

# Students' Reflections Toward Online Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of a Private Institution in Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

The study aimed to investigate undergraduate students' experiences and commitment to online learning during the Covid -19 Pandemic. The study was conducted among international students studying in a private institution in Malaysia. The respondents were interviewed regarding their feedback towards the benefits and shortcomings of online learning, their satisfaction towards instruction support, learning resources, and commitment; simultaneously, they accessed e-learning during coronavirus outbreaks. The study shows that students are delighted by the institution's e-learning mode implemented in the teaching and learning process by conducting interviews. Moreover, the interview session results indicate that most students are satisfied with the quality of education received from the online learning mode and their contribution while accessing online education during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Covid-19 Pandemic

In conjunction with the Covid-19 pandemic's outbreak by the latest of 2019, it has shifted the educational mode in all educational institutions, including the primary level, to higher education (HE), from face-to-face classes to online classes. Due to the severity of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education has shifted educational mode from physical education to electronic learning (e-learning) to avoid infection; thus, teachers and students must work and study from home through electronic devices. During the Covid-19 pandemic's lockdown phase, face-to-face classes were no longer an option for both students and instructors; therefore, online learning became the primary method of teaching and learning and served as an alternative to support education with flexibility and accessibility and convenience (She et al., 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic necessitated that most educational institutions find a practical strategy to educate their pupils; fortunately, modern technological advancements have made e-learning the virtual core teaching method (Bączek et al., 2021).

E-learning is a new approach to knowledge transmission using information technology and technological innovations such as Google Meet, Zoom, Webex, etc., to improve educational qualification. Moreover, online learning has paved the way for teaching and learning to become flexible and interactive among students and teachers while delivering lectures. Most elementary through higher education (HE) instructors

have started exploring and studying the effectiveness of online platforms and methods for providing online instruction to their students; they are keen to understand how to improve learning outcomes via online instruction (She et al., 2021, p. 2). Of course, the success of online education depends on many factors, including instructor support, accessibility of learning resources, and high commitment from the students themselves. While most students are adapted and satisfied with online learning, others are not satisfied with this education to shift as they feel less motivated and lack interaction during the classes. So, a case study was conducted among students in a private institution in Malaysia to measure their satisfaction and perceived performance in the e-learning environment during the Covid-19 pandemic regarding this matter.

### *1.2 Problem Statement*

The outbreak of the Corona Virus, also known as the Covid-19 pandemic, has drastically changed knowledge transmission at every level of educational institutions. E-learning has become a required teaching and learning method for all teachers and students. Face-to-face classes seem risky for all learners and educators to have their usual activities since billions of people get infected by Covid-19 every day. Educational institutions at every level have decided to separate these stakeholders to work and learn from home to prevent the spread out of the Covid-19 pandemic. They hope they will interact more with the help of the current technological innovation. While some students are satisfied with this new learning method, others still need help with the challenges of online learning. They need more interaction and motivation because of network and IT equipment problems.

According to a survey study of Polish students (Bączek et al., 2021), the questionnaire's answers showed that most students were not satisfied with online learning. Most respondents chose the main shortcoming of lack of interaction with patients (70%) and technical problems with IT equipment (54%). Online learning was less effective than face-to-face learning in building skills and social competence. Another study of academic student satisfaction and perceived performance in the e-learning environment during the COVID-19 pandemic; according to Puljak et al. (2021), while some students missed lectures and personal contact with their lecturers, they were generally pleased with how they had adapted to e-learning. So, they still prefer face-to-face classes as their options for learning rather than online learning based on their everyday learning experience. This research aims to examine students' satisfaction, engagement, and performance. It will benefit the teachers to build and improve the online learning environment to be more interactive and practical.

### *1.3. Research Objective*

In conjunction with online learning integration during the Covid-19 Pandemic and students' challenges toward their learning during this period, this study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To measure students' views and feedback regarding the benefits and drawbacks of online learning.
2. To examine the students' satisfaction with the teaching and learning process through interviewing and their experience.
3. To investigate students' perspectives on the impact of online learning on their future careers.

### *1.4 Research Question*

RQ1 What are the advantages and disadvantages of online learning?

RQ2 How far do students feel satisfied with the teaching and learning process during the pandemic?

RQ3 What are the students' views regarding the impacts of online learning on their future careers?

### *1.5 Significance of The Study*

This study significantly contributes to comprehending students' satisfaction, experience, challenges, and performance in the online learning environment during the Covid-19 pandemic. It reflects how online teaching affects students' behaviour and their contribution while accessing online learning to achieve good academic performance from the courses taken. Of course, not all students are familiar with current technological innovation and cannot use it ideally for their learning. Some students might experience frustration and need help with the shift of this learning approach and need more motivation and interaction in learning with network disruption and technological barriers. So, the teachers must consider students' behaviour by observing their participation and facilitating them in class activities to help them improve their performance. This study may give the teachers an insightful understanding of students' reactions and reflections toward online education and how they could produce better learning outcomes, instructions and an interactive learning environment while delivering lectures online.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *The Effects of Online Learning*

Learning online has become a prominent and integral part of activities during the outbreak of Covid-19 to prevent the physical contact between students and teachers that caused them to be infected by the Coronavirus. Online learning is a good form of transmitting knowledge where learners can easily take courses online in a safe learning environment. In addition, many studies have revealed this learning mode's effectiveness for the outcome of students' learning. For instance, an analysis of the effect of online learning during Covid-19 indicated that it is convenient for students to access and encourages students' participation; even introverted learners are more likely to participate in online classes and cost-effective in terms of transportation and tuition fees compared to physical types (Mohammad Alawamleh et al., 2020). Similarly, the study by (Awal et al., 2020) and Duong & Duong (2022) also considered significant positive effects of online learning, namely, comfortably accessing classes with flexible time from anywhere, the ability to utilise the latest technology, cost-effectiveness and teaching materials are chosen as needed.

However, some students still encounter difficulties attending online classes, leading to dissatisfaction. According to one large-scale research, some key reasons for lowering the efficacy of online classes include a lack of technical assistance, the absence of face-to-face interaction, teacher support and staff unavailability, disruption during class flow, and a lack of incentive to attend classes (Mohammad Ziaul Hoq, 2020 & Yuzulia, 2021). Furthermore, online classes are not always the best option for students who lack basic digital abilities, and some other students cannot participate in online learning simply because they do not have home-based access to suitable technological gadgets or consistent internet connections (Li, 2020 & Baticulon et al., 2021). Recently, these studies attempted to provide insight into how online classes help students possess the knowledge and develop their digital skills and the barriers they encounter while accessing online classes.

### 2.2 *Students' Motivation*

Motivation is one of the essential elements that boost students' performance. Many studies outline motivation insight, especially when students attend online classes. According to Hasnan Baber (2020), his literature study revealed that motivation is an internal force that propels a person to do any action or move toward a goal. The technological environment has various effects on students' motivation and encourages them to achieve better outcomes; consequently, specialised activities must focus on plans to pique students' interest and enhance their readiness to participate (Sandybayev, 2020). Online learning can only be a viable alternative if these students are sufficiently motivated, as a lack of enthusiasm is a significant cause of student attrition in online education (A. Mamolo, 2022). On the other hand, motivation emerges organically from the interaction between the instructor and the student, and teachers play an essential role in encouraging students' desire to learn something (Minda, 2020). Therefore, the teacher should consistently observe, realise students' behaviour, capture their attention, and elevate their motivation. These studies provide insight into the significance of the learning environment and teachers' support, which are crucial in boosting students' motivation in online learning.

### 2.3 *Students' Satisfaction with Online Learning*

Students' satisfaction is an essential factor that educators must consider while learning online. Many studies emphasise the importance of student satisfaction since it causes students to succeed academically when accessing classes online. For instance, a survey by Zeng and Wang suggested that synchronous and asynchronous learning are the two vital components influencing students' satisfaction (2021). According to this study, students prefer these two components because they provide the opportunity for real-time discussion, questioning, feedback, and reflection, as well as immediate feedback and interaction, equivalent to face-to-face meetings. Accordingly, Omairi and Hin New stated in 2022 that synchronous occurs in real-time and provides two-way interaction between students, classmates, and instructors. On the other hand, asynchronous courses take place according to individual students' schedules; students can complete the course requirements on a flexible timetable while the instructor delivers reading materials, lecture notes, and coursework. Similarly, another study pointed out that the most critical aspect of online learning's success is its delivery (Puljak et al., 2020). This involves timely feedback, instructors' organisational efforts, providing online lectures (and recording them), adjusting instructions to this learning paradigm, and assisting students in following the courses and seeking feedback on their experiences. These recent studies attempted to prove that synchronous and asynchronous learning influence students' online learning satisfaction.

### 2.4 *The Impacts of Online Learning*

With technological innovations, learners find it more convenient to study with online classes. While some studies outlined the positive effects of online learning, others argued that it is inadequate for some reasons.

According to Yusnilita (2020), online education offers an ideal means of content distribution unbound by time or place, allowing for accessing the teaching at any time from anywhere. On the other hand, online learning will impact future career development (Redecker et al., 2010). The way of teaching and learning has changed from time to time with the up-to-date technological innovations in this modern day. Educators must be skilful with these innovations, especially young learners, to prepare themselves for future labour markets.

Meanwhile, a study revealed that face-screening learning does not significantly impact students' performance compared to face-to-face learning since teachers cannot give immediate feedback to help students improve their comprehension (Nambiar, 2020). According to this research, online learning instructors have trouble noticing their students' body language, which is a clue to assist them in rapidly changing their teaching style to meet the students' requirements best. Similarly, according to the study, students may feel isolated, parents may be concerned about their children's social development, and students with language disabilities may be disadvantaged in a text-heavy online environment (Elfaki et al., 2019). Again, according to the findings in his research, Nambiar (2020), some students consider attending online classes at home a hardship because of an unsupportive home environment and family concerns; thus, they get demotivated and lose concentration because of power cuts, get disconnected between classes and cannot fully participate in online courses. Based on these studies, it could be concluded that the face-screening learning approach positively or negatively impacts students' performance and achievement.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Research Design

This research paper mainly emphasises the students' satisfaction and reflection on the online learning approach during the Covid-19 pandemic. The qualitative research design was used to conduct this study since it seemed to be the most suitable design for collecting the data from research questionnaires. In this study, three international students from a private institution in Malaysia were chosen to participate in the interview session.

#### 3.2 Sample of The Study

In this study, three international students who answered the interview questionnaires were from various study programmes, including Bachelor of Business Administration (Hons) and Bachelor of Business Administration (Marketing). The participants in this study were primarily students from the School of Business and Social Sciences. Hence, the study of this research paper was conducted at Albukhary International University, also known as AIU, located in Alor Setar, Kedah, Malaysia.

#### 3.3 Biography of The Respondents

In this study, the researcher selected and interviewed three international postgraduate students regarding their satisfaction, experience, and reflection on online learning. The participants' backgrounds are tabulated in the table below.

Table 1. Respondents' Backgrounds

Respondents	Nationality	Age	Gender	Programme of Study
A	India	22	Male	Bachelor of Business Administration (Hons)
B	Eritrean	23	Male	Bachelor of Business Administration
C	Indonesia	21	Female	Bachelor of Business Administration (Hons)

#### 3.4 Instruments

In this study, the researcher utilised qualitative methodology and used semi-structured interviews as its instruments. The interviewees are free to express their thoughts and opinions regarding the face-screen learning approach quality based on their experience. The questionnaires (see Appendix) in this study aimed to elicit relevant information concerning their satisfaction with the quality of online classes and the challenges they faced during the Covid-19 pandemic. Hence, the interview questions are divided into four sections; 1, 2, 3, and 4, and four themes; 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Sections of the interview questions:

- Section 1 is on the personal background of the respondents.
- Section 2 focused on the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning.
- Section 3 regarding their satisfaction with the teaching and learning process.
- Section 4 regarding their perceptions of online learning for future careers.

Themes of Findings:

- Theme 1: Most respondents prefer face-to-face classes to online learning.
- Theme 2: Advantages of online learning.
- Theme 3: Most of the students are satisfied with the quality of online learning.
- Theme 4: Online learning has an impact on future careers.

Based on the questions asked, the data or information of this study were collected through an interview session. Hence, the interview session conducted with these three participants was recorded, transcribed, and arranged in its order.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

##### 4.1 Findings (1): Most of The Respondents Prefer Face-To-Face Classes Compared to Online Learning

Based on the interview results, 70% of respondents prefer physical classes to online courses. It is because of some technical issues that they must encounter while listening to lectures.

*Respondent A:*

“... Sometimes, I get distracted from messages or a call while attending online classes, so I may lose focus on the lecture. So, I would prefer physical learning rather than online classes.”

*Respondent C:*

“... I prefer face-to-face classes rather than online learning. I would say, Emm... maybe 70% will be face-to-face classes, and online learning will be 30%. So, we could have more time, at least, Err... to understand ourselves and our education.”

Some students feel online discussion detracts from bridging a sense of community with their peers and lecturers. Likewise, face-to-face interaction is vital for building this feeling compared to online contact. According to Carreon et al. (2022), students prefer face-to-face classes more than online learning because they foster a higher quality of communication— immediate responses and feedback, straightforward clarification and improved social interaction between students and teachers. Based on the student's perception in this study, face-to-face classes would enhance their academic performance compared to online learning. Physical courses were found to be more engaging for several reasons: students could complete their activities in the social environment of the classroom, and they received immediate feedback from their peers and teacher rather than waiting hours for a response to their specific comments online. However, some students were satisfied, and preferred online learning based on their reasons in the same case study. These students prefer online classes because they find them more convenient since they can complete online exercises at their leisure; the online discussion forum prompts more thorough comments than in-class conversation.

##### 4.2 Findings (2): Advantages of Online Learning

Online learning comes with its advantages and disadvantages. Some students claim that online learning helps them gain new skills when they utilise their time properly. At the same time, some others get frustrated due to technical problems. However, it is based on how students adapt and use their time to help them. Anyway, based on the study, students were interviewed to share their perceptions about the learning approach of online learning. Most respondents answered that online education has many advantages regarding flexibility, resourcefulness, etc.

*Respondent A:*

“... of course, it also has some benefits.... Moreover, it depends on the students.”

*Respondent B:*

“Well, as we know, online learning has many advantages, err... in balancing our lives, for instance, and like it is flexible...It is quite flexible, and we have many resources to refer to and learn as much as we want. So, I could say that online learning is a perfect option with many benefits.”

Regarding this context, a study by Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University shows that online learning has many benefits for students in their learning approach (Issaliyeva et al., 2019). From the result of this study, online education paves the way for students to learn at their convenience. So, they are satisfied with their busy schedules compared to face-to-face learning. On the other hand, students can develop themselves as an independent learner while learning online. While completing tasks online, at the same time, students will improve their social interaction with their peers and their problem-solving skills.

In contrast, online learning also negatively impacts students' learning process. For a specific type of skill, online learning is not an option for students to access from home, especially for medical students. The

discussion of a survey study among Polish medical students shows that the e-learning approach is not as practical as the traditional learning approach (Bączek et al., 2021). As medical students, they must improve their social skills with patients. Due to technical issues with IT supplies, students lack interaction with the patients while learning from home. Another barrier to online learning is students' lack of interaction with the lectures (Dost et al., 2020, p. 7). With the advancement of technology, teachers sometimes just make pre-recorded content and send it to their students to review at the convenience of their time. So, this learning approach may appear to detect the interaction between students and teachers that makes them less motivated to learn.

#### *4.3 Findings (3): Most Students Are Satisfied with The Quality of Online Learning*

The benefits of online learning have paved the way for transmitting knowledge to become more flexible. The lecturers and students could interact by facing the screen through their devices. So, it reduces their time and money for transportation. Moreover, the teacher could instruct and facilitate students using technology devices effectively. The students can easily access their learning resources from school data-based or the internet. Based on the information collected from the interviews, most respondents are satisfied with online learning in terms of instructors' support, accessibility of education, and their contribution toward this learning approach.

##### *Respondent A:*

“...from my satisfaction about the teachers' instruction...Of course, some lectures are very clear in their instructions, so based on these scenarios, I would give four rates for the instructor support; thank you.”

“Well, I am delighted with the learning resources available on the internet and the library itself.... there are...Err...data-based, e-books...and we can access it from the database, so I am delighted with these aspects.”

##### *Respondent B:*

“I am delighted by instructor support; I would give four rates [satisfaction scale].”

“...we get many learning resources. I am satisfied here. Also, I would say five [for satisfaction scale].”

A study on online instruction, e-learning, and student satisfaction shows that most students were delighted with online research (Cole et al., n.d.) The factor that made students comfortable with this learning approach was the convenience provided by online learning. The flexibility of online classes was taken into consideration. Hence, the students could study at their convenience, attend classes wherever they are, and save time and money on transportation.

However, other research studies also reported that students would like to be more satisfied with online learning. Based on most respondents, lack of interaction and holding up communication between teachers, students, and other classmates were crucial factors of dissatisfaction with online classes. For instance, in the study of Robert Morris University, United States, and Mississippi State University (Cole et al., n.d. & Yang & Cornelius, 2004), Many students had unsatisfactory teachers' perspectives since they had no face-to-face connection with them made evident by research at Mississippi State University. Hence, according to a survey by Robert Morris University, students were also dissatisfied with components such as the course structure, the instructor's competence to deliver online, etc. As a result, when the instructor's reaction was delayed, the students were left feeling uncertain about their assistance. So, due to these students' struggles, the online learning approach fails to fulfil students' needs and learning objectives.

#### *4.4 Findings (4): Online Learning Is Impactful on Future Careers*

With the advancement of new technologies, the world seems to be a competitive place. Students try to look for and learn new things to improve their soft or complex skills. In Covid-19, most students, teachers, and other staff were encouraged to study and work from home. It means they have electronic devices to complete their assignments or work. Hence, some believe that online learning is a means to improve their skills and positively impact their future careers. Based on this study, most of the respondents agreed that online learning has a significant impact on their future careers.

##### *Respondent A:*

“From my perspective toward my future career, I think it is beneficial.... I need some skills as a business student.... such as designing, Photoshop, data analysis, excel, etc..... So, it has a big impact on my future career.”

##### *Respondent B:*

“.... you know, nowadays, everything is developing, and if we see the tech industry, many mysterious things are happening in the tech. So, those technologies will also guide or support my future career. So, it will

greatly impact my future career to manage, like, for instance, we can mention the artificial intelligence, err... that will also support my career in the future.”

*Respondent C:*

“So, I would say, yes, it is impactful on my future career.”

One of the online learning approaches advantages is the advancement of the future career, based on the Study International Website (Segaren, 2020). “People are taking issues into their own hands due to easy access to technology and a changing global economy. According to the report, they are piecing together their education from a menu of alternatives. They predict that as individuals pursue education throughout their life, self-service learning will become increasingly more widespread”. In the time of technical advancement, students, teachers, leaders, and administrators in higher education have used to date with the current technology innovations. Hence, according to the study of the University of Phoenix (Alward & Phelps, 2019, p. 75), regarding the Impactful Leadership Traits of Virtual Leaders in Higher Education, the technical reliability of the faculty members is significant. So, they must upskill themselves to an effective virtual leader using technology to communicate and engage their teams.

In contrast, online learning is only sometimes an alternative option for students to upskill themselves, which could impact their future careers. Without challenges, the growth of the e-learning approach has not been in these modern days. Students always face some difficulties or distractions while attending online classes. A study regarding the impact of online learning indicated that e-learning is not a practical learning approach for students to gear up their knowledge or skills (Yusnilita, 2020). In this study, 80% of students responded that they have difficulties accessing online classes due to internet connectivity since most live in the village. So, based on the challenges students face in e-learning in this study, it could be concluded that they have a low expectation that online classes will impact their future careers.

## **5. Conclusion**

### *5.1 Summary of The Findings*

#### 5.1.1 The theme of finding 1: most respondents prefer face-to-face classes to online learning

Based on the data collected from the interviews, two out of the three respondents experience the challenges of online classes. They would prefer to have physical courses rather than a face-screen learning approach. The factor that causes them to feel insecure with online learning is that they often need to be more focused on internet issues and the noise of messages or phone calls during class.

#### 5.1.2 The theme of finding 2: advantages of online learning

Regarding the advantages of online learning, two out of three respondents agreed that there are many benefits they could gain based on their experience with this learning mode. Online learning is flexible and allows them to learn at their own pace and complete tasks conveniently. With online learning, at the same time, the students could develop social skills and problem-solving skills, according to study analysis. However, according to one study, it should be accessed physically for a specific nursing skill. The nurses must interact with their patients socially in the physical environment.

#### 5.1.3 The theme of finding 3: most students are satisfied with the quality of online learning

Based on the data collected from the interview session, two out of the three respondents, based on their experience with e-learning mode, were satisfied with the quality of online learning. Some factors that drive them to satisfy with this learning approach include instructor support, the accessibility of learning resources, and their contribution during their studies. It means that despite the facilitation from lecturers while attending online classes during the Covid-19 pandemic, they also made a great effort toward their studies. They did not rely solely on the lecturer but tried to contribute to the given tasks. The online learning approach paved the way for them to learn, making them more independent. However, other factors cause students to be unsatisfied with this online learning, including the instructor's competence in delivering online lessons.

#### 5.1.4 The theme of finding 4: online learning impacts future careers

Most respondents said online learning significantly impacts future careers from the interview session. Based on their answers to the given questionnaires, everyone must be up to date with the latest innovations, the advancement of new technological innovations and the competitive labour market. One of the studies also revealed that every person should upskill themselves to become a virtual leader; they must be professional with the current labour market changes to develop future careers. However, it is still a low expectation for young children living in rural areas since they need help with technical issues. So, their expectation of the impact of online learning on future careers is still in consideration.

### 5.2 Conclusion

This study has indicated that international postgraduate students in AIU experience some challenges of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Even though these students faced some difficulties or distractions due to technical issues and other factors, they tried their best with great effort to contribute to their studies. Hence, based on the student's experience with this learning approach and absorbing some of the knowledge and skills, they were satisfied with the quality of online learning. On the other hand, they believe that online learning significantly impacts their future careers since technology has become more innovative. It will prepare them to be professional leaders to fit and compete in the future labour market. However, some concerning factors must be considered regarding online classes. The online learning environment is one of the essential aspects that need to be improved by that teacher since it covers the students' interaction, motivation, and academic performance.

### 5.3 Recommendations and Suggestions

This study has yet to be very compelling. There are still some worthy areas that need to be revamped and analysed in more depth, such as:

1. Conduct study research and data analysis among all students from various schools and programmes of study.
2. In-depth analyses measure the students' perceptions and the quality of online learning compared to the face-to-face environment.
3. Despite using qualitative methodology, consider using other effective study methods to collect the data and information.

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