compared to online learning (m= 3.0085; engagement in online learning, m=3.2735; activities done in online learning). The figures for the comparison between traditional and online learning in the learning of English language can be found in the appendices of this paper. These findings have supported the findings from Al Rawashdeh (2021) that technology can be integrated into teaching and learning sessions which deliberately encouraged students to engaged in online tutorials in order to complete the task given to them.

Acceptance of Online Learning
Of 117 students 47 responses (41%) indicated that online learning is both neutral and enjoyable respectively. Subsequently, 16 (13%) respondents found that online learning is extremely enjoyable, and the rest 7 (5%) respondents indicated that it is unenjoyable. The results indicate that majority of students still find that online learning is enjoyable despite the disadvantages stated earlier on. The acceptance of online learning seems to have a positive response from the students.

It could improve the standard of teaching and learning, highlight the necessity for higher education institutions to maintain their competitive edge, and provide students with access to education and training in this more globalised situation (Islam, Beer & Slack, 2015). Acceptance of online learning can be improved in the future through specific measure as founded by Dempser and Burke (2022) which are, to maintain communication between students, teachers, and parents and to maintain the access of teaching and learning materials, digital or social medias applications and tools.

Conclusion
The situation of the Covid-19 pandemic, the implementation and use of e-learning platforms and online learning increased from time to time. It is also stipulated that online learning eased students' access to online materials and online learning is bounded by technical problems that they encounter during online classes as well as their own disciplinary actions parallel to limit their online learning. However, students still have a positive perception of both face-to-face and online learning although face-to-face learning has higher means in all categories. In the case of online learning acceptance majority of students have concluded that they accept and enjoy online learning. Future researchers can make a study on the reasons for the perceptions of the findings of this study as well as the challenges that students encountered in online learning.

Acknowledgements

References

Agnoletto, R., & Queiroz, V. (2020). Covid-19 and the challenges in Education. *Centro de EstudosSociedade e Technologia, Universidade de Sao Paulo, Bulletin*, *5*(2), 1 -2.

Al Rawashdeh, A. Z., Mohammed, E. Y., Al Arab, A.R., Alara, M., & Al-Rawashdeh, B. (2021). Advantages and disadvantages of using e-learning in university education: Analyzing students' perspective. *The Electronic Journal of e-Learning*, 19(2), 107-117.

Ammanni, S., & Aparanjani, U. (2016). The role of ICT in English language teaching learning. *International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research*, 7(7), ISSN: 2229-5518, 1-7.

Ba ̧czek, M , Zaganczyk-Ba ̧czek,, M., Szpringer, M., PhD, Jaroszynski, A., & Wozakowska Kapłon, B. (2021). Students' perception of online learning during the covid-19 pandemic: a survey study of polish medical students. Medicine, 100, 7, 1-8. http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/MD.0000000000024821

Bernama. (2021, July 16). Pdpr: Pengajaran perlu disesuaikan dengan keadaan pelajar. *Astro* Awani. https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/pdpr pengajaran-perlu disesuaikan-dengan-keadaan-pelajar-308682

Barnett, R. (2014). *Conditions of flexibility: Securing a more responsive higher education system.* York, UK: Higher Education Academy.

Cai, R., & Wang, Q. (2020). A Six-Step Online Teaching Method Based on Protocol Guided Learning during the Covid-19 Epidemic: A Case Study of the First Middle School Teaching Practice in Changyuan City, Henan Province, China. *Best Evidence in Chinese Education*, *4*(2), 529–534. https://doi.org/10.15354/bece.20.rp010

Chan JF, Yuan S, Kok KH, To KK, Chu H, Yang J, et al. A familial cluster of pneumonia associated with the 2019 novel coronavirus indicating person- to-person transmission: a study of a family cluster. Lancet. 2020;395(10223): 514–23.

Dempsey, Majella & Burke, Jolanta. (2020). Covid-19 Practice in Primary Schools in Ireland Report: A Two-month Follow-up.

Demuyakor, J. (2022). Coronavirus (Covid-19) and Online Learning in Higher Institutions of Education: A Survey of the Perceptions of Ghanaian International Students in China. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies, 10(3),* e202018. https://doi.org/10.29333/ojcmt/8286

Estrella, F. (2022). Ecuadorian university English teachers' reflections on emergency remote teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Education Research Open*, 3, 1-10.

Guo Y, Cao Q, Hong Z, et al. (2019) The origin, transmission, and clinical therapies on coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) outbreak – An update on the status. *Military Medical* Research, 7(11), 1-10.

Islam, N., Beer, M., & Slack, F. (2015). E-learning challenges faced by academics in higher education. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 3(5), 102-112.

Jan, Anbareen. (2020). A phenomenological study of synchronous teaching during covid-19: a case of an international school in malaysia. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open 2*, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2020.100084

Kamal, A. A., Shaipullah, N. M., Yruna, L., Sabri, M., & Junaini, S. N. (2020). Transitioning to online learning during covid-19 pandemic: Case study of a pre-university centre in malaysia. *International Journal of Advanced Coonputer Science and Applications*, 11(6), 217-223.

Kelly, D., & Rebman, C. M. Perception and acceptance of online education: Do online courses pass the muster? *Issues in Information System*, 15(11), 49-58.

Muller, C., & Mildenberger, T. (2021). Facilitating flexible learning by replacing classroom time with an online learning environment: A systematic review of blended learning in higher education. *Educational Research Review,* 34, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2021.100394

Raspopovic, M., Cvetanovic, S., Medan, I., and Ljubojevic, D., 2017. The effects of integrating social learning environment with online learning. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 18(1), pp. 141-160.

Roslan, S. (2020, March 26). Laksana pdp dalam talian. *Harian Metro*. https://www.hmetro.com.my/mutakhir/2020/03/559119/laksana-pdp-dalam

Sekkides, O & Vecchia, Elena Dalla. 2020. Editorial: Covid-19: we will not be returning to the old normal. *The Lancet Microbe,* Vol. 1, Iss. 6. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/S2666–5247(20)30151–8 (accessed 11.05.2022)

Tadesse, S., & Mu- luye, W. (2020). The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Education System in Developing Countries: A Review. Open Journal of Social Sciences, 8,159-170. https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2020.810011

WHO. Coronavirus disease (Covid-2019) situation reports. 2020. https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports. Accessed 1 April 2022.

Xia, J. (2020). Practical Exploration of School-Family Cooperative Education during the Covid-19 Epidemic: A Case Study of Zhenjiang Experimental School in Jiangsu Province, China. *Best Evidence in Chinese Education*, *4*(2), 521–528. https://doi.org/10.15354/bece.20.rp003

Yahaya, M., & Adnan, W. H. (2021). Cabaran pelajaran memalui kaedah pembelajaran atas talian: Kajian institusi pengajian tinggi awam Malaysia. *Journal of Media and Information Warfare,* 14(1), 11-20.
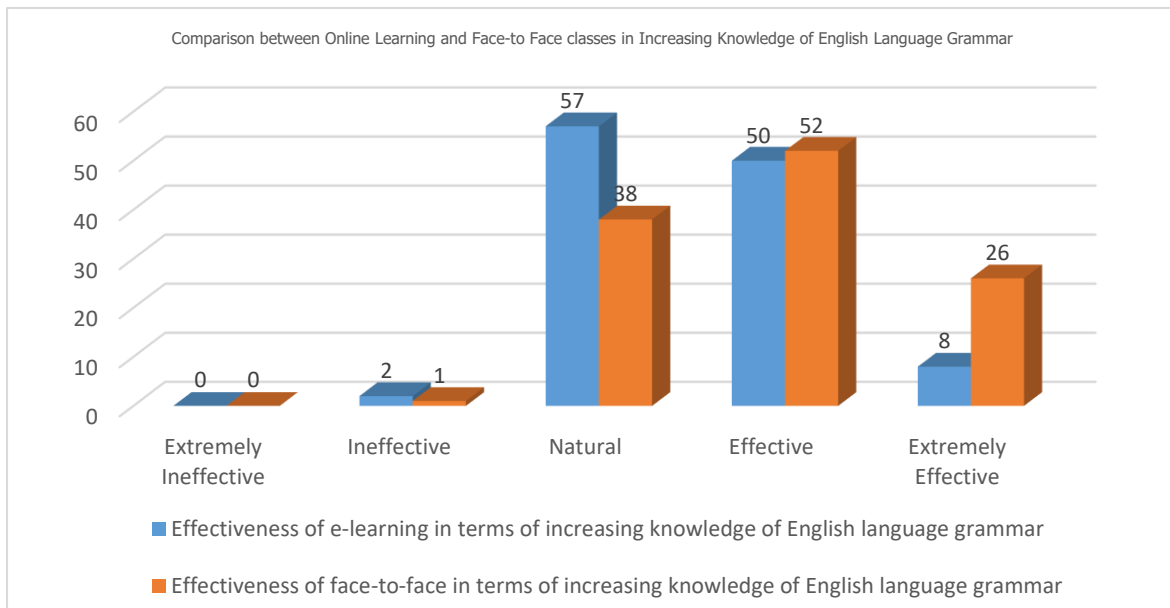
APPENDIXES

Figure 1 Comparison between Online Learning and Face-to-Face classes in increasing Knowledge of English Language Grammar
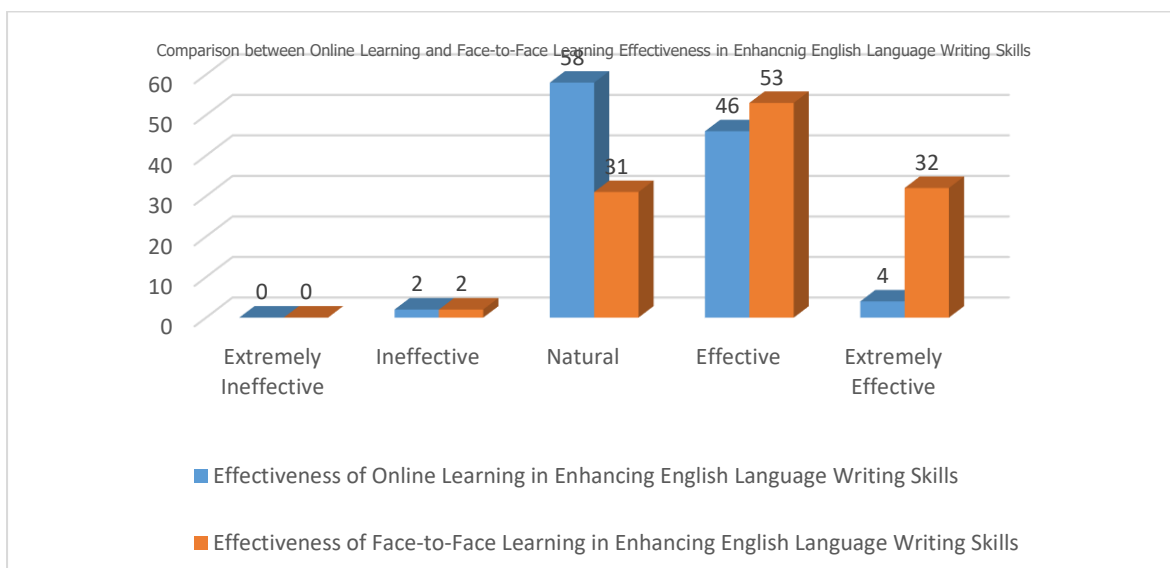

Figure 2 Comparison between Online Learning and Face-to-Face classes in Effectiveness Enhancing English Language Writing Skills.
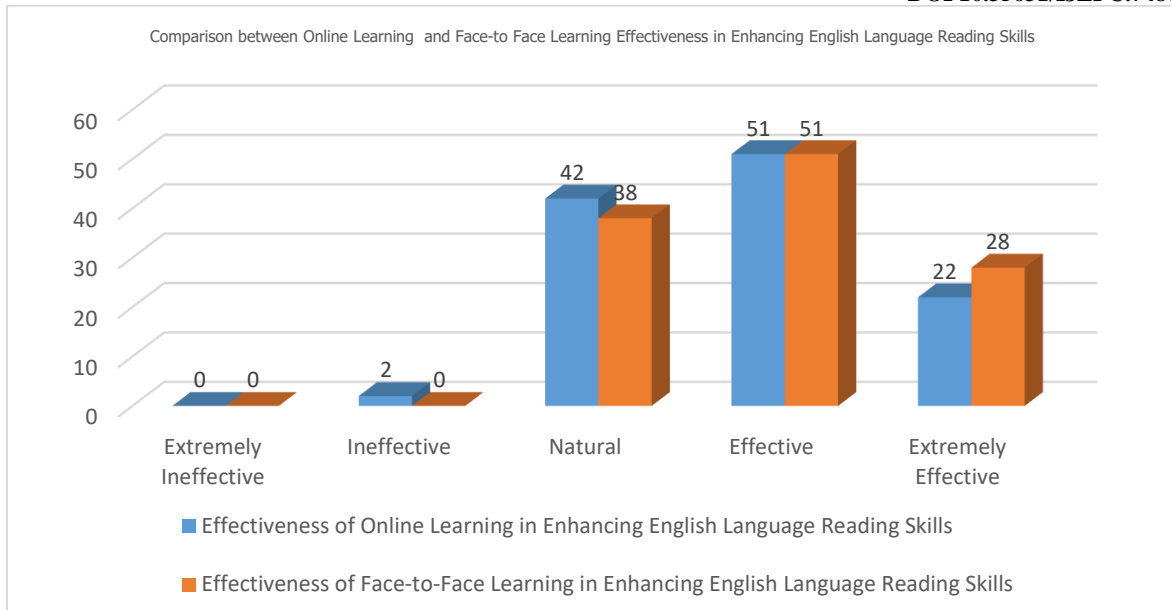
Figure 3 Comparison between Online Learning and Face-to-Face classes in Effectiveness Enhancing English Language Reading Skills.
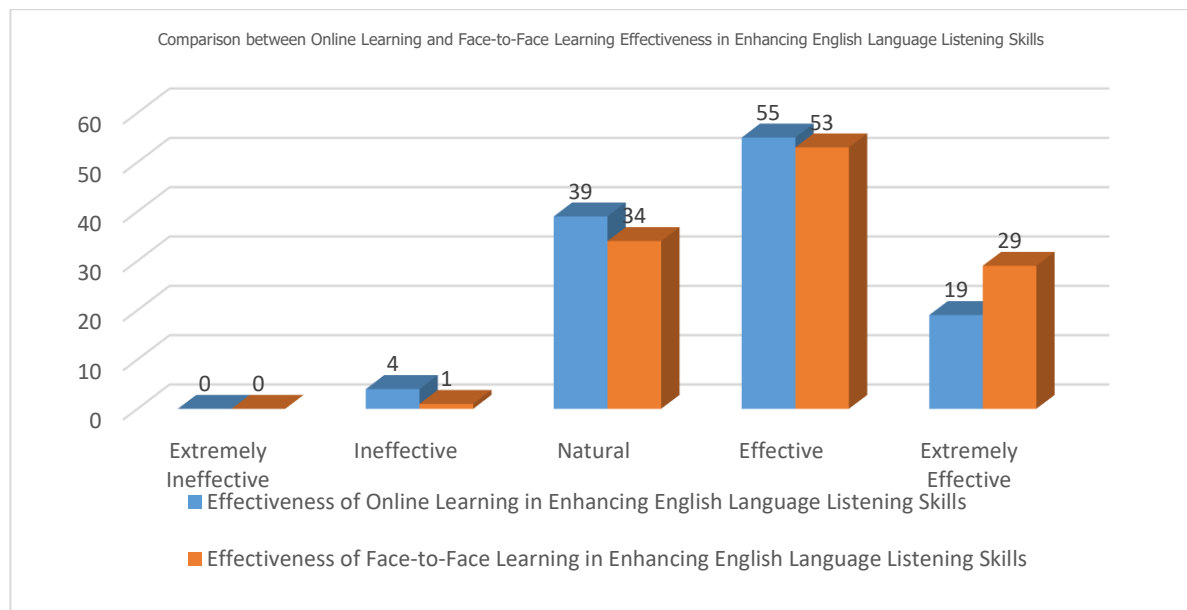

Figure 4 Comparison between Online Learning and Face-to-Face classes in Effectiveness Enhancing English Language Listening Skills.
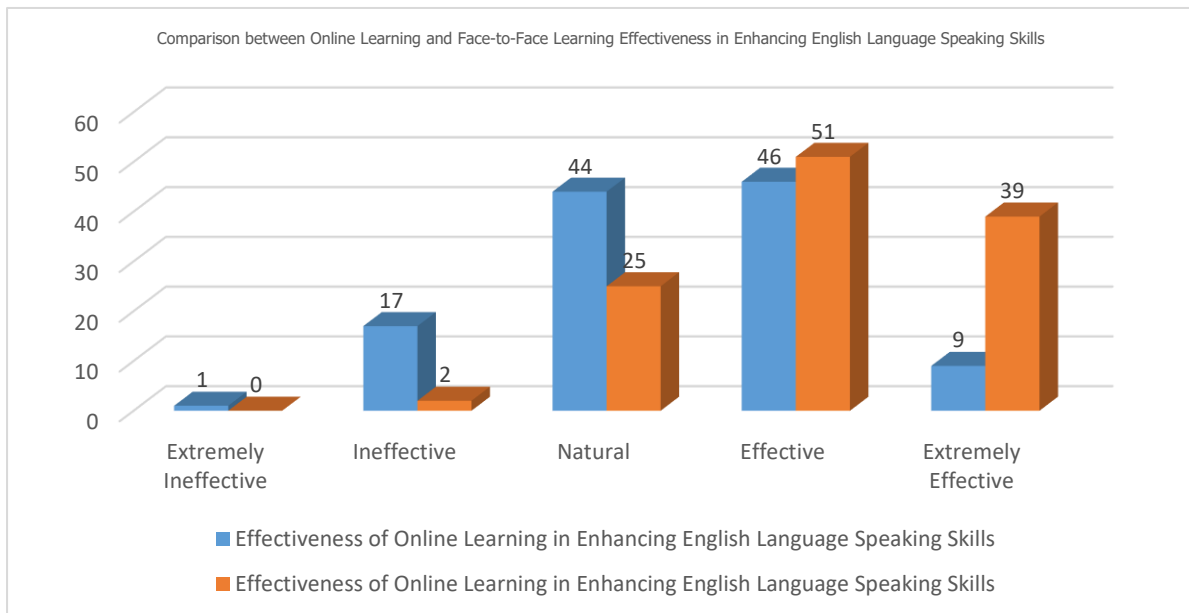
Comparison between Online Learning and Face-to-Face Learning Effectiveness in Enhancing English Language Speaking Skills

Figure 5 Comparison between Online Learning and Face-to-Face classes in Effectiveness Enhancing English Language Speaking Skills.
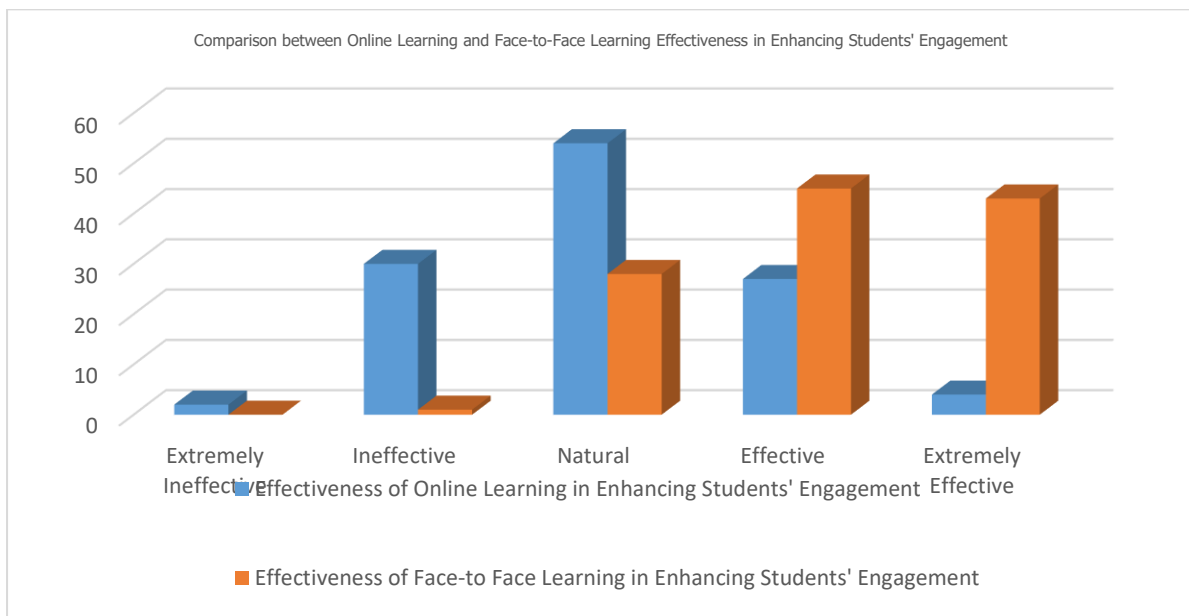
Comparison between Online Learning and Face-to-Face Learning Effectiveness in Enhancing Students' Engagement

Figure 6 Comparison between Online Learning and Face-to-Face classes in Effectiveness Enhancing Students' Engagement.

Comparison between Online Learning and Face-to-Face Learning Effectiveness in the Activities Done

- Effectiveness of activities done in Online Learning Class
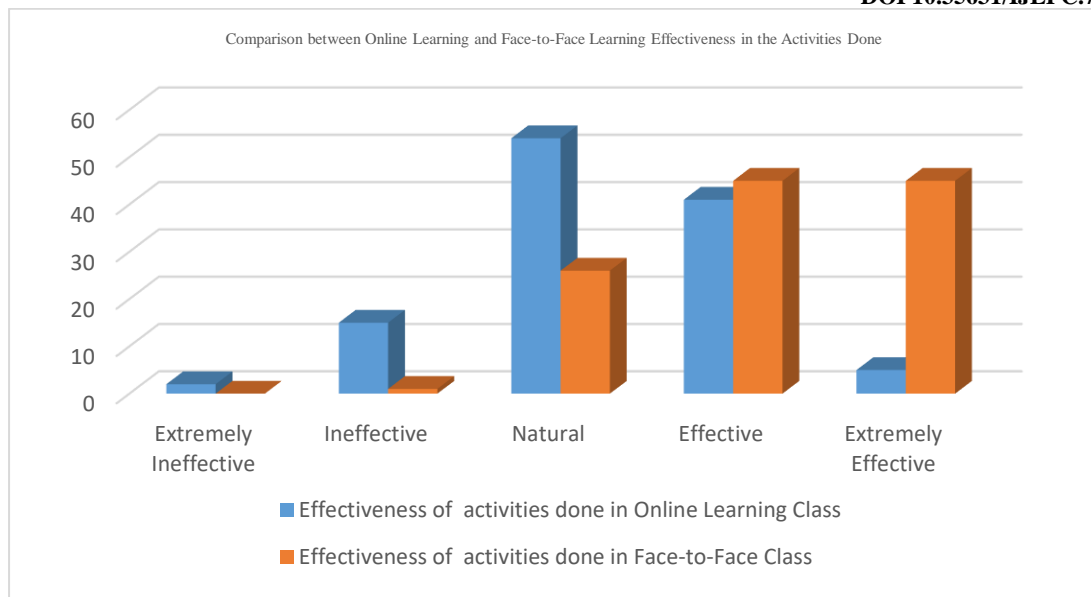- Effectiveness of activities done in Face-to-Face Class

Figure 7 Comparison between Online Learning and Face-to-Face classes in Effectiveness of the Activities Done.
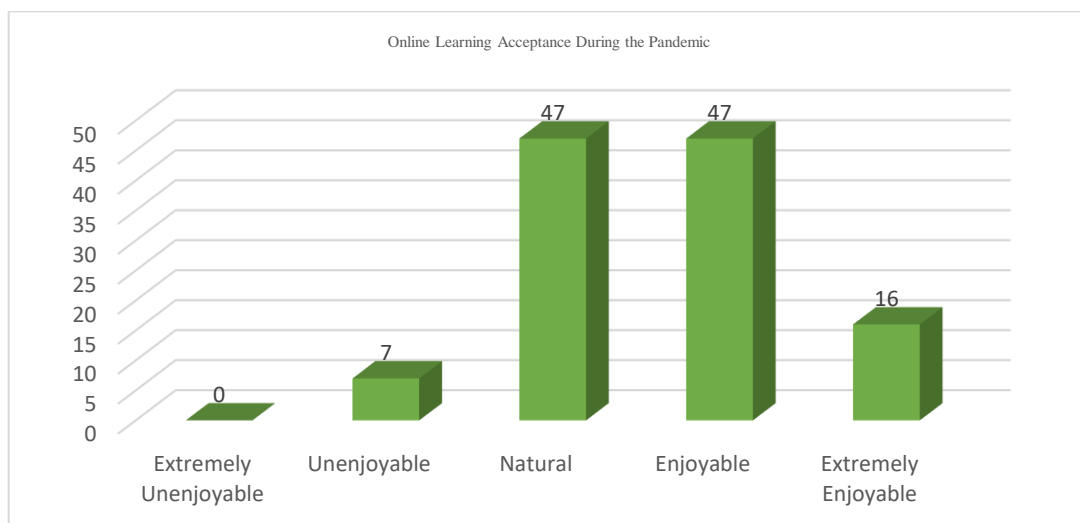

Online Learning Acceptance During the Pandemic

Figure 8 Online Learning Acceptance