

Struggling with Digital Pandemic: Students' Narratives about Adapting to Online Learning at Home during the COVID-19 Outbreak

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Abstract

With the ongoing catastrophe of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world seems to have come to a standstill. Daily living routines, work, and schools predominantly launched into a state of confusion, and people across the globe excessively find ways to cope with their experiences of this traumatic disaster. Concerning schools, the pandemic has dramatically challenged the education system with teaching and learning processes managed remotely, utilising online platforms. This paper explores university students' perception of online learning, specifically during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, to uncover how they respond to this 'new normal' digital mode of teaching and learning and how they seek to regain control over the sudden shift in their lives. Through interviews with students from Universiti Darussalam (UBD) and Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali UNISSA, this original article reveals students' transformative behaviours during online learning, and institutional supports that contribute to the shaping of students' online learning experiences in Brunei.

Keywords: COVID-19; Online Learning; Student; Experiences; New Normal

Introduction

Hoon and Alam (2021) referred to the online learning phenomenon as a 'Digidemic' (digital pandemic) to allude to the impacts of online learning on students and teachers. Their study indicated how this digidemic, in the form of spatial disconnection, occurs as students struggle to accustom to the new norm of conserving their private space while also having to share the space with other various diversions. As they have argued, that situation is beyond the students' control (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020; Leinaweaver et al., 2017; Sumuer, 2018). Similarly, our research shows how students' learning experiences at home deconstructs the dividing line between their private and public spaces. With online learning, students have to maintain their academic responsibilities in a space supposedly meant for destressing and relaxing (Kay, 2020). This causes them to feel mentally detached even to appreciate and be engaged in their online learning, especially with the existence of other disruptions at home (Kim & Frick, 2011). This spatial disconnection can result in increased boredom with learning, reduced learning efficiency (LaPointe & Reissetter, 2008), detachment from reality (Lim et al. 2021), inability to assimilate knowledge (Baran & AlZoubi, 2020), and devalued determination in the learning process (Appadurai, 2020). Thus, this article contributes to a better understanding of how online learning has transformed rigid

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spatial structures and compromised students' insight capabilities to acquire knowledge.

In response to the devastating COVID-19 outbreak globally, higher education institutions have transitioned to online learning as it is considered the most viable mode of conserving education while maintaining a safe distance (Xiangming & Song, 2018). It is important to emphasise that online learning is one of the many options for distance education (Chen et al., 2019). Generally, distance education refers to any form of learning experience where the student and instructor are physically apart. Nagro, Fraser, and Hooks (2019) argued that such an experience is the perfect context for free-flowing thought that allows the students to move beyond the restricted confines of a familiar social order. Furthermore, Biana (2013) puts forth that distance education aims to benefit everyone, especially those who are less privileged, under-resourced, and out of reach with educational access (Dube, 2020).

Therefore, this form of learning is highly suggested as it provides the best learning opportunities for every student, regardless of their circumstances (Migueliz Valcarlos et al., 2020). Especially in the distressing time of the pandemic, distance learning has become a prime element in the lives of all learners and educators (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). However, this seems to rest on a stark assumption. Universiti Brunei Darussalam implemented online learning back in March 2020 as a preventive measure against the transmission of the COVID-19. Lectures had to be taught through synchronous remote learning, and classes were done at home (Dong et al., 2020). With the sudden change from a physical to an online environment, university students in Brunei instead have to face the inevitable challenges that follow the new mode of learning. First, there are issues concerning the efficiency of the online learning environment; the lack of interaction in the process amongst peers and with the instructors (Dube, 2020). As there is a lack of social integration in an online community, this confirms Edge and Loegering's (2000) assertion that students may comparatively learn less than in the traditional physical classroom. There are also socio-economic concerns where there is a clear digital divide between those who have and those who do not have access to sufficient school and technological facilities (Clark et al., 2021), and computers and the internet, thus contributing to the hardship that students may face in their experiences of online learning.

The findings of this study benefit society, considering the increased significance of distance learning and the role of technology, in general, in the 21st century, and particularly so during this pandemic. These days, the greater demand for e-learning should justify the need for more effective teaching and learning techniques (Aliyyah et al., 2020). Even though the main idea of e-learning has been introduced and established in Brunei, it has not been employed to a great measure. This is evident in how students, some teachers, and even parents have problems coping with online learning and are still attempting to adjust to it (Mukhtar et al., 2020). Institutions and instructors will be able to teach more efficiently and provide a better learning environment for students using the approaches that may emerge from the study results. Students and parents can also reflect on their experiences and comprehend what they can do better to manage e-learning and technology as a learning medium.

As for the researcher, this study will hopefully help unravel concealed experiences and build upon those to explore critical areas that can contribute to and fill in the gaps, if any, of the existing studies of many other researchers for the benefit of the general public.

Literature Review

Online learning or ‘distance learning’ is a term that alludes to a form of studying outside the traditional classroom or a face-to-face setting. Particularly in this time of distress, the COVID-19 pandemic has undeniably seized and compelled the idea of utilising online learning to a great extent. A new paradigm has undeniably formed, and students are obliged to learn to manage and cope with the inevitable shift. Building on the work of Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (1999), Anderson (2011) assessed the possibility of forming a theory of online education in which he discussed how four key elements; Learner-Centred, Knowledge-Centred, Assessment-Centred, and Community-Centred, should be considered to achieve effective learning environments, including online learning. Following this statement, many researchers have constructed a variety of studies focussing on processes and strategies for a successful online learning experience. This study will include substantial research into how the community or students’ institutions contribute to making the experience for the students wholly bearable and meaningful. The role of students as learners will also be looked into to understand better how they can modify their experience.

Virtual Belonging

Based on the findings of Garris Garrison and colleagues (e.g., Aragon, 2003; Garrison et al., 2000; Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007) in expanding the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, it is well established that along with the students, the responsibility of creating a supportive and an all-inclusive structure whereby students can easily engage and feel at ease with the online learning community also lies with the institutions and the faculties. The CoI model underlines three crucial presences (Social, Teaching, and Cognitive presence) that can serve as fundamental factors to enable a successful educational experience in remote learning environments. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) note that the key to successful student engagement in online learning is meaningful connections with the institution (Sahi et al., 2020).

With that being the case, it is also pivotal to acknowledge the community surrounding the students—their family and friends—which plays a crucial role in being a central pillar of support in helping the students cope and manage better with their learning (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). Additionally, as individuals, the students should be able to recognise their capability and potential to control and alter their experience. Students should understand that they have the upper hand in their choices for themselves and, thus, develop individual characteristics to cope better with their online learning in this pandemic (Masterton et al., 2021).

This sense of belonging, be it within the physical or online community, is essential as it reveals how an individual can feel familiar with the community around them and

engage smoothly and regularly (Rashid & Yadav, 2020). Oomen-Early and Murphy (2009) put forth that the online learning community is widely known to have higher attrition rates compared to traditional campus face-to-face studies (Spanenberg et al. 2020). With that, he emphasised that this sense of belonging acts as a principal factor affecting a student's engagement and can act as a safeguard against deterioration. In addition to inaugurating the components that can strengthen the sense of unity and belonging, the institution observes the students' progress and identifies initial signs of detachment (Beaudoin, 2002; Dennen, 2008). Moreover, promoting an open discourse between the students, instructors, and their colleagues, which has always been assumed for granted, is essential to online learning (Coomey & Stephenson, 2001).

Student-Instructor Interaction

In light of a better understanding of the institution's responsibility, several studies have attempted to emphasise the importance of student-instructor interaction for a successful and better way of coping with online learning. Cannady (2015) theorised that online-friendly academic resources and profuse chances for student-instructor interactions are plausibly the most pivotal support an institution can offer for online learning students. Similarly, researchers such as Lee (2010) and Ralston-Berg et al. (2015) have highlighted the vital link between a large and frequent number of student-instructor interactions and increased student course satisfaction, emphasising that it is a critical component of successful student learning (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). With the fundamental reliance on asynchronous modes of communication for online learning, it has been proposed that, for successful online learning, interactions can transpire through a variety of methods, including learner-to-content, learner-to-instructor, and learner-to-learner (peer) interaction (Bolliger & Martindale, 2004), that demands a more proactive, self-regulated approach on the students (Brown, 1997; Khiat, 2015; Tsay et al. 2000). Furthermore, Mazzolini and Maddison (2006) emphasised that the instructor's role is to act as the person who allows students to adopt a more central role in their learning. Numerous studies (Barrett, 2006; Butler, 2000; Chang & Fisher, 2003) have suggested that the new standard has, thus, shifted from teacher-centred and institution-centred learning to student-centred learning. Based on these findings, it is critical to recognise institutions or instructors. In particular, it plays an important role as a supportive pillar for a student learning online, as a lack of social interaction is widely regarded as a significant barrier to student success in online learning (Mulenburg & Berge, 2005).

Active Learners

E-learning undeniably places a great deal of differing demands and difficulties, especially on the students. The review article, *Applying Best Practice Online Learning, Teaching, and Support to Intensive Online Environments: An Integrative Review* (2017), explores the main characteristics for effective online learning (Roddy et al., 2017). Especially in this time of a life-altering pandemic, the details of this study can provide an adequate understanding of how students can become the advocates of their own experiences by adjusting and adapting to the 'policy' that is online learning for a steadier means of coping. Several studies have focused on the necessity for students to be more active as learners (Palloff & Pratt, 1998) and develop

'sophisticated' skills such as collaborative working (Cowan, 2006; Chang & Fisher, 2003) to be successful in learning remotely. To further support the statement, Zariski and Styles (2000) suggested that becoming a more proactive learner is to encourage oneself to become self-directed or self-regulated learners. This can be achieved by being responsible for organising their learning structures and constantly reflecting on their progress.

Cases of self-regulated learning whereby students utilise self-cognizant skills for a better means of learning have also been highly linked with outstanding academic achievements (Johnson, 2015; Khiat, 2015). In his study, *E-Learner Competencies*, Birch (2002) noted that to be an e-learner is to be able to "identify and prioritize his or her skill gaps" and to "manage the learning experience which includes establishing defined goals, establishing specific plans, and securing needed resources." (p. 11). Hence, with these studies, there is a constant affirmation that self-regulated learners are most likely to hold an optimistic and supportive attitude towards themselves as the learners and to have a better understanding of the subject content, which can assist in coping better with online learning (Pham & Ho, 2020). Furthermore, Foucault refers to power as "relationships of power" (Foucault, in Bernauer & Rasmussen, 1987:11). In *How Active Involvement in Learning Mathematics Can Preclude Meaningful Engagement: contributions from Foucault*, Klein (2000) highlighted the students' transformation on their positive identity as learners. Using Foucault's theory as a foundation, she revealed that mathematics students can engage with the mathematics courses as they have established self-identities as motivating students (Klein, 2000). In that study, the students were aware that using own resources and finding intrinsic motivations about the benefits of learning mathematics were instrumental for their success in the future employment (Klein, 2000). As a result, the concept of power or knowledge constitutes identity. The constituted identity can alter and affect engagement with knowledge processes in the classroom context; in this context, how power can be used to comprehend and cope with online learning.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to collect data. Six respondents were selected and interviewed using purposive sampling. The respondents are university students; five from Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) and one from Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA). The purposive sampling was preferred to choose students who have had personal experiences with online learning to obtain in-context data more conveniently. To gain a better insight into the respondents' perception of online learning, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted. This method allowed more room for natural probing and profound discussions for a more in-depth comprehension of the respondents' perceptions (Bolliger & Martin, 2018). The interviews were conducted in both English and Malay, as most young Bruneian people speak bilingually (Noorashid & McLellan, 2021). The interview questions posed to the respondents explored their preferences to online learning, and the interviews lasted between 30 minutes to one hour each. Before conducting the interview, the respondents were asked for their consent to record their

responses, and confidentiality of each response was assured. The interviews were conducted using a mobile phone as well as face-to-face meetings, with some conducted via WhatsApp due to different time schedules. The interview recordings were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and this involved a thorough interpretation and examination of the data to identify substantial themes (Tuckett, 2005). In what follows, we present detailed narratives of the various experiences of the research respondents in times of online learning.

Unproductive Temporality and the Challenges of Online Learning

Generally, similar notions surfaced when respondents were asked about their thoughts on online learning. It is noteworthy that online learning has emerged as a new norm in Brunei's higher education. Therefore, behavioural adaptations to it are necessary. Cognitive aspects such as stress and difficulty are associated with how online learning has affected the respondents' overall learning experience. The sudden transition to virtual learning proved overwhelming for the students. Meanwhile, the readiness for this new learning system was an unpredictable challenge: 'I never thought I would ever be in an online learning situation. For me, online learning is more challenging than physical learning' (Izzan, UNISSA). Face-to-face learning has revolutionised the scholarly habitus experienced by students in non-pandemic times. This transition to online learning, on the other hand, forced them to compromise with the old learning model. One student conceals his shock at this new mode:

In my opinion, online learning is not something that I would want to go through. We're all so used to physical learning throughout school life, and we never really had the chance to have online learning. After the pandemic, it took up such an important role for everyone in Brunei that it became such a huge shock to adapt to (Hamizah, Female, UBD).

Not all students are well-prepared for this new structure imposed by the educational institutions. All modules or courses are conveyed through a virtual platform in online learning. This situation prompts students to regularly stay up-to-date with information circulated via the distance learning platform such as Canvas, Moodle, and others. Subsequently, online learning forces them to always be in a virtual domain with their computers/laptops or handheld devices. From the socio-technical perspective, this condition requires students to keep up with the accelerated flow of information. However, this isolates them because their reality cannot coexist with the fluidity of the online space, causing them distress. It is emphasised in a student's experience as follows 'I felt like it did affect me greatly because I felt like I got super pressured by online learning and whatever was happening in classes. I am sort of left behind' (Nadrah, UBD). Breaking away for a moment from the hustle and bustle of online learning is an adaptative mechanism for the students so as not to feel overwhelmed by the new learning experience. However, the important goal of observing the advantages and disadvantages of online learning is to be able to provide body and mental readiness to embark on this virtual learning engagement. As confirmed by a student: 'I wasn't taking the online learning seriously at first, as I wanted to give chances (sic) to my body and mind to digest what is going on in this [online] learning mode' (Fatrisya, Female, UBD). In general, this narrative informs us about the sudden shock experienced by the students when they transitioned from a face-to-face mode of learning to online.

Despite the fact that the instructors have a critical role to play, the students demonstrated thoughtful consideration in understanding how, like themselves, their lecturers may also find the situation perplexing, a change that is difficult to grasp and adapt to with ease. In addition, social change at home was found to be implicated by online learning. The present study found that the experiences of these respondents were affected by their similar opinions of online learning in a home environment. The respondents asserted that a home is designated for comfort and relaxation, where all other obligations could be deferred, including school matters. However, online learning interferes with this luxury and bounds the students instead within their home with online lectures and work.

You're situated at home, in front of your laptop, and you dismiss yourself from your working mode. When you think about home, it's a place to relax and school is for work. There's just that missing piece that sets your mind into studying. (Izzan, UNISSA).

A house was defined as a physical and emotional space that provides an inner bond for individuals and cultural and emotional security for its residents (Cristoforetti et al., 2011). When online learning is imposed, this redefinition of the house comes to the fore. For instance, students tell of a house as rendezvous for a sense of belonging and convenience: 'Home is their comfort space, and it's a place that you are most likely to rest and ignore whatever responsibility you have outside, but online learning was intruding in it' (Hamizah, Female, UBD). This testimony implies online learning has shifted its meaning within the home itself and the temporality it has developed within.

As the students undertake online learning at home, they gradually become aware that disruptions are inevitable. These disruptions include slow internet connections, trouble accessing online lectures through applications such as Zoom, house chores, as well as internal student factors such as laziness or procrastination. Thus, recognising how these disruptions have made their learning progress difficult, the majority of the students developed their initiatives to alter their remote learning experience. One of the respondents recounted how being at the comfort of her home demotivates her as she willingly chooses to procrastinate rather than study. So, instead of conforming to the general idea of remote learning at home, she developed an alternative to help her to refocus and cope with online learning better in which she stated,

I feel like my home is so full of distractions, and I just can't seem to do anything about it. Doing my online learning at home has allowed me to procrastinate a lot, and I tend to just leave the class and enjoy the pleasure of doing something else like cooking, or taking a bath, or even sleeping (Khairani, Female, UBD).

Face-to-face learning and teaching at university are moulding students to be disciplined while on-campus as they are required to obey the norms and regulations, such as class schedules, participating in group work, moving from one lecture hall to another, and wearing formal and proper attire. In sum, on-campus learning embodies the authority to discipline them (Neumann, 2001). Since online learning is accessible

off-campus, the home becomes a space for students to escape the regulatory power held by the university. Moreover, as emphasised in the narrative above, the students can be more autonomous, free and also carry out individual activities.

For this matter, we discovered that substantially as the university is the authoritative party implementing and setting up the online learning system, the respondents expected their institutions to provide more comprehensive guidance. The belief that the students have mastered the forte of online learning could have prompted the institution's deficiencies in management and providing guidelines. This then creates a challenge for the students to have a good learning experience. What about their routines at home? The next section explores how they demonstrate individualised routines.

Individualised Routines

As mentioned above, on-campus learning prompted students to always comply with certain regulations such as wearing formal and proper attires, preparing learning materials for the class before commuting to universities, and entering class punctually according to the schedule. In other words, the university is a disciplinary space for the students in general (Hackley, 2009). Societal role or the surrounding community is commonly a prevalent subject used to elucidate particular social concerns. The respondents agreed on the possible accommodating roles of three important institutions in assisting students in coping with online learning: the contribution of the educational institution, student-instructor interaction, and the family. However, while the data attest to how these institutions can help, we also found prominent perceptions of how these expectations differ from reality.

Online learning makes students achieve individual autonomy and get out of regulatory restraints on campus (Mathieson, 2012). At home, there is no need for them to carry out personal preparation: 'before this I would take the time to dress up to go to school and now that it's mostly online learning, I don't need to dress myself up anymore, so I just need to wake up, open my laptop and start the class' (Alif, UBD). More than that, the students admit that they are more passionate about their own space during the online learning process. With relief during the interview, they also acknowledged the convenience of studying in their own sanctuary and being free from all external control, as is normally the case with face-to-face learning: 'during an online lecture (...), there's no one to tell you, "do not do that", so you are in your own space.' (Hamizah, UBD). Although online learning allows respondents to build closeness with their own space, self-disciplining is challenging. Online learning does not completely give freedom to students at home as they found that face-to-face teaching equips them with emotional attachment to the class ambience. One of the emerging routines they learn through online learning at home is time management. A student acknowledged this argument by stating: 'online learning at home has improved my time management in a way, especially now that I'm in my final year' (Alif, UBD). Another student told us that online learning made her to be an independent learner: "It also does improve you in a way that encourages you to take your own learning seriously' (Rina, UBD). This points to students' reflectivity, enabling them to build autonomy through online learning.

However, despite the challenging notions associated with their experiences, some respondents also expressed the easiness side of online learning, with its convenience for mobility and how it has allowed them to improve themselves as active students, especially as final year students. ‘...those who are constantly on the move, or those who work part-time or have transportation problems, they might have it easier (Izzan, UNISSA). This statement indicates online learning can lead to a transportation problem for students living off-campus.

Societal role or the surrounding community is commonly a prevalent subject used to elucidate particular sociological concerns. The respondents agreed on the possible accommodating roles of three important institutions in assisting students in coping with online learning: the contribution of the educational institution, student-instructor interaction, and the family. However, while the data attest to how these institutions can help, we also found prominent perceptions of how these expectations differ from reality, especially in Brunei Darussalam.

Discussion

The data demonstrate the mixed notions of university students on remote learning during the peak of the COVID-19 outbreak and how it forms their overall learning experience (Domingo & Bradley, 2018). Our findings also found the actuality behind the students' expectations on the role of their educational institutions and their family in providing support and encouragement to help them cope with online learning (Kaufmann & Vallade, 2020). In addition, in order to better understand how students cope with online learning, we observed in the narratives how the students' motivation and initiative in changing their circumstances play a significant role. Since the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic back in December 2019, higher educations in Brunei Darussalam have seen a rise in the use of remote learning, what more with Brunei's great access to advanced digital technologies (Bolliger & Halupa, 2018). Even though ‘Blended Learning’; an approach to education that combines traditional physical classroom learning with online components, was introduced and initiated long before the pandemic, our findings demonstrated how the online learning aspect has not been instilled and deployed to the full extent. Our respondents described the difficulty of online learning and their feelings of being shocked and pressured as a result of the abrupt transition from a traditional face-to-face class to online learning and the need to quickly adapt to the new situation, as well as for teachers and parents. This is consistent with Khalil et al.'s (2020) study, which found that despite the educational sector's resilience during the pandemic, students and educators around the world were subjected to extreme new pressures (Cole et al., 2021).

Contrary to the claims by Hoon and Alam (2021) that emphasise the situation as beyond the students' control, our results suggest that the students are, in fact, capable of taking charge of their situation and altering it for the better sake of their learning process. In our findings, the respondents demonstrated how they identify themselves as a power tool capable of changing and determining their own experiences, rather than merely accepting the learning situation that hinders their own progress. Our

findings fit with previous literature that proves individuals' inventiveness to modify any social structure that constructs their behaviour, in this case, changing the educational arrangement of online learning that demotivates the students to help them get through with online learning (Henderson et al., 2017). Additionally, building on the existing evidence of Birch's (2002) study, the researcher asserts that online learners should be able to recognise and focus on their learning skills or weaknesses. It is argued that they should know how to be in control of their experiences, which includes initiating their own goals and resources (Bolliger & Martin, 2018). Evidently, one of our respondents spoke of the importance of being disciplined when it comes to learning in general. To avoid any unpleasant experience with online learning, he identified his strength as a disciplined student who knows how to manage his time well, establishing necessary boundaries between his academic and personal life. This helps him steer clear of any possibility of degrading his motivation and drive to study and thus, helps him to cope better with his online learning.

This study also provides an insight into the role of the educational institution and the family as two other main contributing parts in helping students cope with online learning (Sellnow-Richmond et al. 2020). A majority of the respondents remarked how the encouragement and boosterism of the instructors or the lecturers of the educational institution can motivate the students to interact and learn better and relieve the dull feeling prompted by the lack of sociality, which Bowers and Kumar (2015), and Rose (2017) have argued to be secluding and can be difficult for many students especially in online learning environments (Cole et al. 2021). Our findings of the lecturers' instructiveness, care, and emotional support highlight their positive impact on the students' learning and success (Busteed, 2019). The data also attest to Bandura's (2011) study of the social cognitive theory, which postulates that learning takes place when individuals interact and engage in social contexts. We have argued that as cognition is not an innate process, it is acquired and formed by the different interactions a student has with other people within different social contexts. Thus, in the context of online learning, our data demonstrate how students can cope with their situation and absorb knowledge better with the reciprocal action of engagement within the social spaces at home (Mamun et al., 2020).

However, while acknowledging previous studies that have focussed on various societal, individual, and spatial matters, our results highlight a significant gap in that we have also identified the role of the family and educational institution in how they can help students cope better with online learning (Domingo & Bradley, 2018). In the event of a pandemic that disrupts students' learning at home, the current study emphasises the importance of promoting mental health to students. The absence of understanding and providing emotional reinforcements are found to further debase students' motivation and enthusiasm to study, especially with the recent normalised situation of online learning in a pandemic.

Conclusion

Imagine falling into the deep blue ocean with little or no knowledge at all about swimming or even staying afloat. On top of that, there is no one around to help, and

you feel simply hopeless. The ocean may seem wondrous, blue, and beautiful; however, it is full of surprises that one might not expect. Now apply the metaphor to online learning. These students fall into the dazzling ocean of online learning with little knowledge as to how to manage themselves. This research shares the accounts of university students transitioning to socially isolating online learning, which was not a smooth process. It highlights various fundamental results that help to comprehend the different notions surrounding the idea of online learning and identify the collective responsibilities of social agencies. Based on a qualitative analysis of the data, it can be concluded that these responsibilities are prime factors that can contribute profoundly to a student's coping strategies with online learning yet are very much overlooked.

The findings of this study reveal how the online learning phenomena disrupt the entire teaching and learning process, necessitating an understanding of the critical solution of instructors' pedagogical methods and the emotional support of the family in order to create an interactive and dynamic online learning experience for students. We emphasise that students have the power and the choice to alter and turn the situation around for their best interest instead of adhering entirely to the structures of online learning that evidently affect the students' learning progress. While the study has provided preliminary discussions on the perceptions of online learning in today's world of the pandemic, the generalisability of the results is limited by the fact that they are not representative of the general community of university students in Brunei Darussalam. Furthermore, one must understand that online learning is a new phenomenon for everyone, an event no one has ever experienced personally, especially in a pandemic. It is undeniable that everyone is still constantly at odds about what they can do in this disheartening circumstance.

Thus, the findings of this study will hopefully be conducive to the benefits of society, considering the increased significance of distance learning and the role of technology in the 21st century, notably during this pandemic. The greater demand for online learning should justify the need for more effective teaching and learning techniques. Even though the main idea of online learning has been long introduced and established in Brunei, it has not been employed to a great measure. This is evident in how students, some teachers, and even parents have problems coping with online learning and are still attempting to adjust to it. With the results derived from this study, we hope institutions and instructors will be able to teach more efficiently and provide a better learning environment for the students. Students and parents can also reflect on their experiences and comprehend what they can do better to manage online learning and use technology as a learning medium.

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