

---

# International Journal of Management, Finance and Accounting

---

## Exploring the Experiences and Challenges of Online Learning at a Private University in Malaysia

Harpaljit Kaur<sup>1</sup>, Kyra Ley Sy Law<sup>2,\*</sup>

\*Corresponding author: [kylaw@mmu.edu.my](mailto:kylaw@mmu.edu.my)

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Business and Law, Taylor' University, Subang Jaya, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Management, Multimedia University, Cyberjaya, Malaysia

### Abstract

This study explores online learning experiences, focusing on their advantages and disadvantages through a qualitative analysis of responses from 30 students at a private institution in Malaysia. The data was collected to gain insight into students' positive impacts and challenges during online learning. The study identified key positive impacts of online learning, including flexibility and accessibility, which allowed students to attend classes from any location and manage their schedules effectively. Students appreciated the opportunity to review recorded lectures and access various online resources. However, the research also highlighted significant negative impacts, such as feelings of isolation, technical issues like unstable internet connections, and challenges with unfamiliar digital platforms. The absence of a structured learning environment negatively impacted student focus and motivation, while inadequate support and instructor communication further diminished engagement and satisfaction. The findings suggest that while online learning offers substantial advantages regarding convenience and resource availability, critical challenges must be addressed. Strategies recommended include improving technical infrastructure, fostering interactive and collaborative online environments, and enhancing support systems for students to mitigate the negative aspects of online learning. This study provides a nuanced understanding of the varied experiences of online learning, offering valuable insights into the strengths and

weaknesses of this educational mode. The recommendations presented aim to enhance the overall student experience in online learning environments.

**Keywords:** Benefits, Drawbacks, Experience, High Institutions, Online Learning

Received on 17 October 2024; Accepted on 2 January 2025; Published on 28 February 2025.

## **1.0 Introduction**

Online learning has become an important element in education as the only feasible alternative to provide uninterrupted education worldwide, affecting millions of students worldwide during the Covid-19 pandemic. With the abrupt transition from face-to-face learning to online education during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, many higher education institutions were unprepared for the sudden shift. This created substantial challenges for both students and educators. However, various universities' initiatives and interventions have successfully established effective systems (Dinh & Nguyen, 2020; Hayashi et al., 2020; Hettiarachchi et al., 2021). Hence, online learning experiences are crucial to be deemed as the pandemic has thus proven that education need not be done the traditional way. Therefore, many universities have opted to continue with these synchronous and asynchronous modes of teaching and learning.

## **2.0 Background of Study**

The online course content needs to be well-planned and designed effectively to increase students' acceptance of the e-learning process (Mohammad, 2023), boosting their performance via their knowledge and skills (Khan & Yildiz, 2020; Mohammed et al., 2020). In the same vein, the quality of the educators in teaching and achieving the needs of student learning is equally important (Mulang, 2021). Though educators have produced better learning outcomes with online instructions and students have more flexible time and space to learn based on their individual learning needs and autonomy, there are concerns about the quality of learning, student satisfaction, and academic success (Sahu, 2020). In addition, various challenges linked with online learning have been identified in past studies, which include difficulties with online exams, internet connection, stress, and inadequate support from faculty members, peers, and devices (Zeng & Wang, 2021). Despite these challenges, past studies have highlighted that individuals who did online learning were satisfied with the experiences (Hettiarachchi et al., 2021) as it supports continuing education with accessibility, convenience, and flexibility (Selvanathan et al., 2020). However, student satisfaction is found to be the key factor in the success or failure of online learning (Gopal et al., 2021; Rabin et al., 2019)

based on how they identify the learning experience and the course instructions quality (Hew et al., 2020).

Online learning can be an important element in encouraging active learning by boosting students' motivation and learning creativity (Pei & Wu, 2019), as it allows independent learning and various skills development, leading to lifelong learning (Dhawan, 2020). Online learning promotes students to connect with their lecturers, peers, and the module's content in the comfort and flexibility of their own time and space (Shaid et al., 2021). Educators have learned to produce better learning outcomes with online instructions (Shahzad et al., 2021), whereas students have more control over the content and time to learn based on their individual learning needs and autonomy (Coman et al., 2020). Students faced multiple challenges during their online learning, one of which was the quality of their internet access as they encountered connection disruptions (Chung et al., 2020; Dinh & Nguyen, 2020; Hayashi et al., 2020), negatively impacting student participation quality. Students also have compatibility issues with their devices (Hayashi et al., 2020; Yeung & Yau, 2021), which required their participatory learning, and had problems focusing on online learning (Means & Neisler, 2020). Many students felt no sense of belonging in the online learning environment, creating a feeling of isolation (Huang et al., 2020) and impacting the learning process. In addition, students had to be responsible for managing their learning, making self-regulated learning crucial in an online learning environment (Pelikan et al., 2021), and success relied on self-motivation (Ben-Eliyahu, 2019). This is strongly connected to an individual's independent learning style, self-directed behaviour, and the lecturer's pedagogical approach for effective online instruction (Hettiarachchi et al., 2021), all of which can help motivate students in their online learning journey.

Furthermore, a lack of student motivation can result in dropouts (Aldowah et al., 2021) and passive procrastination, such as delays in completing module-related tasks (Pelikan et al., 2021), which ultimately lead to low satisfaction with online learning and poor academic performance (Hettiarachchi et al., 2021). Lack of interaction between lecturers, peers, and the content in an online environment creates low student satisfaction and thus decreases engagement in online learning (Rahmatpour et al., 2021) as opposed to significantly higher face-to-face teaching (Dinh & Nguyen, 2020). Online learning has

been associated with mental health in recent studies. Students face anxiety and frustration as they are concerned about their future regarding studies and careers due to the transition to online learning (Aristovnik et al., 2020). In the same vein, students experienced isolation as governments implemented measures like social distancing and lockdowns to control the spread of the pandemic, requiring them to remain at home (Rose, 2020). This situation led some students to discontinue their studies and contributed to a decline in self-confidence, ultimately resulting in increased levels of depression and anxiety. Furthermore, online learning has caused stress for students (Lazarevic & Bentz, 2021) and affected their sleeping habits (Haider & Al-Salman, 2020) due to the continuous use of digital tools for learning.

Interaction among lecturers and peers is crucial to the effectiveness of online learning. Past studies have found that students require prompt feedback, student engagement, lecturer awareness, and help from their lecturers (Baber, 2020; Jiang et al., 2021), who are the facilitators of online learning to increase student satisfaction and motivation in online learning. Peer interaction is vital in this environment to boost academic achievement and student satisfaction as it encourages students to interact, discuss, participate, and exchange ideas as groups (Lim et al., 2020). High-quality content motivates students to learn, engaging them in the learning process to reach desired outcomes (Kim & Kim, 2021) and achieve their academic goals. Moreover, online learning enables students to utilize technology to communicate across borders, expanding their knowledge and skills (Waham et al., 2023). Therefore, it is crucial in this research to explore students' online learning experiences, particularly with motivation, autonomy, and self-regulation. Identifying the key challenges students face during online learning, such as technical, personal, and educational obstacles. Ultimately, this will lead to recommendations for improving the online learning experience by addressing these challenges and enhancing the overall quality of online education.

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study used an online semi-structured questionnaire, allowing the researchers to gain a distinctive meaning from the contents of different participants. A semi-structured questionnaire combines structured and unstructured elements. It involves pre-determined questions or topics (structured) while also allowing for flexibility in the questions that are asked and the ways the conversation flows (unstructured). This format enables the researcher to explore topics in-depth and adapt based on the responses given by participants. Semi-structured questionnaires are commonly used in social sciences, market research, educational research, and healthcare studies (Pitura, 2023). In this research, a set of key questions is developed in advance based on the research objectives to ensure that the primary themes are covered.

### **3.2 Respondent Profiles**

Thirty (30) participants are recruited from a private higher institution in Malaysia using purposive sampling to collect relevant information and data. A diverse group providing rich, nuanced insights through their varied perspectives, experiences, and individual stories about the online learning experience. Purposive sampling allows researchers to selectively choose participants who best represent the research topic, providing targeted insights, depth of understanding, and rich data (Campbell et al., 2020). Among the thirty participants, fifteen (15) of them are female, and the balance is male. The inclusion criteria for the participants are as below:

1. Between 19 to 21 years old and registered as a student in a private higher learning institution
2. Able to speak and communicate in English
3. Undergoing the online classes in a higher learning institution

All participants' names were given aliases for confidentiality and safety purposes. Table 1 summarizes their demographic data.

**Table 1: Summary of demographic data**

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>
R1	Female	Chinese
R2	Female	Chinese
R3	Female	Chinese
R4	Female	Chinese
R5	Female	Malay
R6	Female	Chinese
R7	Female	Chinese
R8	Female	Chinese
R9	Female	Chinese
R10	Female	Chinese
R11	Female	Chinese
R12	Female	Chinese
R13	Female	Malay
R14	Female	Chinese
R15	Female	Malay
R16	Male	Chinese
R17	Male	Chinese
R18	Male	Malay
R19	Male	Indian
R20	Male	Chinese
R21	Male	Chinese
R22	Male	Chinese
R23	Male	Chinese
R24	Male	Indian
R25	Male	Indian
R26	Male	Chinese
R27	Male	Malay
R28	Male	Chinese
R29	Male	Chinese
R30	Male	Indian

### **3.3 Data Collection Method**

As a data collection method, the online semi-structured questionnaire combines elements of both structured and unstructured approaches. It is particularly suited for qualitative research to gather in-depth information about participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward online learning. In this study, the online semi-structured questionnaires were conducted on the thirty participants. All the data were recorded, and the information gathered was put together for analysis purposes.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

In this study, a thematic analysis was organized from the data collected. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively. Thematic analysis often identifies patterns, themes, or trends in the participants' responses. Since participants' responses are open-ended, interpretation involves looking for recurring themes and understanding the deeper meaning of responses. The findings were produced following the six important steps after the data saturation was achieved (Alam, 2021).

1. Researchers self-familiarized with the data collected.
2. Generation of initial codes across the entire data set.
3. Searching and identifying potential themes.
4. Reviewing and refining the themes identified.
5. Defining and naming themes.
6. Final analysis and production of the report.

To reach the data saturation point, it is noticeable when the themes, patterns, or codes start repeating. Data saturation is achieved when sufficient information has been gathered to allow replication of the study, no new insights or data can be obtained, and no further meaningful coding is possible (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). In this research, code or thematic saturation is reached when repeated codes or themes are consistently observed during data analysis with no further information or new connections between



them emerge. Thus, two main themes were identified with five sub-themes, each to elaborate further on the insights to reach data saturation.

#### 4.0 Results and Analysis

Table 2 summarizes the two main themes that emerged from this study, clarifying the participants' experiences with the online classes that affect their experience.

**Table 2: Summary of the thematic analysis**

Themes	Sub-themes
Theme 1: Positive impacts	Teaching staff and peer supports
	Increased self-learning experiences
	Systematic learning platforms
	Timesaving
	Enhanced critical thinking and skills
Theme 2: Negative impacts	Unadaptable
	Miscommunication
	Overwhelming content and information
	Mental health concerns
	Procrastination

#### 4.1 Experiences

Effective learning should come from the academic institution, administrators, staff, and students regarding online learning. Having online classes significantly affected students' learning experience. Some students might be impacted positively or negatively. Nonetheless, online classes were a different experience, significantly affecting all students. Online learning is initially less effective compared to physical classes. This perception leads to frustration, where online learning seems like a waste of time.

However, with self-discipline, participants later highlighted its positive impacts, such as convenience, flexibility, and enhanced productivity. This shift suggests a nuanced view, balancing the challenges with eventual satisfaction due to personal effort. Similarly, participants touched on feelings of loneliness and isolation exacerbated by the lack of social interaction in virtual environments. Respondent 27 specifically mentioned the social disconnect during online classes, where cameras are off, and interactions are limited, contributing to an overall feeling of loneliness. This led to anxiety and discomfort at the beginning of online learning, indicating that the mode of learning itself was unfamiliar and strange. This emotional response is tied to the broader loss of the university's social experience, which is traditionally a time for forming new connections. The responses reflect diverse student experiences with online learning. While some students can adapt and even find positive impacts in the format, others may struggle with feelings of social isolation and emotional discomfort. The overarching themes involve balancing the flexibility and convenience of online learning against the emotional and social drawbacks, especially the lack of peer interaction and the initial adjustment difficulties.

*This makes me feel that online learning is not as effective as physical classes, and it somehow affects my experience because I feel that studying online is a waste of time. However, with self-discipline, my online learning experience makes me happier because it makes the learning process more convenient, gives me more time flexibility, and makes me more productive. (Respondent 3)*

*Online classes did affect my experience. This is because online classes make it hard to find new friends. After all, we have not met each other physically. Thus, it makes me unhappy as I know that I must start back from scratch when I return to campus. (Respondent 18)*

*At the beginning of the semester, I was anxious and worried due to the mode of online learning. It was a unique experience for me, a strange way of learning. Online learning makes me feel lonely. When attending*

*online classes, everyone turns off their camera and has no interaction with each other. University is a time for people to create new social connections and develop new friendships and relationships. Students are unable to make these connections due to national lockdown and social distancing measures. (Respondent 27)*

Despite the negative impacts on students' experience, some students have otherwise feelings for online learning. Two participants reflect on the dual impact of online learning on their experiences. While it offers academic flexibility and opportunities for self-improvement, it also creates feelings of social isolation and emotional dissatisfaction. Ultimately, these experiences reveal the complex nature of online learning, where students are required to balance the convenience and independence of virtual education with the emotional challenges of reduced social engagement.

*Online learning did affect my experience and made me upset sometimes. This affects my experience positively, as I know that I am always able to catch up academically, and I would not feel left behind. This re-watching method sometimes even improves my understanding of some parts of the syllabus that I have trouble understanding at first. Due to online learning, I have not been meeting new people as I have not been on campus, and this has affected my experience negatively. (Respondent 23)*

*The online learning experience did affect my experience as I was feeling unhappy after knowing that the entire semester would be conducted online, I was unable to meet with my coursemates and study with them as I was used to studying with people before the pandemic to boost my motivation. However, my experience level has increased*

*after attempting to adjust and make myself adapt to online learning as it has made me more disciplined and independent in terms of study and daily life. (Respondent 13)*

## 4.2 Theme 1- Positive Impacts

### (i) Teaching staff and peers' support

Respondents highlighted that support from teaching staff and peers enhanced their online learning experiences. Supporting one another in a new learning environment has helped the students stay motivated, and eventually, it creates or leads to experience. Two participants illustrated the positive aspects of online learning, focusing on the critical role of instructors in providing guidance and the positive impacts of peer collaboration in improving understanding and retention of course materials. It reflects an optimistic view of online learning when academic support and collaborative opportunities are present.

*The time and effort spent by my lecturers and tutors to give to my classmates and me on how to handle our difficulties and move forward smoothly have significantly helped. (Respondent 4)*

*I did some group discussions with my friends through Teams as well to exchange ideas and points while doing notes and tutorials. It helps me to memorize the points and understand better with the modules. The lecturers and tutors provided lots of information and videos to teach us how to complete it perfectly. In this online learning experience, I made some good friends from the tutorials and different group assignments. (Respondent 8)*

### (ii) Increased in self-learning experiences

Experiencing online classes, students learn to be more independent, and it increases their self-learning experiences. Online learning has helped students study remotely, which is convenient for teachers and students to access. It encourages students to study independently as they can access teaching materials effortlessly (Mukhtar et al., 2020). The responses highlighted the positive impacts of online learning in terms of increased flexibility, productivity, and independent learning, while also pointing out the critical role of self-discipline. Two participants showed that adaptation to online learning can lead to personal and academic growth when students develop the necessary skills to succeed in a more autonomous environment.

*Online learning provides me with more time flexibility and enables me to do things I want. This has enhanced my productivity, which means I can complete more tasks through online learning. However, a high level of self-discipline is required to have a great online learning experience. (Respondent 3)*

*Online learning has increased my ability to do self-learning before lectures as I was a person who always depended solely on study materials that were provided by lecturers instead of doing some research about the topics which were going to be covered during lectures. (Respondent 13)*

(iii) Systematic learning platforms

Systematic platforms will help students organize their learning experiences as they can watch recordings from classes in case they miss the classes or when they do revisions. The advantages of online learning include reducing traveling resources and other expenses and easing administrative tasks. The learning materials and videos are created and uploaded by the teachers. These instructional materials are one of the accessible media that is readily available for students at any time and easy to understand (Aliyyah et al., 2020). The participants highlighted the practical positive impacts of online

learning, particularly using efficient platforms and the availability of recorded lectures. Two participants appreciated the convenience and accessibility of learning materials, emphasizing how easily they can refer to notes and lessons during or after class. The flexibility to review content at their own pace, pause, and replay difficult sections significantly enhances their understanding of the material. The overall sentiment reflected that online learning, with its technological tools, provides students with greater control over their learning experience, enabling self-paced learning and improved academic comprehension.

*The usage of efficient online platforms such as Teams and Zoom helps us students overall because there will be a recording of the class to refer to whenever we are stuck during our revisions. Online classes also help me in terms of referring to notes during lectures because it is all just one click away. (Respondent 18)*

*The benefits of online learning are that the lectures are recorded. This allows me to watch the lessons again and pick up the things I missed out on. By re-watching the lectures, I understand it much more as I can pause and play anytime, I want. In addition, there is the option of online learning. (Respondent 29)*

#### (iv) Timesaving

Two participants emphasized the flexibility and time-saving benefits of online learning, particularly how it allows them to optimize their schedules for both academic and personal activities. Respondent 1 highlighted the elimination of commuting and the flexibility to choose class times, which reduces stress and allows for more relaxed learning. Respondent 23 focused on managing time effectively, using free moments for activities that contribute to well-being, such as exercise. The overall sentiment reflected that online learning gives students greater control over their time, enabling them to

balance their academic responsibilities with personal growth and productivity, resulting in a more efficient and stress-free learning experience.

*Since I do not need to travel to the university, I do not need to spend time waiting in the traffic. Moreover, I can choose what time I want my classes to be. I do not need to get up early in the morning just to get ready. (Respondent 1)*

*In terms of time management, because I am always at home and attend my classes at home, I can manage my time wisely and carry out activities that benefit me in my free time, for example, working out. (Respondent 23)*

(v) Enhanced critical thinking and skills

The participants acknowledged that online classes could enhance their critical thinking and skills as the students work collaboratively yet independently using online communication tools (Martin & Bolliger, 2018). Hence, teachers must choose and design the subject materials and activities that assist the students in exploring, discovering, improving skills, and gaining knowledge. The result of this research is supported by previous research, which identified that online learning based on a Rich Internet Application (RAI) leads students to solve independently (Muali et al., 2018). The authors continue stating that students are provided with learning experiences on real issues, which grow and train students to think critically.

*Online learning has enhanced my critical thinking skills and made me understand that it is essential to think outside of the box as I will need these techniques in the future workplace. (Respondent 13)*

*I managed to pick up a few useful skills that would be handy in the future such as working with a group online, how to take notes in classes fast or even how to create a good schedule. This is extremely beneficial because these skills can be implemented even when it goes back to face-to-face classes. (Respondent 24)*

### **4.3 Theme 2- Negative impacts**

#### **(i) Unadaptable**

The participants struggled to adapt to online classes and often lost focus during long sessions. Most younger generations may be tech-savvy or have basic computer skills; however, they may lack computer skills for online classes, making them uncomfortable using online channels or platforms. The responses reflect a shared experience of difficulty and stress during the transition to online learning. Respondent 9 and Respondent 12 both described how the initial adjustment phase could be chaotic and overwhelming, with significant challenges related to adapting to new online systems. The lack of face-to-face interaction with lecturers and peers is a common concern, impacting their ability to get support and engage effectively with the course material. Overall, it was highlighted that while online learning offers benefits, the transition can be emotionally taxing and challenging, particularly when dealing with a lack of direct communication and support. Addressing these challenges may involve providing more structured guidance and opportunities for interaction to ease the adjustment period and support students in navigating the online learning environment.

*Online learning is quite stressful in the beginning as to be a chaotic situation. Everything is new to me, and I have no idea or direction where to start from. Although online learning has its benefits, I feel*



*stressed and sad because some topics I cannot understand well therefore I might not score well in my subject. (Respondent 9)*

*I find my online learning experience difficult and more tiresome compared to having physical classes. This is because I had a difficult time adapting to the new system, whereby everything is conducted online which leads to me being unable to interact face-to-face with my lecturers and friends to get some help. (Respondent 12)*

(ii) Miscommunication

Communication barriers during online classes have caused some students to feel left out of their studies. Communication breakdown seemed to be one of the major impacts on the students, especially when they needed to reach out to lecturers or peers. When the students cannot meet face-to-face, communication barriers occur as people may not reply on time, which could be frustrating. The inability to meet peers and observe non-verbal cues creates difficulties in collaborative tasks and hampers the development of meaningful relationships. Respondent 1 and Respondent 4 highlighted issues with group assignments and communication, while Respondent 20 and Respondent 26 expressed concerns about the lack of physical interaction affecting friendship formation and learning dynamics. Respondent 28 added that the absence of face-to-face communication can lead to misunderstandings between students and tutors. These responses reflect the emotional and practical challenges posed by the shift to online learning, suggesting that addressing these issues may require improved strategies for virtual collaboration and enhanced tools for supporting both students and instructors in the online environment.

*The biggest disadvantage is not being able to work with my group members face-to-face. I had not been to the university since the start of school. Without meeting them, it is quite difficult to work on all the assignments. Since none of us knew each other, there are instances*

*where some people don't respond to messages which causes delays in the process of the work. (Respondent 1)*

*Online learning and working from home means that all group discussions will also be held online. This situation is personally an inconvenience for me as it is hard to see the facial expressions when communicating with my colleagues. On the other hand, facial expressions enable me to see my group members' emotions and social intentions. Online learning has also made it hard for me to create connections and new friendships with the people around me. Especially when it comes to group assignments, it isn't easy to work with people I do not normally converse with. (Respondent 4)*

*Online learning does not allow me to have real contact with my classmates, which makes it difficult for me to know what they are like and make friends. To be honest, I only knew two people when I entered college because I didn't even know what most of them looked like. (Respondent 20)*

*I have not been able to meet my peers in person, and therefore, our relationships are not as close as those we would have when we meet in person. Communication has also become limited as we cannot have our microphones unmuted all the time as this will disrupt the class. Another thing is there are many other communication cues, such as body language, that are just not present via online learning. (Respondent 26)*

*Since it is online learning, I am not able to have physical communication with my colleagues, and I can only make “net friends” through assignments and clubs online. This has affected my university learning experience, where I didn’t have that many memories of my university life. Conversely, since the students aren’t showing their faces during tutorial class, our tutor can’t observe students learning progress through their body language. This may lead to misunderstanding between tutor and student as a tutor will think that we aren’t replying to her. (Respondent 28)*

(iii) Overwhelming content or information

The dissemination of information and online class contents seemed to be quite overwhelming for students to understand or take. Either way, it has caused the participants to lose focus and be distracted by other matters surrounding them. Similarly, some subjects are scheduled on the same day, making the students stay alert and active as they feel information overloaded and exhausted (Khalil et al., 2020; Nambiar, 2020). The difficulty in comprehending material may be attributed to the nature of online communication and reduced interaction, while distractions from digital devices significantly impact focus and engagement. These issues highlighted the need for strategies to enhance attention and comprehension in online learning environments, such as creating more engaging content, implementing techniques to minimize distractions, and providing additional support to address comprehension challenges.

*I find it difficult to understand the context delivered by the lecturers or tutors. Also, I get distracted easily when it comes to online learning. For example, I did not pay attention during live lectures because I was using my phone. (Respondent 3)*

(iv) Mental health concerns

Having the online classes might look like doing a solo assignment or journey alone during the participants' higher education. Students feel that online classes are less lively and lack a friendly atmosphere and social interaction (Nambiar, 2020). This might take a toll on students' mental health concerns as they might feel loneliness and lack of support during the online classes. The solitary nature of online study and difficulties in obtaining timely help contribute to feelings of disconnection and loneliness. These issues were intensified by external factors such as the lockdown period, further limiting social interactions.

*One of the biggest disadvantages I noticed from having an online class is that there are times when it may be a solo act. It is true that, although online learning might be convenient and flexible, it is also a solo act. This sometimes makes me feel a lack of support and reassurance. As a result, I needed to personally text the lecturer regarding my problems, and it always got delayed because there were so many more students just the same as me. (Respondent 16)*

*Having to go through online learning for months has undoubtedly taken a toll on my mental health. It was very difficult at first because it was hard to make friends in an online class, and I somehow got very anxious at the beginning. It gets very lonely at times because of a lack of social interaction. Additionally, the MCO just makes it even worse as it limits my social interaction with friends. Online learning makes me feel disconnected from the real world. (Respondent 17)*

(v) Procrastination

The responses from Respondent 3 and Respondent 10 revealed key challenges in online learning, including difficulty adapting to a less structured environment and issues with motivation and distraction. The absence of peer pressure and the increased potential for

distractions at home can lead to decreased effort and focus. Due to a lack of discipline, some participants might struggle to keep to the timeline and due dates for assignments. Thus, they might tend to delay the submission of assignments and have less participation during online classes. Eventually, students turn out to be less serious, and they just attend the class for attendance and feel bored and lazy.

*Initially, my online learning experience was not that great because I found it difficult to adapt. For instance, when I first started online learning, I became lazier in terms of attempting tutorial questions because online tutorials do not give peer pressure like how physical classes do. (Respondent 3)*

*I could not pay attention well in online classes as I would be disrupted by my phone. I will also sometimes feel unmotivated and procrastinate on important tasks in online learning. (Respondent 10)*

## **5.0 Discussion**

One of the primary positive impacts of online learning that contributes to student experience is flexibility. Online learning enables students to access materials and complete assignments independently. This flexibility is particularly beneficial for students with other commitments, such as work or family responsibilities, as it enables them to balance their studies with their personal lives more effectively. Additionally, learning from anywhere can reduce the stress and time associated with commuting, further contributing to a more positive learning experience. However, previous research also indicated that dissatisfaction with online learning would cause stress as students worry about being unable to cope, blame themselves, and hold it against themselves (Ibanez et al., 2022). Similarly, undergraduate students in the Philippines are more unhappy in their senior years due to a heavier workload (Gumasing et al., 2022) regarding online learning experiences. When adapting to the online learning environment, online learning helps students exercise learner autonomy and enhance social engagement

(Pasaribu & Dewi, 2021). This is related to the positive emotions highlighted by the participants when they discuss the positive impacts of online learning, aligned with Jiang and Koo (2020).

Another benefit is the potential for a personalized learning experience. Online platforms often incorporate adaptive learning technologies that tailor educational content to students' individual needs and learning styles. This personalization can lead to greater engagement and satisfaction, as students can learn at their own pace and focus on areas where they need the most improvement. Moreover, the vast array of online resources and courses allows students to explore subjects that interest them, fostering a sense of autonomy and control over their education and enhancing their overall experience. Enhancing online learning regarding suitable teacher training and financial support is vital to updating the labs and equipment or stimulating educational programs (Aljaraideh & Al Bataineh, 2019). The findings are consistent with past research from Indonesia stating that supports from teaching staff and peers encourage them to continue with online learning and help each other if they need technical support (Aliyyah et al., 2020). The students would be more self-directed in learning as they learn asynchronously at their own pace (Mukhtar et al., 2020).

Despite these positive impacts, several negative impacts of online learning can negatively impact the student experience. One major negative impact is the lack of face-to-face interaction and social engagement. Many students miss the camaraderie and support that comes from interacting with peers and instructors in a physical classroom. This lack of social connection can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness, detracting from the overall learning experience and reducing student experience. Additionally, the absence of immediate feedback and real-time discussions can make it more challenging for students to stay motivated and engaged with the material. The adjustment and engagement of the new online learning system may be a barrier to the development and implementation of online learning (Khalil et al., 2020). From physical classes to online classes, most students find it difficult to adapt due to technical issues, lack of structure, disturbance in the flow of classes, problems in clarifying doubts, and lack of interest and motivation to attend class (Nambiar, 2020).

Technical issues and accessibility can also pose significant challenges. Not all students have reliable access to the internet or the necessary technology to participate fully in online learning. Technical difficulties, such as poor connectivity or platform malfunctions, can cause frustration and disrupt learning. Furthermore, the self-discipline and time management skills required for online learning can be difficult for some students to maintain, leading to procrastination and stress. These factors can diminish the positive impacts of online learning and negatively affect the student experience. By understanding both the positive and negative impacts of online learning, educators and institutions can work towards creating more balanced and effective online learning experiences that maximize student experience and academic success.

### **5.1 Limitation of Study**

This research aims to understand diverse perspectives, but the participants' ethnicity is from similar groups; this homogeneity could be a limitation. It might suggest that the results reflect more the experiences and views of the Chinese ethnic group rather than a wider, more varied demographic. Though online semi-structured questionnaires allow for more flexibility than structured ones, they might not capture the depth of participants' experiences as effectively as in-depth interviews or other qualitative methods. The participants might tailor their answers based on the online semi-structured questionnaire the researcher posted or based on their perceptions of the questions, leading to biased responses.

### **6.0 Conclusion**

Effective learning in an online environment necessitates the collaboration of academic institutions, administrators, staff, and students. Enhancing online learning involves providing suitable teacher training and financial support to update labs and equipment and stimulate educational programs. Online classes significantly have varied impacts on students' learning experiences. Despite the unique challenges and experiences of online learning, it has substantially influenced all students. Research shows that dissatisfaction

with online learning can cause stress, as students worry about their ability to cope and may internalize blame (Ibanez et al., 2022). Future research on online learning experiences could prioritize large-scale cross-sectional or longitudinal studies using analytics and multivariate statistical methods to examine the relationships between student engagement metrics, learning outcomes, and platform design elements. Additionally, studies could employ quantitative data to evaluate the effectiveness of different pedagogical strategies and technological interventions across diverse student populations and subject areas.

## **6.1 Recommendations**

To improve the effectiveness of online learning, academic institutions, administrators, staff, and students need to work collaboratively. Institutions should invest in comprehensive teacher training programs and provide financial support to upgrade labs, equipment, and educational programs. Addressing the diverse impacts of online classes on students' experience is crucial, as dissatisfaction can lead to stress and self-blame. Special attention should be given to managing the workload, particularly for senior students, to mitigate the increased dissatisfaction observed in online learning environments. Also, academic institutions should prioritize creating a structured and engaging online learning environment to address the challenges students face in adapting to online classes. Providing technical support and training can help students overcome technology-related difficulties and improve their comfort with online platforms. Similarly, enhancing the clarity and flow of online classes and offering interactive and motivating content can maintain student focus and interest during longer sessions.

Institutions could also facilitate open communication channels for students to easily clarify doubts and engage with the material, helping to reduce barriers to effective online learning. Being able to mitigate the feelings of isolation and enhance the social aspect of online learning, academic institutions should implement strategies that foster a sense of community and support by introducing regular virtual group activities, discussion forums, and collaborative projects that can create a more lively and interactive learning environment. Facilitating peer-to-peer interactions and providing accessible



mental health resources can help address students' concerns about loneliness and lack of support. Additionally, incorporating synchronous sessions where students and instructors can engage in real-time discussions can enhance online classes' friendly atmosphere and social interaction.

To sum up, online learning has a significant impact on the student experience, presenting both positive impacts and negative impacts. Positive impacts include flexibility in scheduling, accessibility from any location, and the potential for personalized learning experiences. However, negative impacts such as feelings of isolation, technical issues, and the lack of in-person social interactions can negatively affect student satisfaction. Additionally, the absence of a structured learning environment and challenges in maintaining focus during long virtual sessions contribute to increased stress and dissatisfaction. Effective online learning requires balancing these factors to enhance the overall student experience. Addressing these challenges may require enhancements in support systems, more proactive engagement strategies, and additional resources to address both emotional well-being and academic needs in online learning contexts.

## **6.2 Implications of Study**

The implications of research on online learning experience are significant for educational institutions and policymakers. Understanding factors that affect students' online learning experiences can help develop more effective educational frameworks. For instance, if qualitative studies reveal that students feel happier with more interactive and engaging content, institutions can prioritize incorporating multimedia elements, interactive discussions, and real-time feedback mechanisms into their online courses. This can lead to improved student satisfaction, increased motivation, and better overall academic performance, as happier students are more likely to engage deeply with the material and persist through challenges.

Furthermore, insights into online learning experiences can influence the design of support services and resources. As the study identifies that a lack of social interaction

and community is a major source of inexperience, institutions might invest in virtual student lounges, online study groups, and other platforms that foster social connections. Additionally, understanding the emotional and psychological factors that affect online learners can help develop mental health and wellness programs tailored to the unique needs of distance learners. By addressing the factors that influence the online learning experience, educators and administrators can create more inclusive and supportive learning environments that cater to the well-being of all students, ultimately leading to more positive educational outcomes.

**Author Contributions Statement:** Conceptualization: K.L.L.S; Methodology: K.L.L.S; Formal analysis and investigation: K.L.L.S; Writing: H.K.; Resources: H.K. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding Statement:** No funding was received to assist with preparing this manuscript.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all participants in this study.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data are available from the corresponding author upon request.

**Acknowledgement:** The authors would like to thank all the participants in this study and the editors and anonymous reviewers of the International Journal of Management, Finance, and Accounting who have provided their precious feedback and comments.

**Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors have no competing interest to declare that they are relevant to the content of this study.

**References**

- Alam, M. K. (2021). A systematic qualitative case study: questions, data collection, NVivo analysis, and saturation. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 16(1), 1-31.
- Aldowah, H., Al-Samarraie, H., Alzahrani, A. I., & Alalwan, N. (2020). Factors affecting student dropout in MOOCs: a cause and effect decision-making model. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 32, 429-454.
- Aliyyah, R. R., Rachmadtullah, R., Samsudin, A., Syaodih, E., Nurtanto, M., & Tambunan, A. R. S. (2020). The perceptions of primary school teachers of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic period: A case study in Indonesia. *Online Submission*, 7(2), 90-109.
- Aljaraideh, Y., & Al Bataineh, K. (2019). Jordanian students' barriers of utilizing online learning: A Survey Study. *International Education Studies*, 12(5), 99-108.
- Aristovnik, A., Keržič, D., Ravšelj, D., Tomaževič, N., & Umek, L. (2020). Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on life of higher education students: A global perspective. *Sustainability*, 12(20), 8438.
- Baber, H. (2020). Determinants of students' perceived learning outcome and satisfaction in online learning during the pandemic of COVID-19. *Journal of Education and E-Learning Research*, 7(3), 285-292.
- Ben-Eliyahu, A. (2019). A situated perspective on self-regulated learning from a person-by-context perspective. *High ability studies*, 30(1-2), 199-236.
- Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Bywaters, D., & Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of research in nursing: JRN*, 25(8), 652–661.
- Chung, E., Subramaniam, G., & Dass, L. C. (2020). Online learning readiness among university students in Malaysia amidst COVID-19. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 16(2), 46-58.
- Coman, C., Țîru, L. G., Meseșan-Schmitz, L., Stanciu, C., & Bularca, M. C. (2020). Online teaching and learning in higher education during the coronavirus pandemic: Students' perspective. *Sustainability*, 12(24), 10367.
- Dhawan, S. (2020). Online learning: A panacea in the time of COVID-19 crisis. *Journal of educational technology systems*, 49(1), 5–22.

- Dinh, L. P., & Nguyen, T. T. (2020). Pandemic, social distancing, and social work education: Students' satisfaction with online education in Vietnam. *Social Work Education, 39*(8), 1074-1083.
- Gopal, R., Singh, V., & Aggarwal, A. (2021). Impact of virtual classes on the satisfaction and performance of students during the pandemic period of COVID-19. *Education and Information Technologies, 26*(6), 6923-6947.
- Gumasing, M. J. J., Marino, W. A., Liwanag, J. L., & Sanchez, A. A. (2022). Measuring the experience index of students during online class: a case of undergraduate students in the Philippines. In *2022 The 3rd International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Industrial Management*.
- Haider, A. S., & Al-Salman, S. (2020). Dataset of Jordanian university students' psychological health impacted by using e-learning tools during COVID-19. *Data in brief, 32*, 106104.
- Hayashi, R., Garcia, M., & Maddawin, A. (2020). *Online learning in Sri Lanka's higher education institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Asian Development Bank.
- Hennink, M., & Kaiser, B. N. (2022). Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests. *Social Science & Medicine, 292*, 114523.
- Hettiarachchi, S., Damayanthi, B. W. R., Heenkenda, S., Dissanayake, D. M. S. L. B., Ranagalage, M., & Ananda, L. (2021). Student satisfaction with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic: A study at state universities in Sri Lanka. *Sustainability, 13*(21), 11749.
- Hew, K. F., Hu, X., Qiao, C., & Tang, Y. (2020). What predicts student satisfaction with MOOCs: A gradient boosting trees supervised machine learning and sentiment analysis approach. *Computers & Education, 145*, 103724.
- Huang, R. H., Liu, D. J., Tlili, A., Yang, J. F., & Wang, H. H. (2020). Handbook on facilitating flexible learning during educational disruption: The Chinese experience in maintaining uninterrupted learning in COVID-19 outbreak. *Beijing: Smart Learning Institute of Beijing Normal University, 46*.
- Ibanez, M., Doctolero, K., Senolos, L., Cruz, A. D., & Tus, J. (2022). The relationship between experience and stress among senior high school students from public

- schools amidst online learning. *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 2(1), 122-125.
- Jiang, H., Islam, A. Y. M., Gu, X., & Spector, J. M. (2021). Online learning satisfaction in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic: A regional comparison between Eastern and Western Chinese universities. *Education and Information Technologies*, 26(6), 6747-6769.
- Jiang, M., & Koo, K. (2020). Emotional presence in building an online learning community among non-traditional graduate students. *Online Learning*, 24(4), 93-111.
- Khalil, R., Mansour, A. E., Fadda, W. A., Almisnid, K., Aldamegh, M., Al-Nafeesah, A., ... & Al-Wutayd, O. (2020). The sudden transition to synchronized online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia: a qualitative study exploring medical students' perspectives. *BMC Medical Education*, 20(1), 1-10.
- Khan, N. U. S., & Yildiz, Y. (2020). Impact of intangible characteristics of universities on student satisfaction. *Amazonia Investiga*, 9(26), 105-116.
- Kim, S., & Kim, D. J. (2021). Structural relationship of key factors for student satisfaction and achievement in asynchronous online learning. *Sustainability*, 13(12), 6734.
- Lazarevic, B., & Bentz, D. (2021). Student perception of stress in online and face-to-face learning: the exploration of stress determinants. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 35(1), 2-15.
- Lim, C., Ab Jalil, H., Ma'rof, A., & Saad, W. (2020). Peer learning, self-regulated learning and academic achievement in blended learning courses: A structural equation modeling approach. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET)*, 15(3), 110-125.
- Martin, F., & Bolliger, D. U. (2018). Engagement matters: Student perceptions on the importance of engagement strategies in the online learning environment. *Online Learning*, 22(1), 205-222.
- Means, B., & Neisler, J. (2020). *Suddenly online: A national survey of undergraduates during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Digital Promise.
- Mohammad, Z. A. (2023). The effectiveness of integrating e-learning on learning outcome and student perceptions in tertiary education. *International Journal of*

- Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*. <https://doi.org/10.37648/ijrssh.v13i02>, 6.
- Mohammed, S. S., Suleyman, C., & Taylan, B. (2020). Burnout determinants and consequences among university lecturers. *Amazonia Investiga*, 9(27), 13-24.
- Muali, C., Islam, S., Bali, M. E. I., Baharun, H., Mundiri, A., Jasri, M., & Fauzi, A. (2018). Free online learning based on rich internet applications; the experimentation of critical thinking about student learning style. In *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*. IOP Publishing.
- Mukhtar, K., Javed, K., Arooj, M., & Sethi, A. (2020). Advantages, limitations and recommendations for online learning during COVID-19 pandemic era. *Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences*, 36(COVID19-S4), S27.
- Mulang, H. (2021). The effect of competences, work motivation, learning environment on human resource performance. *Golden Ratio of Human Resource Management*, 1(2), 84-93.
- Nambiar, D. (2020). The impact of online learning during COVID-19: students' and teachers' perspective. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 8(2), 783-793.
- Pasaribu, T. A., & Dewi, N. (2021). Indonesian EFL students' voices on online learning during COVID-19 through Appraisal Analysis. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 14(1), 399-426.
- Pei, L., & Wu, H. (2019). Does online learning work better than offline learning in undergraduate medical education? A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Medical education online*, 24(1), 1666538.
- Pelikan, E. R., Lüftenegger, M., Holzer, J., Korlat, S., Spiel, C., & Schober, B. (2021). Learning during COVID-19: The role of self-regulated learning, motivation, and procrastination for perceived competence. *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft*, 24(2), 393-418.
- Pitura, J. (2023). Using the e-questionnaire in qualitative applied linguistics research. *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*, 2(1), 100034.
- Rabin, E., Kalman, Y. M., & Kalz, M. (2019). An empirical investigation of the antecedents of learner-centered outcome measures in MOOCs. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 16(1), 1-20.

- Rahmatpour, P., Peyrovi, H., & Sharif Nia, H. (2021). Development and psychometric evaluation of postgraduate nursing student academic satisfaction scale. *Nursing Open*, 8(3), 1145–1156.
- Rose, S. (2020). Medical student education in the time of COVID-19. *Jama*, 323(21), 2131-2132.
- Sahu, P. (2020). Closure of universities due to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): impact on education and mental health of students and academic staff. *Cureus*, 12(4), e7541.
- Selvanathan, M., Hussin, N. A. M., & Azazi, N. A. N. (2020). Students learning experiences during COVID-19: Work from home period in Malaysian Higher Learning Institutions. *Teaching Public Administration*, 41(1), 13-22.
- Shahzad, A., Hassan, R., Aremu, A. Y., Hussain, A., & Lodhi, R. N. (2021). Effects of COVID-19 in E-learning on higher education institution students: the group comparison between male and female. *Quality & quantity*, 55(3), 805-826.
- Shaid, N. A. N., Kamruzaman, F. M., & Sulaiman, N. A. (2021). Online learning during ongoing covid-19 pandemic: A survey of students' satisfaction. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(7), 924-937.
- Waham, J. J., Asfahani, A., & Ulfa, R. A. (2023). International collaboration in higher education: Challenges and opportunities in a globalized world. *EDUJAVARE: International Journal of Educational Research*, 1(1), 49-60.
- Yeung, M. W., & Yau, A. H. (2021). A thematic analysis of higher education students' perceptions of online learning in Hong Kong under COVID-19: Challenges, strategies and support. *Education and Information Technologies*, 1-28.
- Zeng, X., & Wang, T. (2021). College student satisfaction with online learning during COVID-19: A review and implications. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Higher Education*, 6(1), 182-195.