

# Beyond the Classroom: Students' Perspectives on E-Learning Portal in Blended and Online Learning

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## Abstract

Evaluating the e-learning portal is essential to ensure the success of online teaching and learning activities. The portal should be assessed regularly to determine its value as a tool to support learning. This study aims to investigate students' perspectives on using the e-learning portal as a blended and online learning activity. A survey involving two cohorts of students from a public university in Malaysia was conducted in 2016 (n = 805) and 2020 (n = 1027). The survey required the students to evaluate the use of the e-learning portal in blended and online learning, regarding their self-learning experiences, learning performances, quality of learning materials, quality of communication, and their level of interest in using the portal. The findings revealed that the majority of the students from both cohorts were generally positive about using the e-learning portal to support their learning. However, it is interesting that both cohorts preferred face-to-face instruction over online learning. Hence, future research should widen the scope of the study by analysing the perspectives of course instructors, administrators, and other relevant learning support agencies.

**Keywords:** e-learning, online learning, blended learning, online portal

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## INTRODUCTION

E-learning portals at local Malaysian universities have enabled teaching and learning activities from various locations, allowing students to control their learning (Ke & Kwak, 2013). There are several benefits of using e-learning, such as providing easy access and low-cost education (Budiastuti et al, 2023; Richardson, 2017). Larbi-Siaw and Owusu Agyeman (2016) stated that e-learning is crucial in tertiary education because it offers alternative methods for developing student knowledge, competency, and attitude. Callaghan (2018) explains that this is a continuation of traditional teaching and learning. While e-learning generally refers to teaching and learning activities in an online

environment, its definition can vary due to the rapid advancement of technology (Corbeil & Corbeil, 2015).

In 2020, the educational landscapes in Malaysia and around the world have changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a drastic transition from face-to-face to online learning. The Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia has significantly impacted various sectors, including education. A surge in COVID-19 cases made it impractical for educational activities to be conducted as usual. Hence, all Malaysian educational institutions were ordered to switch to online mode. E-learning portals, which used to be a supplementary tool in face-to-face learning, have since become the primary platform for content delivery (Hasbullah et al., 2022).

It is undeniable that face-to-face learning provides space for students to communicate with their lecturers directly. Students may experience technical disruptions in online learning, such as unstable Internet connection and disruptive background noise. According to Markus (2020), financial factors are also a challenge. Powers et al. (2016) state that many students learn better through face-to-face learning than online learning. It has also been discovered that students prefer physical learning the most regarding collaborative and interactive activities because of the engagement factor (Carver & Kosloski, 2015). Moreover, Giray (2021) states that face-to-face learning is more valuable to students than online learning.

This study evaluated the e-learning portal to ensure that online teaching and learning activities are implemented effectively through blended and online learning environments. Morpheus and eLEAP, an e-learning portal, was developed to facilitate online teaching and learning at a higher education institution in Sarawak. This platform supports both blended and full online learning. In 2016, a research project began to evaluate the impact of this e-learning portal in a blended learning environment. The study was repeated in 2020, coinciding with the Movement Control Order (MCO) enforcement, which required a shift from blended to fully online learning in higher education institutions.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

One of the most important attitudes students should possess in online learning is the ability to manage learning independently. Gorbunovs et al. (2016) explain that self-management equals self-discipline. Motivational factors are also essential. Self-management is related to students' competency in improving online learning performance (Cobb, 2013). Self-discipline, however, acts as a stepping stone to learning improvement. It can be seen when students plan their learning process systematically and do their learning tasks efficiently (Jung et al., 2017). Due to convenience, online learning requires students to have high self-discipline (Chauhan, 2020). Students need to have good time management skills and discipline to avoid procrastination.

Accessibility to learning materials from various Internet sources has helped students learn better and obtain good grades in their assessments. As stated by Sabani and Razak (2022), the Internet has become