

## STUDENTS PERSPECTIVES ON SWITCHING FROM ONLINE TO FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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**Abstract:** After around two years of having online learning, students in the universities have to come back to face-to-face learning mode as it was before the pandemic. This setting also applied to the biology education study program of Universitas Sulawesi Barat. The current study investigated the students' perspective on changing online to face-to-face learning after COVID-19. It is a qualitative descriptive study with nine students as respondents from the classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021. The instrument used was an interview guide consisting of indicators regarding online teaching and learning features, assessment, and interactions that students needed to experience in face-to-face settings but would like to. In addition, students' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of the shift from online to offline learning were also assessed. The data analysis was performed in three stages: data reduction, data display, and drawing a conclusion or data verification. The result showed that several things they would like to have as it was during online learning were (1) have electronic materials, online-games-based learning, and more time to complete the assignments, (2) get various types of assessments including via online platforms (3) to have online applications or media to discuss learning materials and submit assignments. (4) In addition, for the advantages, the practicums could be conducted in laboratories, they felt more concentrated during offline classes, and became more confident to apply IT skills during offline settings, while the disadvantages were feeling anxious and fear to interacting during offline class and trouble to listen to lecturers' class while having masks. Overall, students feel face-to-face learning is way more effective and efficient but suggested blended learning as an interesting mode in the learning and teaching implementation.

**Keywords:** *Face-To-Face Learning, Online Learning, Students' Perspectives*

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### INTRODUCTION

COVID-19, an infection brought on by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, was identified by WHO to have the potential to become a pandemic on March 11, 2020. As a result, all nations were urged to activate and improve their emergency response systems. COVID-19 is believed to have resulted in 600 million cases and 7 million mortalities worldwide [1]. Worldwide efforts have been made to stop the spread of COVID-19, including using many testing kits, mandatory or voluntary quarantines for citizens, and canceling major events [2].

Millions of college students were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced them to adjust to new learning environments and maybe unfamiliar learning styles [3]. Higher education and the student experience have both been impacted by the pandemic. As a result, online or blended learning has largely substituted face-to-face instruction in academic institutions [4]. The transition from in-person instruction to online learning brought about new issues and effects. Additionally, online learning environments allow students flexibility, interaction, and collaboration. Due to its flexibility, teachers and students could choose how and where they wanted to learn [5].

When the pandemic hit, institutions and educators were forced to quickly shift to online

teaching and learning activities. It was a significant undertaking of the lack of precedent and guidelines [6]. Teachers may consider flexible distance learning methods such as correspondence teaching, module-based learning, project-based learning, and television broadcast because face-to-face interaction is impractical during the pandemic. Computer-assisted learning, synchronous online learning, asynchronous online learning, and collaborative e-learning are all options for students who have access to the internet [7].

University students from several countries have faced several challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The most prevalent worries in the five nations (Israel, Kosovo, Ukraine, Cyprus, and Germany) were similar: the uncertainty about the end of the health crisis and the fear of family members' health. Financial problems and difficulty with online learning were also mentioned as the two main challenges [8]. In Indonesia, it has been reported that throughout online learning during the pandemic, students have faced difficulties such as the internet, electricity, electronic gadgets, the environment, individual issues, and uninteresting learning. Furthermore, lecturers must become more adept at using online learning tools. In the era of education 4.0, lecturers must be able to create engaging and acceptable educational materials [9]. However, faculty considered that online learning

allowed manageable distance learning, and students could access instructors and course materials [10].

In Indonesia, COVID-19 cases have shown a declining trend from the previous years, and it has begun to relax several regulations regarding COVID-19. It indicates that Indonesia is transitioning from a pandemic to an endemic state [11]. The good news was that face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic could already be conducted generally as before the pandemic [12]. However, there has yet to be much attention paid to how education will proceed after the pandemic, especially switching from online to offline learning. The current study examined the students' perspective on changing from online to face-to-face learning after COVID-19. The study focused on students in the biology program at Universitas Sulawesi Barat who have recently experienced online learning during a pandemic and returned to face-to-face learning. Understanding students' needs is crucial to managing and creating effective learning and teaching strategies.

### RESEARCH METHODS

This study was conducted in January 2023 at Universitas Sulawesi Barat, Biology Education Study Program. This qualitative descriptive study illustrates students' perspectives on switching from online to face-to-face learning after COVID-19. Respondents of this study were nine students from the classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021 who have previously experienced online learning throughout

the COVID-19 pandemic and recently returned to face-to-face learning in the odd semester year of 2022–2023. The instrument used was an interview guide that was adapted and modified by Stoian et al. [13]. The indicators were regarding (1) *features* of online teaching and learning that students didn't experience in face-to-face settings but would like to. (2) features of online assessment that students didn't experience in face-to-face settings but would like to (3) features of online interaction with lectures and classmates that students didn't encounter in face-to-face settings but would like to (4) students' perception of advantages and disadvantages of the shift from offline to online learning. According to Miles et al. [14], the data analysis was performed in three stages: reduction, data display, and drawing a conclusion or verification.

### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

With the schools and universities closing for around two years, since COVID-19 has spread slowly, they are starting to reopen. Universitas Sulawesi Barat, particularly Biology Study Program, has experienced online learning since 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic and started to switch back to offline learning in mid-2022. The current study investigated the students' perception regarding the shift from online to face-to-face learning. The student's responses to each indicator are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' perspective on switching from online to face-to-face learning.

Indicators	Respondents' Responses
Features of online teaching and learning that students didn't experience in face-to-face settings but would like to.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students needed more material resources in electronic format compared to online settings.</li> <li>- Students experienced more variety of online-games-based learning during online teaching and learning.</li> </ul>
Features of online assessment that students didn't experience in face-to-face settings but would like to.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The type of evaluation or assessments in offline settings was less compared to online learning.</li> <li>- The time and place to take exams were more flexible than face-to-face ones.</li> <li>- Students had more time to finish assignments and exams during online learning.</li> <li>- Lecturers applied more online assessment tools in online settings</li> <li>- , with only a little difference between online and offline settings.</li> </ul>
Features of online interaction with lectures and classmates that students didn't encounter in face-to-face settings but would like to.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students used to communicate everything with lecturers through online platforms, including discussing learning materials and submitting assignments.</li> <li>- Communication with lecturers was more flexible during online learning.</li> <li>- Not much difference between online and offline settings.</li> </ul>
Students' perception of advantages and disadvantages of the shift from online to face-to-face settings.	<p>Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students were satisfied and preferred face-to-face learning to online learning.</li> </ul>

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- Practicums or laboratory activities were best conducted in offline settings.
  - Students were able to focus on the offline classroom than the online classroom.
  - Students did not need to worry about having internet connection troubles.
  - Students' IT skills were improved.

Disadvantages:

- Students felt anxious about talking with friends or lecturers.
  - Students felt a lack of confidence whenever being asked by lecturers in the offline classroom.
  - It was difficult to hear the lecturers' explanations clearly as they were wearing masks while teaching.
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**Features of online teaching and learning that students didn't experience in face-to-face settings but would like to.**

The first indicator was regarding the students' experiences in offline learning in terms of teaching and learning aspects. They did not get the same way in online learning, yet they would like to experience it again. In the current study, most respondents mentioned that they used to get all learning materials or resources (such as videos, e-modules, e-books, etc.) from the lecturers and made learning about the topic and its learning objectives easier themselves. Meanwhile, during the switch to offline learning, lectures gave fewer electronic format materials, and students were mostly asked to find more learning materials besides those provided by lectures. It agrees with Stoian et al. [13], who found that the second highest percentage of responses from students was that they would also like to receive educational resources in electronic format during face-to-face learning. Besides that, the respondents explained that during online learning, they usually had online-games-based learning and would like to have it in an offline setting, too. Respondents also added that games-based learnings were fun, interactive, and challenging, increasing their motivation. However, it has become less in practice during face-to-face learning. Pan et al. [15] mentioned that game-based learning is frequently more enjoyable, engaging, moving, and symbiotic. Game-based learning also enables students to engage in authentic learning environments, creating an interactive and challenging environment that allows students to apply their knowledge. Another response from respondents about aspects of online learning they would like to experience face-to-face was more time to complete the assignments.

**Features of online assessment that students didn't experience in face-to-face settings but would like to.**

The pandemic has challenged students and instructors worldwide in ways they were not prepared for, as neither teachers nor students expected this sudden alteration. Montenegro-Rueda

et al. [16], in a review, listed some methods of online assessment applied during the pandemic, such as moodle platforms (online test; discussion forum), videoconferencing (zoom, google meet), email, and other tools such as google forms. In the current study, students responded that they used to get various assessments in online settings and much less during face-to-face settings. During offline learning, most assessments were carried out in the classroom, where students had to finish them on exam papers. Students mentioned that finishing the assessment while having the exam proctor watch them was quite intimidating. Different from online settings, where they could decide on their own a place to have the test, get extra time to finish the assignment or test, have numerous online platforms to have the evaluation, open books settings, and projects type of assessments. Students would like to experience numerous assessments in face-to-face settings, like online learning. However, a few respondents added that there was little difference between online and offline regarding the assessment, as some lecturers still used online platforms for evaluation. Stoian et al. [13] explained that replacing a face-to-face evaluation with a virtual assessment involves not only replicating these materials but also redesigning the entire teaching and learning process. Mariadi et al. [17] also added that shifting assessment administration from a traditional form to an online one can motivate lecturers in higher education to reevaluate and enhance the evaluation procedures that are novel, interesting, and useful to them. In contrast, Maya et al. [18] also reported that only some students believed frequent and extensive assignments and presentations added stress to their online learning experience. Some students stated that they had lost interest in grades and marks because any students could cheat during online exams.

**Features of online interaction with lectures and classmates that students didn't encounter in face-to-face settings but would like to.**

One of the important aspects to notice in teaching and learning, either in online or offline

settings, is interactions. The interactions can be student-student interaction or student-lecture interaction. In the current study, respondents explained that during online learning, the interactions between lectures and classmates were provided by technology, such as video conferencing (Zoom Meeting; Google Meet), WhatsApp, E-learning Unsulbar, and or email. They used those online applications to discuss learning materials and submit assignments. During face-to-face learning, those types of platforms become less, particularly for assignment submission. Only some lecturers required students to submit assignments papers directly, while some others still use the provided online platforms. Some respondents preferred to submit assignments through online platforms, saying it was way more flexible and efficient. Some respondents chose to submit assignments papers directly, saying that is the way they could interact with the instructors or even discuss assignments, while few respondents said they felt there is no difference either way. During online learning, respondents mentioned that the interactions between classmates were only conducted through online platforms. Most respondents even met and knew each other's classmates only when the class switched back to offline settings. They mostly preferred physical settings' interactions in terms of the learning process but could not deny the importance of online interactions as well.

#### **Students' perception of advantages and disadvantages of the shift from online to face-to-face settings.**

When COVID-19 hit, the best way to keep education going while universities are closed for faculty and student safety is to transition to online learning quickly [19-21]. After shifting back to offline learning from online learning, there were several advantages and disadvantages from students' perspectives. For the advantages, all respondents were satisfied and preferred offline settings in terms of the learning process, especially as a biology education study program that involves a lot of practicums that are best conducted in laboratories. In addition, respondents also described that they felt more concentrated during offline classes since they could listen to and interact with lecturers directly without having to experience internet connection troubles, uncondusive home situations, or lack of access to gadgets. They also added that since their skill in terms of digital or technology has improved during online learning, they become more confident to apply it during offline class. As for the disadvantages, some respondents stated that at first, they felt anxious because they had to meet friends and lecturers for the time and feared having to talk

or being asked by lecturers during face-to-face learning in the class.

Furthermore, some respondents also mentioned that sometimes it was difficult to hear lecturers' explanations clearly as they were wearing masks while teaching. Students mentioning the teacher were not audible while they wore masks while taking classes during switching from online to offline [22]. At last, students also added that some lecturers were using blended learning, where they still have an offline class but still conduct the class while having online platforms where they find it interesting and effective.

#### **CONCLUSION**

As the time to switch back to face-to-face learning has come after a long COVID-19 pandemic, some aspects must be considered, especially regarding students' perspectives. Although students feel face-to-face learning is way more effective and efficient, some aspects of online learning, such as learning and teaching, assessments, interactions, and advantages and disadvantages, need to be considered. These findings might be taken as a reflection from students' points of view to improve future learning implementation and policy making.

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