

Relationship Between Perceived Flexibility And Learners' Satisfaction Among Students Studying Islamic Sciences Online

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Abstract :

The educational landscape is steadily changing with online education. Flexibility is among many factors pertaining to student's satisfaction with online studies. Flexibility of time which includes when students can start and end their course, timings of assessments and assignments, pace and frequency of learning and duration of course were examined in this paper and its relation to student satisfaction. Students from three online universities participated in the study (N=28) with results showing a moderate positive correlation (0.672) between the two. Thus, flexibility must be an important factor in delivering online education. Self-regulated learning skills comprise of setting objectives, managing time, utilizing effective learning strategies, organizing the study environment, and seeking assistance. The Online Self-Regulated Learning Questionnaire (OSLQ) was used to assess self-regulated learning and its relationship to students' satisfaction from the same sample. The results showed no statistical significance ($\rho = 0.08$); hence no inference could be made. However, existing literature on self-regulated learning reveals that it is related to academic achievement. Finally, the paper discusses the use of self-regulatory learning skills and strategies in online learning as a means to achieve Ihsan (excellence). Ihsan can be viewed as a spiritual accountability for students. Ihsan will combat the challenges faced by students such as lack of motivation, procrastination etc. and serve as a strategy for an effective online learning experience. This paper seeks to inform developers of online learning platforms of the importance of incorporation of flexibility into their programs and students to develop self-regulatory learning skills as a means of achieving Ihsan in their online education.

Keywords: *Perceived Flexibility, Self-Regulatory Learning Behaviors, Student Satisfaction, Ihsan (Excellence).*

Abstrak :

Lanskap pendidikan terus berubah dengan adanya pendidikan online. Fleksibilitas adalah salah satu dari sekian banyak faktor yang berkaitan dengan kepuasan siswa terhadap pembelajaran online. Fleksibilitas waktu yang mencakup kapan siswa dapat memulai dan mengakhiri kursus mereka, waktu penilaian dan tugas, kecepatan dan frekuensi pembelajaran dan durasi kursus diperiksa dalam makalah ini dan hubungannya dengan kepuasan siswa. Mahasiswa dari tiga universitas online berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini (N=28) dengan hasil yang menunjukkan korelasi positif yang moderat (0,672) antara keduanya. Dengan demikian, fleksibilitas harus menjadi faktor penting dalam memberikan pendidikan online. Keterampilan pembelajaran yang diatur sendiri terdiri dari menetapkan tujuan, mengatur waktu, menggunakan strategi pembelajaran yang efektif, mengatur lingkungan belajar, dan mencari bantuan. Kuesioner Online Self-Regulated Learning Questionnaire (OSLQ) digunakan untuk menilai pembelajaran yang diatur sendiri dan hubungannya dengan kepuasan siswa dari sampel yang sama. Hasilnya menunjukkan tidak ada signifikansi statistik ($\rho = 0,08$); oleh karena itu tidak ada kesimpulan yang dapat dibuat. Namun, literatur yang ada tentang pembelajaran yang diatur sendiri mengungkapkan bahwa hal tersebut terkait dengan prestasi akademik. Akhirnya, makalah ini membahas penggunaan keterampilan dan strategi pembelajaran pengaturan diri dalam pembelajaran online sebagai sarana untuk mencapai Ihsan (keunggulan). Ihsan dapat dipandang sebagai pertanggungjawaban spiritual bagi siswa. Ihsan akan memerangi tantangan yang dihadapi oleh siswa seperti kurangnya motivasi, penundaan, dll. dan berfungsi sebagai strategi untuk pengalaman belajar online yang efektif. Makalah ini berusaha untuk menginformasikan kepada para pengembang platform pembelajaran online tentang pentingnya penggabungan fleksibilitas ke dalam program mereka dan siswa untuk mengembangkan keterampilan belajar

pengaturan diri sebagai sarana untuk mencapai Ihsan dalam pendidikan online mereka.

Kata Kunci: *Fleksibilitas yang Dipersepsikan, Perilaku Belajar yang Mengatur Diri Sendiri, Kepuasan Mahasiswa, Ihsan (Keunggulan).*

INTRODUCTION

Online learning is becoming increasingly popular day by day. This is truer for learning Islam and its various disciplines online. Online education, which gained momentum during the covid pandemic, is steadily being adopted to teach many courses across universities. Islamic Online learning is not something new, however its usage has surged up in the last couple of years. Some of the factors contributing to this are, the ease of access for learning Islam from highly qualified teachers, the benefits which online learning provides such as flexibility of time, place and educational qualification, the increased access to mobile phones and internet, lesser costs and so on. There are various reasons why students opt for online courses, one being the opportunity to manage their busy schedules more effectively, which may include juggling childcare and work responsibilities (Soffer et al., 2019). Many students find that they can utilize their learning time outside of class more productively through online courses. Additionally, some students select online courses to minimize their need to commute to the campus. Students value the convenience of studying at home and feel that instructional materials in a flexible format provide them with greater control while still supporting course outcomes. Online education proves useful especially to female learners due to its ease of access and flexibility. With the increased enrollment into studying Islam online, it becomes incumbent on developers of the online learning platforms to improvise and curate the courses to meet the needs of the learners.

This study is conducted to target two sets of people: the developers of online learning platforms and the students intending to pursue Islamic Studies online. With online learning on the rise especially to study Islam, it is imperative that courses and programs cater to the needs of students. Findings inform that flexibility is an important factor for a student's enrollment decision. Therefore, this study is conducted to measure the extent of students perceived flexibility and their subsequent satisfaction in their current Islamic studies programs, to inform program developers of the significance of such flexibility considering students' demanding circumstances. Students on the other hand, should not take flexibility for granted and use self-regulatory learning (SRL) skills and strategies to successfully complete their course. Therefore, this study also measures the relationship between self-regulatory learning and students' satisfaction. Numerous

studies have established the relationship between SRL and course achievement such as meeting course outcomes effectively. However, this paper aims to investigate the relationship between SRL and student satisfaction. The continuation and future enrollment of students in an educational platform is dependent on their level of satisfaction. Hence satisfaction is measured against perceived flexibility and SLR. Discipline is the key to achieving success hence this study intends to address both flexibility and SRL for a successful online learning experience.

Finally, the concept of Ihsan (excellence) is discussed. As a Muslim, one must strive to achieve Ihsan in any deed one undertakes. SRL is viewed as a tool and a means to achieve Ihsan in one's educational journey. The educational landscape is changing rapidly with the emergence and development of online education. More literature must be developed on how to navigate the online learning experience and make the best use of it especially to study Islam and its various disciplines. Both scientific (self-regulatory learning skills) and Islamic perspective (having the right intention, aiming for Ihsaan etc.) must be incorporated as a guide for prospective students. This paper intends to shed light on its importance.

Perceived Flexibility

Flexibility is the hallmark of online studies, and it manifests in various dimensions. There are two theories, on a continuum, with regards to flexibility. Research indicates that flexibility is positively correlated with students' satisfaction in online courses (Arbaugh, 2000). The second is that too much flexibility is a threat to university standards and quality (Xavier & Meneses, 2021). Hence a balance must be established between the two. Collis, Vingerhoets, and Moonen (1997), listed five categories of dimensions—time, content, admission requirements, instructional style and resources, and delivery and logistics—where flexibility might be offered (Soffer, Kahan & Nachmias 2019). The time dimension will be examined in this paper. The concept of flexibility in terms of time encompasses various time-related elements, such as the duration of learning, the times designated for course interactions, the pace and frequency of learning, and the timing of assignments and assessments. Online courses can offer students the flexibility to access course materials at any time.

According to Harasim (2000), the ability to access course materials 24/7 allows students to engage throughout the week, supporting continuous knowledge acquisition and enabling participation at the most optimal learning times (Soffer, et.al., 2019). Nevertheless, the convenience of taking a flexible course, such as completing course work

at one's convenience, may transform into drawbacks, as there may never be an optimal time to complete the course work. In the author's observation, many people intend to study Islamic Studies online, at a later stage in life; probably after they've completed with their formal higher education. Numerous researches have emphasized that most individuals taking online courses are of mature age, employed, and/or responsible for caring for children and possibly other family members like elderly parents (Stone, Freeman, Dymont, Muir, & Milthorpe 2019).

At this stage, responsibilities are increased with work and family. Flexibility becomes an even more important factor for students' enrollment. The effectiveness of online education can be determined from the dropout rates (Willging & Johnson 2009). In a study conducted to determine the factors for dropout, one of the most common responses was that it was difficult to work full-time and be a graduate student and another response was that the course was too demanding (Willging & Johnson 2009). Several research studies have demonstrated that retention rates for distance learning students are at least 20% lower than on-campus students (Stone, et.al., 2019).

Additionally, there was a 40% decrease in the number of students who completed their degrees over a nine-year period, and the likelihood of withdrawal without obtaining a qualification was 2.5 times higher. Numerous factors have been cited as contributing to these outcomes, including technology-related challenges, family and work commitments, and inadequately designed course materials and delivery. Hence flexibility must be an important element, online learning platforms must strive for. However, too much flexibility can be disadvantageous. Professors who are e-learning designers of undergraduate courses at the Open University of Catalonia (UOC) opined the advantages of flexibility as improvement of personalized feedback, formative assessment, and module workload thus enabling engagement and persistence (Xavier & Meneses 2021).

The disadvantages include procrastination, dropout, increased workload, and a risk of losing professorial control. Thus, there must be a balance between structure and flexibility. Studies have established that students' satisfaction with online courses is positively related to its flexibility (Arbaugh 2000). This paper will assess the flexibility offered by Islamic online learning platforms and its relationship with students' satisfaction with their studies.

Self-Regulated Learning

With flexibility comes responsibility wherein students must be committed and disciplined. Students enrolled in flexible learning must devote more time, exert more

influence over their education, and make independent decisions (Soffer, Kahan, & Nachmias, 2019). The term self-regulated learning (SRL) pertains to the active and intentional actions taken by students to attain their educational goals (Barnard-Brak, Paton, & Lan 2010). These actions encompass setting objectives, managing time, utilizing effective learning strategies, organizing the study environment, and seeking assistance. These SRL behaviors, as abilities and strategies performed by individuals, are driven by their aspiration to succeed in learning. It has been suggested that these self-regulation skills and strategies are not only applied in educational settings but also in social interactions. Therefore, self-regulated learning reflects both the competencies and the motivation of individuals. Based on this interpretation, self-regulated learning is considered a way to understand why students achieve differently and a method to boost academic performance. Self-regulated learning skills and strategies seem to serve two functions: distinguishing between students in terms of academic achievement and improving academic success.

The systematic effort made by students to control and regulate their learning to achieve certain learning objectives that include cognitive, metacognitive, behavioral, and self-motivational components is known as self-regulated learning, or SRL (Muharom, Tajudin & Nugroho, 2022). The cognitive component pertains to the students' understanding and proficiency in using specific information when addressing enquiries or resolving issues. The ability for students to take charge of their cognitive processes—that is, to establish goals, plan, monitor, and assess their learning—is known as metacognitive competency. Additionally, the ability of pupils to control their learning behaviors is a behavioral component that is crucial function in the process of self-regulated learning. The motivational component is the desire and aspirations of the students to continue being actively involved in educational exercises.

Self-regulated learning as proposed by Zimmerman in a three-phase model consists of forethought, performance control and self-reflection phase (1998). The phase of forethought involves the strategic and skilled processes that come before and prepare for learning performance. These processes include goal setting, attribution, confidence in handling tasks, and the internal motivation to complete the learning task. The forethought phase represents the self-regulated learning skills and strategies that lie at the junction of cognitive and motivational factors, typically occurring before or as the student starts the learning process. Skills and strategies like organizing the environment and setting goals may be linked to the forethought phase. The second phase, the performance control or

volitional phase, consists of the skills and strategies employed during the learning process. These processes encompass attention, affect, and monitoring of action, and include self-regulated learning skills and strategies like time management, task strategies, and help seeking. These are all associated with the performance control phase. In the third and final phase, the self-reflection phase, individuals react and respond to their self-regulated efforts in the learning process by evaluating the outcomes of their performance. During the final self-reflection phase, the individual will self-evaluate based upon social comparisons and adjust the implementation of skills and strategies in the forethought and performance control phases for the next learning task. Self-regulated learning skills and strategies such as self-evaluation may be associated with the self-reflection phase.

Student Satisfaction

Student satisfaction with course activities is often considered as a dependent variable in research on distance education and Internet-based courses (Arbaugh 2000). Due to the novelty of this educational medium, the satisfaction of students with Internet-based courses will probably influence their decision to enroll in future courses in the same format or with the same educational provider. If students are not content with Internet-based courses, they are likely to discontinue taking them, and this could have significant implications for the sustainability of this educational medium.

Ihsan

Students must be proactive in their studies and develop skills for self-regulated learning. SRL is an important asset students must aim to develop. It can be viewed as a means to achieve Ihsan (excellence) in one's work. Online studies with all its perks of ease and comfortable learning, when a student intends to apply Ihsan in the form of self-regulated learning, their efforts will be blessed, and the outcomes will be phenomenal. The outcomes would surpass all the disadvantages of online learning such as procrastination, increased workload and so on. It would result in more meaningful and productive learning rather than a superficial one.

Ihsan is an Arabic word and the primary meaning of it is taken from the Hadith (saying of the Prophet Muhammed ﷺ), Hadith of Jibreal, wherein he ﷺ is reported to have answered to the question on 'What is Ihsan' as "That you worship Allah as if you see Him; for if you see Him not, surely He sees you" (Riyad as-Salihin 60). This is the foundational idea of Ihsan where a Muslim is constantly aware of Allah's presence and that he is always being observed. A specific meaning for Ihsan is derived from the Hadith narrated by Abu Ya'la Shaddad ibn 'Aus (may Allah be pleased with him), the Prophet

ﷺ was reported to have said the following: “Verily, Allah has enjoined excellence (Ihsan) with regards to everything. So, when you kill, kill in a good way; when you slaughter, slaughter in a good way; so, every one of you should sharpen his knife, and let the slaughtered animal die comfortably” (Sahih Muslim 1955a). Ihsan in this hadith, according to Imam a Nawawi means ‘to master and be proficient’ (Ab Wahab & Ismail, 2019). The Hadith uses the phrase "killing well" to illustrate the importance of doing things efficiently. This phrase reflects the emphasis on perfection in every action.

Moreover, the hadith’s reference to "everything" indicates that Ihsan, or excellence, is a value of high standard and is suitable for application in all circumstances. Shuriye (2014) points out that there are over 66 verses in the Qur’an that mention Ihsan as excellence in action, whether it's in the workplace, during social interactions, in assisting others, or in offering aid to those in need. Therefore, Ihsan in this context signifies achieving the highest level of performance, demonstrating a relentless pursuit of excellence. According to Ahmad (2007), the term Ihsan, as used by the Prophet ﷺ, encompasses executing actions in the most exemplary manner, involving wholehearted dedication and meticulous attention to the minutest details (Ab Wahab & Ismail 2019).

Based on the Zimmerman’s model, an Ihsanic attitude towards study will be the following. In the forethought phase, the student will be required to set the right intention, that is to please Allah and not anyone else, by studying this knowledge. Next, he/she should plan a semester-wise, weekly and daily schedule considering due dates for assignments, exams, revision period etc. Zimmerman in his forethought phase mentions ‘confidence in handling tasks’. This in the Ihsanic paradigm will be, to have Tawakkul (trust in Allah), after the student puts his utmost effort. Intention should be renewed on a daily basis to protect it from any stains and serve as a motivation to complete the task at hand. Setting up the study space and making it free from distractions are also part of the forethought phase. The second phase, the performance control phase, is where the student should engage in active study by employing attention, affect, and monitoring of action, time management by structuring tasks around salah, task strategies, and help seeking. The different components of the performance control phase are all found within the principles of Islam and the practices of Muhammed (saw). The final phase is the self-reflection phase. Islam requires Muslims to be engaged in frequent self-reflections for one’s improvement. The famous saying of the second caliph, Umar (ra), “Hold yourselves accountable before you are held accountable and evaluate yourselves before you are evaluated, for the Reckoning will be easier upon you tomorrow if you hold yourselves

accountable today” (Muḥāsabat al-Nafs li-Ibn Abī Dunyā 2) informs us of the significance of the self-reflection phase. This closely aligns with the excellence value of Ihsan as highlighted by prominent Islamic scholars like Al-Ghazali, Al-Qurtubi, and Imam An-Nawawi (Ab Wahab & Ismail 2019). This scenario can be applied to online learning wherein students intending to study with responsibility and Ihsan, must cultivate in them the skills and strategies for self-regulated learning.

The concept of Ihsan is regarded as a moral standard since it entails going beyond what is strictly required (Ab Wahab & Ismail 2019). When individuals work with utmost sincerity and efficiency, without supervision, it reflects an Ihsanic value, stemming from the belief that their work is being observed by the All-Seer and All-Hearer (i.e., Allah). Ihsan instills strong dedication in students, encouraging them to surpass in their studies and strive for excellence. The key traits of Ihsan include prioritizing sincere and efficient work as if being assessed by Allah. Additionally, going above and beyond in fulfilling responsibilities is seen as an act of Sunnah or Mustahab (act loved by Allah), compensating for any shortcomings in completing entrusted tasks. Ihsan also represents an extension of generosity and social responsibility from students towards their education. Individuals embodying Ihsan display heightened diligence in fulfilling their responsibilities and exert additional effort to attain outstanding results.

Operational Definitions

Flexibility- Flexible learning is based on the recognition of differences among students, which are addressed by providing varying degrees of choice to learners regarding what, where, when, why, and how to learn. (Soffer, Kahan & Nachmias 2019).

Self-Regulated Learning- Self-regulated learning pertains to the active and intentional actions taken by students to attain their educational goals which includes setting objectives, managing time, utilizing effective learning strategies, organizing the study environment, and seeking assistance (Barnard-Brak, Paton, & Lan 2010).

Student Satisfaction -Student satisfaction with Internet-based courses is likely to determine whether the student takes subsequent courses in this format or with the same education provider. (Arbaugh, 2000).

Ihsan – The Prophet Muhammed ﷺ said, “Ihsan is that you worship Allah as if you see Him; for if you see Him not, surely, He sees you” (Riyad as-Salihin 60). It also means ‘to master and be proficient’ according to Imam An Nawawi (Ab Wahab & Ismail, 2019).

Hypothesis

1. Students' increased perception of flexibility positively correlates with increased student satisfaction.
2. Students increased self-regulatory learning style positively correlates with increased student satisfaction.

Significance of Study

To improvise the online learning experience for the Muslim Ummah

It is observed that many Muslims are taking up Islamic Studies online. The Muslim Ummah is diverse with people of various ethnicities, stages in life, educational backgrounds, financial circumstances and so on. Online Education is at the forefront for educating millions of Muslims who have intended to tread this path of knowledge. It is hence crucial for the developers of online learning platforms to be flexible enough to be conducive to persistence and engagement since the design of programs closely correlates with the persistence and attrition of students (Naidu 2017).

To make the Muslim student understand their responsibility towards online learning

It is important to remember that flexibility entails the learners' responsibility. Hence the role of self-regulatory learning skills shall be discussed. Online learning students must self-regulate their learning and hence this paper will provide students with a guide, a spiritual one, to navigate through and enhance the online learning experience. This will enable students to make an informed decision when applying for online Islamic Studies programs, thus improving students' satisfaction and their retention.

This paper focusses on gaining formal Islamic education either through a diploma, bachelors, master's and so on. Research into this arena is still scarce and it is hoped that this paper will serve as a guide for developers of online Islamic Studies programs with respect to its flexibility protocols and students to develop self-regulatory learning skills and strategies.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are-

- To examine the relationship between students' perception of their course flexibility and their satisfaction towards studying their course.
- To examine the relationship between self-regulatory learning skills and strategies and student satisfaction.
- To discuss self-regulatory learning skills and strategies as Ihsaan (excellence), a Muslim exhibits in their study.

RESEARCH METHOD

Variables

The independent variables employed in this study are perceived flexibility and self-regulatory learning. The dependent variable is student satisfaction. It is hypothesized that as students' perception of program flexibility (independent variable) increases, their subsequent satisfaction towards their program increases. Similarly, as students employ more self-regulatory learnings skills and strategies in their online learning, the more they will be satisfied.

The student's name, demographic details such as the university they are studying in, course taken and its duration and number of completed years were asked at the beginning of the online questionnaire.

Sampling Technique

This study uses simple random sampling wherein any student currently enrolled in formal Islamic courses taught online are eligible to participate. They could be currently enrolled or graduates of their respective courses.

Sample Demographics

A total of 28 participants participated in this study. 23 students from the International Open University (IOU) and 4 from Preston International College and 1 from Muqaddima. All students are currently enrolled (except 1) in either bachelors, diploma or research-based programs. The details of International Open University and Preston International College are as follows:

IOU, founded in the year 2007 by Dr. Bilal Philips offers undergraduate and graduate courses in Islamic Studies, and secular courses such as IT, psychology, education and economics, all taught from an Islamic perspective. Its operation is systematic and has been successfully graduating hundreds of graduates every year. Students at IOU can choose to take their course in the normal period (4 years), accelerated (3 years) or part-time (8 years). Students can take a minimum of one to nine subjects for a semester depending on their circumstances. All the course lectures are pre-recorded; hence students have access to them around the clock. Each semester, which is 6 months in duration, comprises of one midterm assessment, one final assessment and one assignment for which the dates are announced at the start of each semester. Students can then schedule around these times. The assessments are usually spanning across a week and students can take their exams anytime during the exam period. Also, provisions are made for students who couldn't take their exams or submit their assignments at the

specified period due to valid reasons, to attempt it during the supplementary exam period, late assignment submission and so on. Students can pause their studies by taking a semester break as per their circumstances. All these together makes IOU a very flexible platform wherein students can continually engage in studies even if it means taking 1-2 subjects per semester while executing other responsibilities. With regards to self-regulated learning, although it is primarily a student's responsibility, IOU monitors its students' progress through the student's retention office and emails are sent when they notice a low progress and offer guidance on how to successfully complete the semester.

At Preston International College, classes are conducted live, unlike IOU. In case of missed class, students support each other by recording the class. Classes are live, which implies that it cannot be accessed anytime, and one must dedicate the specified time for attending the classes. Exams periods are also announced beforehand but anecdotal reports inform that the exam dates get postponed to months later. This college is based in India and students giving exams must travel to India during the exam period in order to give their exam. This makes it difficult for travelling students to comply with the changing schedules. Thus, the flexibility offered at Preston is quite limited.

Inclusion/Exclusion criteria

Any student enrolled in Islamic Studies courses or courses taught from Islamic perspective are eligible to participate. However, for the purposes of this study, students should be doing university-like programs (diploma, bachelors, masters or PhDs) and not short informal courses taught through WhatsApp for memorization, Tajweed or the like.

Data Collection Process

Data was collected using an online questionnaire (Google Forms). Forms were sent across various IOU Telegram groups and through WhatsApp over a period of four weeks, starting from April 20'2024 to May 25'2024.

Measurements

Online Self Learning Questionnaire (OSLQ; Barnard, Lan, & Paton, 2008; Barnard, Lan, To, Paton, & Lai, 2009) (see Appendix A) - The OSLQ consists of six subscale constructs, including environment structuring, goal setting, time management, help seeking, task strategies, and self-evaluation. It is a 24-item scale with a 5-point Likert type response which ranges from 1 to signify '*Strongly Disagree*' to 5 to signify '*Strongly Agree*'. This is used to measure self-regulatory learning. The OSLQ has revealed satisfactory psychometric properties being validated across two samples of learners in the online and blended learning environments respectively (Barnard-Brak, Paton, & Lan

2010).

Perceived flexibility and student satisfaction are subscales taken from Perceived Student Satisfaction Questionnaire from the study conducted by Arbaugh in the year 2000. Both are 5-point Likert-type scales, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). (see Appendix B). The level of perceived flexibility is assessed using an eight-item scale, which centers on the structure of the course, enabling students to enroll in classes they might not have been able to otherwise, and their capacity to schedule their participation in the course around their work, family, and travel commitments. The study assessed student satisfaction by utilizing a 12-item scale that specifically targeted their contentment with the online course, their assessment of its quality, and their inclination to enroll in future Internet-based courses (Arbaugh 2000).

Ethical Considerations

Participants may face an element of fear of the reputation of themselves or their university when participating in the study. However, assurance was provided that their data will remain confidential, and their identity will not be linked with their data. Participants could also withdraw anytime from the study if they wished to do so. (see Appendix C)

Research Method

Quantitative method was used to conduct this research. Three variables- perceived flexibility, self-regulated learning and student satisfaction was collected and correlated with each other. Students enrolled in Islamic studies programs online, filled out e-questionnaires. The Likert type scale was then coded in MS Excel. Scoring and Pearson correlation test was carried out using SPSS software.

Methods of Data Analysis

The Pearson correlation test was used to analyze the data using SPSS software (IBM SPSS Statistics 29).

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the result of Pearson correlation test conducted on the three variables. The results show a positive moderate correlation between perceived flexibility and student satisfaction ($p = 0.672$). Thus hypothesis 1, where perceived flexibility will result in student satisfaction is supported. The correlation between self-regulated learning and perceived student satisfaction is not statistically significant ($\rho = 0.08$). Thus, no inference can be made regarding hypothesis 2.

Table 1
Results of Pearson Correlations

| | | Perceived Flexibility | Self-Regulated | Student Satisfaction |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------|----------------------|
| Perceived Flexibility | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .721** | .672** |
| | Sig. (2 tailed) | | < .001 | < .001 |
| | N | 28 | 28 | 28 |
| Self-Regulated Learning | Pearson Correlation | .721** | 1 | .491** |
| | Sig. (2 tailed) | < .001 | | .008 |
| | N | 28 | 28 | 28 |
| Perceived Satisfaction | Pearson Correlation | .672** | .491** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2 tailed) | < .001 | .008 | |
| | N | 28 | 28 | 28 |

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

DISCUSSION

The study was conducted to examine the current status of online Islamic Studies programs as to whether the students are satisfied with regards to the flexibility their program offers. Since flexibility is a key deciding factor for pursuing online studies, this factor should be at the forefront of online programs both in theory and practice. Flexibility operates at various levels: time, place, admission requirements and so on. The time dimension was examined in this paper wherein students could choose when they can start and end their course, their pace and frequency of learning, assessment timings and course duration.

This study collected data primarily from students from the International Open University (IOU) wherein all the aforementioned aspects of flexibility of time are offered. Whereas at Preston International College, flexibility is quite limited, and this operational

method would be better suited to traditional students who can commit a dedicated time to study. The primary difference between the two with regards to flexibility is that in IOU, classes are pre-recorded which enables students to access the course materials and study anytime. At Preston, classes are conducted live so students must spend 4-5 hours every morning studying. Since only 1 participant was from the Muqaddima institute, information regarding the program operations was not collected but the data given by the participant was used in the analysis.

Since this paper seeks to examine the relationship between perceived flexibility and student satisfaction, results in table 1 show a moderate positive correlation (0.672) between the two. This is the culminative result of all three institutes (IOU, Preston International College and Muqaddima) which indicates that in order to achieve the outcomes of a course such as student satisfaction, persistence, engagement and retention, flexibility is crucial. Thus hypothesis 1, perceived flexibility positively correlates with student satisfaction is proven correct. However, it should be noted that flexibility is one of many factors leading to student satisfaction and the fact that there is a moderate correlation between the two reveals that flexibility could be an overarching factor in student satisfaction with their program. This also aligns with the hypothesis that flexibility is a deciding factor in students enrollment intentions.

The second element, self-regulated learning skills, seeks to examine the individual student's characteristics. As per the literature review, profiles of students who exhibit self-regulated learning such as setting objectives, managing time, utilizing effective learning strategies, organizing the study environment, and seeking assistance do better academically but the author did not come across studies examining the relationship between SRL and student satisfaction. The results obtained in this study show no statistical significance. Thus, no relationship exists between the two variables: self-regulated learning and student satisfaction. It can be inferred that students self-regulatory learning skills and strategies are positively related to academic achievement but not student satisfaction. Even though a direct causal relationship cannot be established based on these results, it is well-known that academic achievement leads to contentment, satisfaction and confidence.

Limitations of Research

This study has the greatest limitation with respect to its sample size. A minimum of 100 participants were expected, if not at least 50. Steps were taken to increase the number of participants by sending constant reminders and by forwarding the study questionnaire

to many student community groups, but the study could only secure 28 participants. Such a small sample size is not sufficient to obtain a reliable proposition. The second limitation is that students from three different organizations participated in this study. Initially it was designed to examine students at the International Open University (IOU), but due to the sample size issue, it was agreed that it would be open to any student studying Islamic Sciences online. This resulted in universities with different operational mechanisms in terms of flexibility to be assumed as comparable. This would have confounded the results for the first hypothesis. Third, student demographics were not considered.

As per the author's knowledge, participants in this study comprised of all female students who were either married, not married, having kids and so on. This will largely affect the use of flexibility in the student's study. Participants who are not married will have lesser responsibilities and thus would be able to commute more time to studies. Nevertheless, the use of self-regulatory learning skills must be used by every student within their capacity to study effectively.

Further research and recommendations

This study considered flexibility of time, which is one of the main factors in determining student satisfaction. Other dimensions of flexibility such as content, admission requirements, instructional style and resources, and delivery and logistics could be examined to determine student satisfaction. Since schools without walls is increasingly becoming the norm, online learning platforms must upgrade and improvise to effectively deliver knowledge. Self-regulatory learning skills must be taught to students and should be given training in order to get used to online learning. It is indeed a new platform for obtaining a degree and hence students must know how to adapt to them. The idea of linking self-regulatory learning with Ihsan (excellence) will automatically endorse in student's spiritual accountability.

Therefore, studies should be developed on how to study online by incorporating self-regulated learning skills and tying the whole process to setting the right intention, applying Ihsan and so on. Studying Islamic studies is sacred and a trust which must be given the utmost reverence and sincerity. Thus, how to approach studying Islam online from an Islamic perspective would be a fine handbook for newly aspiring students.

Implications of Study

It is hoped that findings in this research have contributed to the development of Islamic studies program online by highlighting the importance of flexibility factor. It is also hoped that students will invest in their learning by developing self-regulatory

learning skills. This study aims to give the strategy to develop any beneficial skill from an Islamic perspective, Ihsan (excellence). It is hoped that self-help articles and books will emerge on the Islamic perspective to studying online.

CONCLUSION

This study is about online learning of Islam and its various disciplines specifically examining the flexibility the programs offer and its relation to students' satisfaction. A moderate positive correlation was obtained indicating that perceived flexibility is positively related to students' satisfaction. Student satisfaction is imperative for a student to continue the program and also take other courses in the future to study online. They will also recommend others to study online due to their satisfaction with the program operations. Secondly, self-regulatory learning was assessed among the participants of this study to examine whether it is related to student satisfaction or not.

However, the results obtained were not statistically significant and hence inference could not be made. The current literature on self-regulated learning establishes a relationship between self-regulated learning and academic achievement. The final part of this paper shed light on the concept of Ihsan which is excellence a student must apply in their online learning. Ihsan is a moral value which should be applied in all aspects of life such as work, social interactions, in personal life and so on. Since there is no direct observation by teachers and staff in online learning, there will be a tendency to procrastinate, reduced quality of work in assignments and not actively engaging in learning and so on.

But as Muslims, studying should be seen as an act of worship (Ibaadah) and one must put in their maximum effort (Ihsan) knowing that even though their effort might not be known or acknowledged by their teachers, Allah (swt) is always watching and loves the people of who exhibit Ihsan. Therefore, their efforts will be blessed, and the knowledge acquired will be beneficial and the disadvantages of online learning can be largely combated.

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