



# Research study on online learning by tertiary students and faculty members in tourism and hospitality programmes in Macao

The novel coronavirus covid-19 pandemic caused unprecedented impacts to our community and in cities around the world. During the height of the pandemic, Macao had temporarily suspended schools and imposed instructions for online delivery of classes in tertiary education. The Macao Tourism and Hospitality Association sponsored a research study on online learning by tertiary students and faculty members in tourism and hospitality programmes in Macao. We are sharing these insights to guide policy makers and curriculum planning for the future.

At the time of the research, there were four higher education institutions that offer tourism and hospitality related programmes in Macao, namely City University of Macao, Macao Institute for Tourism Studies, Macau University of Science and Technology and University of Macau. A total of 82 faculty members and 356 students took part in the study by responding to an online questionnaire distributed in March 2020. Both groups were asked to evaluate different aspects of their online teaching and learning experience on a 5-point Likert scale.

The majority of the sample did not have any prior online teaching and learning experience. Among the 82 faculty members, only 8.54% of faculty members had experienced teaching online courses before February 2020. In addition, faculty members agreed that stable Internet connection was in the place which was sufficient to deliver their courses in an online mode. Over 30% of the faculty members had more than 10 years of teaching experience, but preparing and delivering courses online were difficult despite online teaching was more convenience and flexible. In terms of preference of teaching mode, 8.54% preferred only online teaching, 43.9% preferred a blended mode, and the majority of 47.56% preferred only face-to-face traditional teaching. Based on faculty members' comments, this result could be due to the difficulties in observing and motivating students in an online classroom environment. The lowest and highest mean scores in items related to faculty members' evaluation of online teaching experience which are listed below.

- I believe that teaching online hospitality/tourism courses are easier than face to face courses (2.17)
- Being in a classroom with face-to-face communication would improve my ability to teach (4.22)

Students also rated favourably to using technology for learning although 69% of the 356 students did not have prior online learning experience. However, students encountered difficulties in attending classes online despite their ease in using technologies. Although attending classes online was flexible, they rated negatively towards workload, time devotion and learning effectiveness. Students appreciated the effort by faculty members and were generally pleased with their performance. However, students preferred face-to-face traditional classes more than classes delivered online, which suggest concerns related to learning in an online mode. Contrary to faculty members, the majority of students preferred a blended mode of online and face-to-face learning (61.8%), followed by only face-to-face learning (30.9%) and only online learning mode (7.3%).

In addition to the attitudes towards teaching and learning in an online environment, the study also collected data about participants' mental health since the pandemic outbreak. Both faculty members and student groups did not report a high level of stress during this period. They also thought the pandemic did not seriously affect their teaching or learning performance. The positive mentality towards stress brought on by the pandemic could be due to the relatively low number of confirmed cases in Macao and the expedited reaction by the government in controlling the situation.

Although both faculty members and students are happy with online teaching and learning, they faced a number of difficulties and challenges. The most frequent challenge encountered was technical issues such as internet problems and online learning system support. It was also difficult to maintain interaction and ensure students are engaged while they are attending classes in the comfort of their own homes. Adapting to a new online environment and using these tools were also challenging, as well as different assessment methods. Both groups were also concerned about fairness in grading and lack of resources to support online teaching and learning. Some faculty also noted immense difficulty in courses that involve practical and hands-on teaching such as culinary and wine classes.

Our findings suggest that both faculty members and students in the tourism and hospitality programmes need more training and support to adapt to delivery of online teaching and

learning. As seen in the current covid-19 pandemic, online education as an alternative to traditional means of teaching plays an important role in crises. In the uncertainties of the pandemic, it is prudent that education establishments are prepared, faculty members and students are supported and properly braced for drastic changes in traditional teaching and learning environments.

We hope this research study shed some light on education planning in tertiary education, particularly in the tourism and hospitality field, so that decision makers understand that more effort and in which direction that both faculty members and students are prepared and supported for remote teaching and learning through online technology if it is to become the new norm in the future.

The Macao Tourism and Hospitality Association (MacTHA) is a scholarly association initiated by academics in the tourism and hospitality field in Macao. Its overarching aim is to bring teaching and research in tourism and hospitality to the industry through recognition, education and collaboration. The Macao Tourism and Hospitality Association is officially registered with the Macao Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. Details are published on Boletim Oficial, No. 25, Series II, p.10927-10928, on 19 June 2019.

For enquiries, please contact us:

Email: [mactha.mo@gmail.com](mailto:mactha.mo@gmail.com)

Website: [www.mactha.org.mo](http://www.mactha.org.mo)

