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FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' CHOICE OF LEARNING FORMATS

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The rapid expansion of distance and technology-enhanced education has created new learning opportunities while simultaneously requiring a re-evaluation of the psychological, social, and organizational factors that guide students' educational choices. The selection of a learning format - whether traditional face-to-face, fully online, or blended - depends on how students perceive their personal needs, learning goals, and the resources available to them. The value system of learners, their motivation, attitudes toward learning, and self-regulatory capacities play a central role in this decision-making process. This article examines the psychological factors, value orientations, and contextual influences that shape students' preferences regarding learning formats in modern higher education.

Introduction. In contemporary higher education, the choice of a learning format has become one of the most significant decisions students make. This choice is not merely a preference for how classes are delivered, but a strategic selection that influences academic success, personal development, and future professional opportunities. With the growing availability of online platforms, flexible scheduling, and hybrid modalities, students now navigate a more complex educational landscape than ever before.

The decision-making process related to learning format is shaped by a range of psychological characteristics, including personal motivation, levels of self-discipline, learning attitudes, and individual value priorities. Social expectations, family influences, and cultural norms add further layers to this process. In addition, university infrastructure, digital literacy, and economic considerations substantially affect how students evaluate their options. This article explores these factors from a psychological and pedagogical perspective, highlighting the mechanisms that guide students' choices in the context of rapidly evolving educational environments.

Research indicates that personal characteristics significantly influence students' preference for a particular learning format [1]. Learners with strong self-regulation, intrinsic motivation, and a well-developed sense of autonomy tend to prefer distance learning, as it offers greater flexibility and independence. Students who value interpersonal interaction, structure, and immediate feedback are more likely to choose traditional classroom-based education. Blended learning is often favored by individuals who seek both flexibility and meaningful social engagement.

Digital literacy has become a foundational element in format selection. Students who demonstrate confidence in using digital tools are more open to the opportunities offered by online or blended learning [2]. Students who experience discomfort or anxiety when interacting with digital technologies, or who have limited access to reliable technological resources, are more inclined to choose traditional, face-to-face instruction.

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This preference is often driven by the perceived stability, clearer structure, and stronger interpersonal guidance that in-person learning environments provide. Contemporary research consistently highlights that digital competence is a key predictor of students' ability to navigate online platforms effectively. Higher levels of digital literacy are associated with greater confidence in using educational technologies, smoother adaptation to virtual learning environments, and increased satisfaction with online coursework. In contrast, insufficient digital skills can create barriers to engagement, reduce academic confidence, and ultimately influence students to opt for conventional classroom-based learning. Students' choices are also shaped by social context. Family expectations, peer recommendations, and societal attitudes toward online or traditional education influence decisions both consciously and unconsciously. Cultural orientations emphasizing collectivism, face-to-face communication, and traditional academic structure tend to support preferences for in-person formats. In contrast, cultures that value autonomy, innovation, and flexibility are more supportive of online and hybrid education models.

Institutional quality, accessibility of resources, scheduling flexibility, and financial costs play an important role. Distance education can reduce transportation expenses, allow students to combine study with work, and offer broader access to academic programs [3]. In contrast, traditional face-to-face instruction often offers more direct academic guidance, a clearly organized learning structure, and deeper opportunities for interpersonal interaction. Many students view these elements as critical for their academic development, as in-person settings allow for immediate feedback, closer relationships with instructors, and a stronger sense of classroom community. The predictability and routine of traditional learning can also help students maintain focus and motivation, especially those who benefit from external structure rather than self-directed study. Furthermore, the social connections formed in physical classrooms—peer support, collaborative learning, and informal academic discussions—are frequently cited as valuable components that cannot be fully replicated in virtual environments..

Students' value priorities, as described in the frameworks of Rokich, Schwartz, and Hofstede, offer insights into deeper motivational patterns underlying educational preferences. Individuals who prioritize autonomy, self-development, and innovation often select online or blended learning. Those who value social belonging, stability, and tradition typically prefer face-to-face modes [4]. Understanding value orientations thus provides a meaningful way to interpret learning-format decisions. Across studies, the most influential factors shaping students' choice of learning format include motivation, personal values, digital competence, and lifestyle demands. Students who choose distance education often demonstrate higher self-management abilities and prioritize convenience and flexibility. Those who select traditional education tend to value structured environments and direct social interaction. Blended learning appeals to students seeking a balance between independence and interpersonal engagement.

These patterns emphasize that learning-format selection is a complex process influenced by both internal psychological mechanisms and external contextual conditions.

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Recognizing these dynamics can help educational institutions design learning environments that better align with students' needs and preferences.

Conclusion. Students' preferences for different learning formats arise from the interplay of psychological traits, value systems, technological confidence, and organizational constraints. In an era of expanding educational choices, universities must consider these factors to create more adaptive, inclusive, and student-centered learning models. Supporting students in understanding their own learning preferences and value orientations can also contribute to more informed and effective educational decision-making.

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