

Students' Perspectives Towards Learning and Course Management System: McGraw-Hill Connect Platform For ECO415 (Economics)

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Abstract: Learning Management Systems have reshaped higher education, transforming face-to-face classrooms into blended and online environments that dismantle spatial and temporal constraints. McGraw-Hill Connect has emerged as a comprehensive digital learning and course management platform, automating preparation, simplifying course building, and providing robust analytics for instructors alongside personalized study environments for students. Integrating AI-enabled adaptive features, the platform optimizes pedagogical delivery, promotes learner autonomy, and supports diverse learning strategies. This study examines undergraduate students' perceptions of McGraw-Hill Connect at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam Campus, Malaysia, focusing on the ECO415 Economics course that has adopted the platform since COVID-19. Using a descriptive quantitative design, data were collected from 154 undergraduates across four departments. Cronbach's alpha confirmed reliability for the educational and technical dimensions. Distributions were approximately non-normal for the educational and technical dimensions; a bootstrapping procedure was applied to test independent-samples t-tests. The independent-samples t-tests revealed a significant gender difference in the technical dimension, with female students scoring higher than male students; no significant difference emerged for the educational aspect. A one-way ANOVA confirmed no significant departmental variation for either dimension. Findings indicate positive perceptions of both technical and educational value, supported by subscription growth from 2,657 learners in 2021 to 4,606 in 2025. The findings suggest that adaptive learning and AI-enabled personalization may support learner autonomy and pedagogical efficiency.

Keywords: *Learning management system, digital learning and course management system, Connect.*

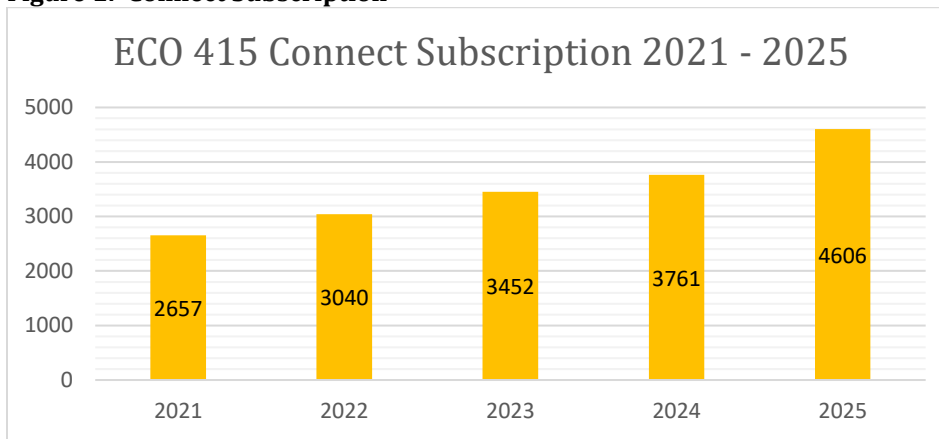
1. Introduction

Six years have passed since the world was hit by the Covid pandemic that stopped the entire world for a while. This has altered conventional education, allowing technology to completely redefine classic teaching and learning models. Today's digital tools support a variety of personalized learning strategies that cater to unique student profiles, ultimately empowering learners to take control of their own education (Aminatun & Oktaviani, 2019; Simamora & Oktaviani, 2020). Today's technology accommodates unique student needs through diverse learning approaches, ultimately empowering learners to take charge of their own education (Aminatun & Oktaviani, 2019; Simamora & Oktaviani, 2020).

The way Learning Management Systems (LMS) have evolved shows we are moving toward fully integrated, anytime-anywhere learning environments—effectively dismantling the old constraints of physical space and rigid timetables (Sanchez et al., 2024). In addition, these web-based technologies used to deliver, track, and manage educational content have driven the evolution of traditional face-to-face classrooms into blended and fully online learning environments (Altinpulluk & Kesim, 2021). Learning Content Management Systems (LCMS) prioritize digital instruction as their core educational framework and focus specifically on the development of e-learning content (Shurygin et al., 2021). In tandem with an LMS, it supplies students with self-directed learning materials. Digital learning platforms have witnessed staggering growth. Metrics from Tencent Conference and Tencent Classroom between 2023–2025 highlighted a user base of 400 million, while daily global engagement in online education and meetings surged to an estimated 3 billion participants worldwide (Huang & Rex, 2023). As the backbone of blended and e-learning models that rely heavily on LMS and LCMS, these systems support crucial real-time and delayed communication across multiple devices. This connectivity enables educators to build varied instructional strategies that promote collaborative discussion and active student engagement.

McGraw-Hill Connect is a comprehensive, digital learning and course management platform (LCMP) designed to enhance the educational experience for both instructors and students. By automating time-consuming prep work, simplifying course building, and offering robust performance analytics, the platform significantly streamlines educator workloads. For students, Connect provides a personalized, flexible learning environment through features like the GenAI-powered AI Reader, SmartBook® adaptive learning, and on-the-go study access via the ReadAnywhere® app. Ultimately, the platform is engineered to spark curiosity, boost student engagement, and drive measurable academic success. At the Faculty of Business and Management UiTM, one of the courses that has been using this platform for its teaching and learning is ECO415 (Economics). The use of this platform started during COVID when classes started to be conducted online. It has been more than five years since then. Based on the Connect subscription data in Figure 1, the increase in subscriptions for the platform indicates that users, lecturers, and students have started to adapt well to the transformation from traditional face-to-face teaching and learning methods to the new digital learning style. This platform, a dynamic online and blended learning environment, has trained and allowed students to become independent learners.

Figure 1: Connect Subscription



Note: Subscription to Connect between 2021 - 2025

Source: McGraw-Hill Education (MHE) Analytic Portal, ECO415 activation usage year report 2021–2025, McGraw-Hill

2. Literature Review

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is an appropriate theoretical framework applied to investigate students' acceptance and perceptions toward the course management system. TAM was developed by Davis (1989) by emphasis two important factors: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use affecting users' acceptance of technology. In the context of learning and course management systems, perceived ease of use reflects the extent to which students perceive the system as easy to access, navigate, and operate, while perceived usefulness refers to the extent to which students believe that the system supports and improves their learning activities. The technical aspect reflects system accessibility, functionality, reliability, and ease of use, whereas the educational aspect may capture the system's usefulness in supporting learning, accessing learning materials, communication, and completing learning activities.

The rapid growth of digital technology has transformed higher education delivery, with Learning Management Systems (LMS) becoming an important component in modern teaching and learning environments. Learning Management Systems have grown into flexible, all-encompassing educational spaces that remove the usual boundaries of time and place (Sanchez et al., 2024). These crucial digital platforms help manage, distribute, and track course materials, satisfying both teaching and technical demands (Altınpulluk & Kesim, 2021; Dlamini & Ndzinisa, 2020). They encourage independent learning by allowing students to monitor their own performance and collaborate with peers (Tuğtekin, 2023). Ultimately, research shows that modern schools and universities must integrate these systems to improve educational quality and increase access to online learning (Prahani et al., 2022; Kasim & Khalid, 2016).

Students' perceptions are an important factor in determining the efficacy of digital learning platforms, as the availability of technology does not always guarantee meaningful use. Students are more likely to use a digital learning system when they believe it is useful, easy to use, and supportive of their learning goals. Khoo et al. (2024) reveal that usability and instructional value are closely related to students' acceptance and continued use of LMS. Their findings indicate that LMS can improve students' learning experiences when the technology is aligned with the learners' academic needs. This is also supported by Almusharraf (2024), who found that students' perceptions of the technical aspects of an LMS can influence their willingness to use the system. In terms of student engagement, Nkomo and Nat (2021) explained that engagement in technology-supported learning is multidimensional and involves different aspects of students' participation in the learning process. A recent scoping review by Du Plooy et al. (2024) also provided evidence on the use of personalized adaptive learning in higher education. The review reported improved academic performance in 59% of the studies and increased student engagement in 36% of the studies. These findings indicate that adaptive learning features may provide additional support for students' learning and engagement. In this context, McGraw-Hill Connect represents a more specialized digital learning and course management platform that combines learning materials, assessment, and personalized learning features. Babbain (2021) found that students were generally satisfied with Connect, particularly in relation to understanding course materials, studying and reviewing for examinations, and the system's usability and friendliness.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to investigate students' perceptions of the use of the McGraw-Hill Connect digital teaching and learning platform. A descriptive and inferential approach was used to analyze the data. The target population is undergraduate students from the Faculty of Business and Management at Universiti Teknologi MARA Puncak Alam Campus. A convenience sampling technique was used to collect data among students enrolled in the Economics course who used the Connect platform. A total of 154 valid questionnaires were collected. The descriptive analysis of the demographics is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic analysis

Variables	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	22	14.33
Female	132	85.7
Age		
18-20 years old	49	31.8
21-23 years old	101	65.6
24-26 years old	4	2.6
Department		
Department of Economics and Financial Studies (DEFS)	29	18.8
Department of Entrepreneurship and Marketing Studies (DEMS)	41	26.6
Department of International Business and Management Studies (DEIMS)	58	37.7
Department of Technology and Supply Chain Management Studies (DTSCM)	26	16.9

Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire through an online platform, Google Forms. The questionnaire is divided into two main sections: Section A is demographic profiles to gather data on gender, age, and academic discipline and Section B is the measurement items on the perception towards the Connect platform from technical and educational aspects. The measurement items were adapted with minor modifications from Putri and Sari (2020). Responses were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

The instrument's reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. The overall scale for educational and

technical aspects was above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, supporting the reliability of the instrument. The quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 29. The statistical significance level was set a priori at $\alpha = 0.05$. The analysis was performed in three sequential phases, which are descriptive statistics, an independent-samples *t*-test, and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The descriptive statistics analysis includes means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages to summarize the demographic profile of the participants and the primary variables. Normality of the data was assessed using skewness and kurtosis. The independent samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of students' perceptions toward the use of the Connect platform from the technical and educational aspects, respectively, between males and females. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether there are differences in students' perceptions of the use of the Connect platform from the technical and educational aspects, respectively, across students of four departments in the faculty.

4. Findings and Results

This study investigates students' perceptions of the use of the McGraw-Hill Connect digital teaching and learning platform from technical and educational aspects among the undergraduate students at the Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Puncak Alam Campus, Malaysia.

Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients were calculated to examine the distribution and internal consistency of the variables, as shown in Table 2. The distribution of the data was assessed for normality using skewness and kurtosis. As detailed in Table 2, the skewness values for the use of the digital teaching and learning platform in both the technical aspect (-3.41) and the educational aspect (-3.55) fell well outside the acceptable range of ± 1.0 . Consequently, the data for both variables are highly negatively skewed, indicating that the assumption of normality is not met.

Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. The technical aspect ($\alpha = 0.721$) and the educational aspect ($\alpha = 0.895$) Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeded the standard threshold of .70 (Hair et al., 2018), indicating that both scales are sufficiently reliable.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics, Normality, and Reliability Tests

Variables	No of items	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's alpha
Use of the digital teaching and learning platform (Technical aspect)	7	3.94	0.509	-3.41	0.728	0.721
Use of the digital teaching and learning platform (Educational aspect)	7	4.02	0.631	-3.55	-0.278	0.895

Note. SD = Standard Deviation. Skewness and kurtosis values within ± 1.0 indicate acceptable normality. Cronbach's alpha > 0.70 indicates acceptable internal consistency.

As the skewness values indicated that the data were not normally distributed, bootstrapping with resampling 5000 was applied to the independent samples *t*-test and ANOVA to obtain more robust estimates and reduce the reliance on the normality assumption. The use of bootstrapping is appropriate when the normality assumption is not fully satisfied, as it provides empirical estimates of the sampling distribution based on repeated resampling of the observed data (Field, 2018). The results of the independent samples *t*-test and ANOVA are presented in Tables 3 and 4, respectively.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-Test Results for Technical and Educational Aspects by Gender

Aspect	Gender	N	M	SD	Levene's F (p)	T	df	P
Technical aspect	Male	22	3.62	0.571	1.292 (p=0.258)	-3.223	152	0.002
	Female	132	3.99	0.481				
Educational aspect	Male	22	3.90	0.831	0.7254 (p=0.008)	-0.762	24.687	0.335
	Female	132	4.04	0.593				

Note. N = Sample size; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; df = Degrees of freedom.

Table 4: One-Way ANOVA Results for Technical and Educational Aspects Across Four Departments

Aspect	Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	F-test	p-value
Technical aspect	Between Groups	1.274	3	0.425	1.659	0.178
	Within Groups	38.396	150			
Educational aspect	Between Groups	0.363	3	0.121	0.300	0.826
	Within Groups	60.595	150			

Note. SS = Sum of Squares; df = Degrees of Freedom; MS = Mean Square

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of students' perceptions of the technical and educational aspects of the Connect platform, respectively, between males and females. Levene's test indicates equal variances assumed for the technical aspect ($F=1.292$, $p > 0.05$), while equal variances are not assumed for the educational aspect ($F=0.7254$, $p < 0.05$). The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between the males and females for the technical aspect ($t = 3.223$, $df=152$, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI [-0.592, -0.142], Cohen's $d = 0.742$) but not statistically significant difference between the males and females for the educational aspect ($t = -0.762$, $df = 24.687$, $p > 0.05$, 95% CI [-0.521, 0.240], Cohen's $d = -0.223$). Specifically, males ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.571$) scored significantly lower than females ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.481$). These results indicate that male and female students' perceptions of the technical aspect of the Connect platform were significantly different, with female students having a higher score than male students.

A one-way ANOVA was performed to evaluate whether there are differences in perception of the technical and educational aspects of the Connect platform for students from four different departments in the faculty. The ANOVA results indicated no statistically significant difference across students from four different departments for technical ($F_{3,150} = 1.659$, $p = 0.178 > 0.05$) and educational aspect ($F_{3,150} = 0.300$, $p = 0.826 > 0.05$), respectively.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the undergraduate students generally perceived McGraw-Hill Connect positively in both its technical and educational dimensions. The mean scores reported for the two dimensions were close to 4.00 on a five-point scale, suggesting that students broadly agreed that the platform was usable and supportive of their learning. The findings indicate that Connect was favorably perceived as both a technological tool and a learning environment for ECO415. The result is consistent with Khoo et al. (2024), who linked perceived usefulness and ease of use with students' acceptance of learning management systems, and with Babbain (2021), who reported generally favorable student satisfaction with Connect for understanding course content, studying, and examination preparation.

The positive technical perception is important because ease of access, system usability, and reliable platform functions influence whether students continue to engage with digital learning systems. Almusharraf (2024) similarly found that students' perceptions of the technical aspects of an LMS can shape their willingness to use

it. In the present study, the favorable technical rating, together with the growth in Connect subscriptions from 2,657 learners in 2021 to 4,606 in 2025, suggests increasing institutional and student acceptance of the platform. Subscription growth is not, by itself, evidence of improved learning, but it provides contextual support for the survey finding that Connect has become embedded in the delivery of ECO415 following the transition to online and blended learning during the COVID-19 period.

Students also reported a favorable perception of Connect's educational dimension. This suggests that the integration of course materials, assessments, feedback, and adaptive learning features is viewed as relevant to students' academic needs. The finding supports earlier research showing that LMS platforms can encourage self-directed learning by enabling students to monitor their performance and access learning resources flexibly (Tuğtekin, 2023). It is also consistent with Du Plooy et al. (2024), whose review found evidence that personalized adaptive learning can improve academic performance and engagement. However, the current study measured students' perceptions rather than their actual achievement or behavioral engagement. Therefore, the findings support the perceived educational value of Connect but do not establish that the platform caused improvements in grades, engagement, or learner autonomy.

The gender comparison produced a more specific result. Female students reported significantly more favorable perceptions of the technical aspect than male students ($M = 3.99$ and $M = 3.62$, respectively; $t = -3.223$, $p = 0.002$), with the reported effect size indicating a meaningful difference. Accordingly, the null hypothesis of no gender difference for the technical dimension is rejected. This difference may reflect variation in prior experience, frequency of use, digital study practices, or expectations of platform usability; however, these factors were not measured and should not be assumed from the present data. The result instead signals a practical need to examine whether particular students experience avoidable technical barriers and whether orientation, technical guidance, or ongoing support should be tailored accordingly.

In contrast, there was no statistically significant gender difference in perceptions of the educational aspect. The null hypothesis of no gender difference for this dimension is therefore not rejected. Although the mean score for female students was slightly higher than that for male students, the observed difference was not sufficiently large to rule out sampling variation. This suggests that students of both genders generally recognized similar educational value in the platform. Taken together with the significant technical result, the finding shows that perceptions of technological usability and perceptions of instructional value should be treated as related but distinct dimensions. A platform may be educationally useful across groups even when the user experience is not perceived equally.

The one-way ANOVA found no significant differences among students from the four departments for either the technical dimension ($F(3, 150) = 1.659$, $p = 0.178$) or the educational dimension ($F_{3,150} = 0.300$, $p = 0.826$). The null hypotheses of no departmental differences are therefore not rejected. These results imply that the platform's perceived usefulness is broadly consistent across the academic disciplines represented in the sample. This is relevant to practice because it supports the continued use of a common digital platform for ECO415 students from different departments without evidence that its technical or educational value is confined to one disciplinary group. The finding also aligns with the wider literature describing LMS platforms as flexible environments capable of supporting access, content delivery, performance monitoring, and learning across varied higher-education contexts (Altınpulluk & Kesim, 2021; Sanchez et al., 2024).

Overall, the study meets its stated purpose by evaluating students' perceptions of Connect from technical and educational perspectives and by determining whether those perceptions differ by gender and department. The evidence supports the broader expectation that students perceive value in the platform, but it only partially supports an expectation of subgroup differences: a difference was identified for gender in the technical dimension, whereas educational perceptions did not differ by gender and neither dimension differed by department. The findings extend existing research by providing institution- and course-specific evidence from a Malaysian public university after several years of sustained platform use. They also underline that future evaluation should examine technical experience separately from educational effectiveness and should combine perception data with objective evidence of usage and learning outcomes.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that McGraw-Hill Connect is positively perceived by ECO415 undergraduates at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam Campus, in relation to both its technical functions and educational value. The instrument demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, and the findings showed that students across the four departments held broadly comparable views of the platform. A statistically significant gender difference was found only for the technical dimension, with female students reporting a more favorable perception than male students, while no significant gender difference emerged for the educational dimension. These findings suggest that Connect has become an accepted component of teaching and learning for ECO415, while also identifying technical experience as an area that may not be uniform across all students.

The study contributes to current research by adding course-level evidence on the sustained use of a specialized digital learning and course management platform in Malaysian higher education. It supports prior work connecting usability and instructional value with students' acceptance of digital learning systems and demonstrates the importance of assessing technical and educational perceptions as separate constructs. In practice, the results support the continued use of Connect for ECO415 and potentially for other suitable courses, provided that implementation remains aligned with course outcomes, student needs, and appropriate academic support.

Several recommendations follow from the findings. Lecturers and administrators should maintain a structured orientation for first-time users, provide concise technical guides and responsive assistance, and monitor recurring access or usability issues. Particular attention should be given to understanding the technical-perception gap between male and female students through follow-up surveys, focus groups, or user-experience testing rather than assuming its cause. Lecturers should also make purposeful use of Connect's adaptive learning, assessment, feedback, and analytics features and regularly review whether these functions are helping students prepare, practice, and learn independently. Periodic evaluation should combine student feedback with platform usage data, completion rates, assessment performance, and course outcomes so that decisions about adoption or expansion are evidence-based.

The conclusions must be considered in light of the study's limitations. The research used convenience sampling, involved one course at one faculty and campus, and included an unequal gender distribution. These factors limit the generalizability of the results and may affect the stability of subgroup comparisons. The cross-sectional, self-reported design captures perceptions at one point in time and cannot determine causal effects on academic performance or engagement. The study also did not examine variables such as prior digital experience, internet access, device type, frequency of platform use, socioeconomic background, instructor practices, or specific Connect features that might explain differences in perception.

Future research should use larger and more balanced samples across courses, faculties, campuses, and institutions. Mixed-method studies incorporating interviews, focus groups, or usability observations would help explain the gender difference found in the technical dimension and identify the platform features students find most helpful or difficult. Future studies should also examine relationships among perceived usefulness, ease of use, actual usage behavior, engagement, learner autonomy, assessment performance, and retention. Such work would provide stronger evidence for decisions on platform design, instructional integration, student support, and broader institutional adoption.

Acknowledgement: The paper is supported by the internal faculty grant 600-TNCPI 5/3/DDF (FPP) (038/2024) endowed by the Faculty of Business Management, University Technology MARA, Puncak Alam, Selangor.

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