

A Cross-Sectional Study on Student Experience and Contentment of Online Learning During Covid 19 Lockdown

Jayaron Jose¹ and Blessy Jayaron Jose²

¹English Language Centre, University of Technology and Applied Sciences Al Musannah, Oman

²Information Technology Department, University of Technology and Applied Sciences Al Musannah, Oman

jayaron@act.edu.om

jayaronjose@gmail.com

blessy@act.edu.om

bjayaron@gmail.com

Abstract: The delivery mode of the lessons was transitioned from face-to-face to online/e-learning in response to the Covid-19 lockdown across the Middle East, particularly in Oman. The University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Al Musannah (UTASA), also adopted this approach, which brought forth both opportunities and challenges for the academic community, including teachers and students. However, no systematic studies were conducted across various departments at the university to gain insights into the implications of full-time online/e-learning. Therefore, this study was designed to comprehend the perceptions of cross-sectional UTASA students regarding the effectiveness of e-learning, encompassing their experiences and satisfaction with participating in it. The study employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, utilizing a survey questionnaire and a descriptive question. The participants included both male and female learners (N = 212) from departments such as IT (Information Technology), Business, Engineering, and ELC (English Language Centre). The analysis encompassed both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses of the quantitative data, as well as a descriptive thematic analysis of the qualitative data. The results revealed that over half of the participants held a clearly positive impression of their e-learning experience and satisfaction during the Covid-19 lockdown. Furthermore, the analysis of qualitative data shed light on the reasons behind both negative and positive sentiments towards e-learning, along with suggestions for potential enhancements. The diverse reactions of the participants to the survey questions have assisted researchers and interested parties in gaining a comprehensive understanding of both the favorable and unfavorable aspects of the procedure. A subset of the participants held a pessimistic view of online learning due to factors such as receiving low grades, encountering inadequate technical assistance, and observing a lack of commitment. In contrast, a different group perceived online learning as advantageous, citing its provision of a convenient and adaptable learning environment, along with convenient access to recorded lectures. Additionally, certain survey respondents put forth recommendations for enhancing online learning, including the need for better training, improved Internet connectivity, and enhanced interaction between teachers and students, as well as among fellow students. In summary, the study yielded valuable insights into the experiences and contentment levels of learners engaged in the online teaching and learning process. The findings and ensuing discussion provide essential recommendations for stakeholders and future researchers alike.

Keywords: Online learning, Experience, Contentment, Covid-19 lockdown, e-Learning, Satisfaction

1. Introduction

Covid 19 presented both challenges and opportunities across sectors, especially in the education sector. Students and teachers who used to teach face-to-face classes had to switch to online learning globally following the Covid outbreak announcement by WHO (World Health Organization) in 2020 (Nikolopoulou, 2022). This trend of transitioning to online learning took full momentum in educational institutions in the Middle East in general and Oman in particular. Meanwhile, the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Al Musannah (UTAS-A), also adapted itself to the online mode of teaching and learning quickly. According to Jose (2022), UTAS-A ELC learners had a positive impression about their adaptability and acceptance of online learning. In addition, the study (Jose and Jose, 2021) using the technology acceptance model found that the university learners' perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, perceived attitude, and their intention to use the online platform for future studies were positive. These studies were limited to the acceptance and adaptability of the online platform, i.e., MS Teams, and the perception of a limited number of participants from ELC (English Language Center) on selected areas. Since the online mode of study was administered across all departments at the university, the researchers felt that a cross-sectional quantitative descriptive and qualitative study design on student experience and contentment of online learning during the Covid 19 lockdown at UTAS-A had an increased scope, and it would draw better insight into the effectiveness of online learning among cross-departmental learners (IT, Business, Engineering, and ELC) at the university level, and thus, filling the knowledge gap in the research area.

2. Research Objective

The research objective is comparing perceptions of cross-sectional students from IT, Business, Engineering and the English Language Centre at University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Al Musannah in terms of their experiences and contentment of attending online classes. Furthermore, the study aims to find out whether there is any statistically significant difference between the perceptions of students from four different departments, and it also aims to determine the relationship between the learners' experience and their contentment of online learning. Finally, the goal of the study is to get deeper insights into participants' perception by collecting their comments for improvement and reflections about the online learning qualitatively.

3. Research Questions

RQ1. What are the cross-sectional student perceptions of transition to online learning during the Covid 19 at UTASA?

RQ2. Is there a statistically significant difference between cross sectional student perceptions of their experience and gratification in attending online classes?

H₀ (Null Hypothesis). There are no statistically significant inter-group differences, or all group means are statistically equal.

H_a (Alternative Hypothesis). There is a statistically significant difference between all groups.

RQ3. Is there a statistically significant correlation between students' experience and contentment of online learning?

H₀ (Null Hypothesis). There is no statistically significant correlation between student experience and contentment.

RQ4. What are learners' comments or opinion about their experience of learning online?

4. Literature Review

Global student enrolment to online courses is increasing in numerous higher educational institutions in public and private sectors (Wolverton, Hollier, and Lanier, 2020), and stakeholders take initiatives to measure student experience and contentment of the process for quality purposes and improvements. Student experience or engagement can be defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli, et al., 2002, p.74). Student experience represents their attitude towards participating in learning. The term further refers to the amount of student efforts, and the extent of students' thoughts, feelings, and activities in the process of learning (Hong, Song, and Lee, 2021). Moreover, student experience in terms of active learning and involvement is considered essential for the transition to tertiary level education to be a feasible venture (Murray, 2018). According to Edglossary (2023), learners' degree of interest, curiosity, optimism, attitude, and passion shown when they study or are taught. This is the reverse of the state where learners are disengaged, bored, disaffected, or dispassionate and measuring student experience and improvement are common educational goals of academics (ibid.). Contentment is generally defined as the pleasure or satisfaction one feels when they accomplish some work or receive what they need or want (Collins, 2023). Students' contentment at a university is explained as satisfaction or happiness that students get when their expectations or needs are met (Venkateswarlu, Malaviya, and Vinay, 2020). Student contentment regarding online or e-learning in the study, therefore, means that how satisfied learners are with respect to different determinants under the construct of student contentment or satisfaction.

A study by Panigrahi, Sreevastava and Panigrahi (2021) found that learners' online participation had positive impact on the learners' engagement, and it resulted in better academic performance. Furthermore, there are many factors that impact e-learning such as teachers' online presence, student-teacher interaction and clarity of content, and effectiveness of maintaining a connection between online e-learning and face-to-face teaching as possible (Nortvig, Peterson, and Vinay, 2020). Another study (Nikolopoulou, 2022) found that the online education had both positive and negative impacts on teachers and students. The advantage is that students get acquainted with technology to learn and contact with teachers, while teachers face technical challenges of lack of resources and support, and their students' lacking electronic devices to join classes. In addition, the recent conceptual study on e-learning or online learning through a review of a good amount of literature demonstrated that online learning, despite challenges, has impacted tertiary level students positively, and the online learning

process enabled the participants to better achieve their learning outcomes enhancing their performance (Jose and Jose, 2022).

The research findings by Yen and Nhi (2021) revealed that the online learning helped teachers and students to interact uninterrupted in the process of learning and teaching, to share files and instant feedback and giving opportunities for quarantined to students to attend lessons. In addition, online learning enabled teachers to create assignments and quizzes, and track their learners' progress. Majority of learners could attend online classes and complete all assignments. They could actively interact in the chat box. Some challenges faced by learners and teachers online are interruption in Internet transmission, limited possibilities of presenting an active and lively lesson, and monitoring students' participation, and lack of students' awareness. Furthermore, students faced psychological and social problems, technological inequality (no equal opportunities), and lack of technology (Milla, et al., 2021). Furthermore, Hidalgo-Camacho, et.al. (2021) reported that online engagement impacts learners' academic achievement with respect to pedagogical practices and assessments, affective factors, learning outcomes and learners' impression regarding merits and demerits of online learning. Other demerits of online learning as listed by Debych (2023) are lack of electricity or Internet connection, misusing the system for fun and bad intentions, distraction such as engaging in video games, chatting, and visiting social media platforms, and hardware and software issues as outdated or worn-out devices and un-updated versions, respectively. By contrast, online learning has benefits such as flexibility of study time, affordability, no physical limitations, and easy access.

5. Research Methodology

The study utilized a mixed methodology involving quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to address the research question.

5.1 Study Design, Scope, and Limitation

This cross-departmental study was conducted among students at the university of Technology and Applied Sciences Al Musannah (UTAS-A) across four departments - Information Technology (IT), Business (BUS), Engineering (Engr.) and English Language Centre (ELC). It used a validated 5-point Likert scale survey written in English and disseminated to respondents through MS Forms. The survey included an open-ended question to get some descriptive qualitative responses from participants to get deeper understanding about their thought process. The scope of the study was confined to students enrolled in four specific departments, who were actively engaged in online learning within the university setting. This focus revolved around exploring the constructs of the experience and the contentment of online learning relating to selected variables in the quantitative data, and derived variables/ themes in the qualitative data.

5.2 Criteria Inclusion and Exclusion

Students who were actively enrolled in the university and participated in online/e-learning were included in the study. Four main departments at the university were selected for the survey, namely: Information Technology, Business, Engineering, and the English Language Centre. To ensure an equal number of participants from each department, respondents who exceeded the count of 53 in each department were excluded from the survey.

5.3 Instrument and Sample Size

The survey questionnaire, comprised of 27 items, was meticulously prepared and subjected to validation and reliability piloting. The questionnaire was structured into three distinct sections: a) demographic items, b) items indicative of student experience, and c) student contentment. The study ensured the inclusion of an equal number of participants ($n = 53$, $N = 212$) from each department, and the data collection process spanned over a period exceeding six months, aimed at securing a sufficient number of respondents. Additionally, the questionnaire featured an open-ended question, prompting participants to offer general or specific comments concerning e-learning or online learning.

The questionnaire included four parts.

- Part 1: This section encompasses items related to the demographic information of the participants (Table 2).
- Part 2: Comprising eighteen items, this segment aims to gather learners' perceptions of online learning during the Covid-19 lockdown with regards to their experience (EX) (Table 1).
- Part 3: Consisting of nine items, this part seeks to gather insights into learners' perceptions of online learning concerning their contentment (CT) (Table 1).

- Part 4: Included is an open-ended question intended for learners to articulate their opinions about e-learning (3.3).

Table 1 summarises the 5-point Likert Scale Items (parts 2 and 3).

Table 1: Survey Items

Student experience level (EX)	
EX1	I make sure to study regularly.
EX2	I put forth efforts in online classes.
EX3	I use class notes between getting online to make sure I understand the material.
EX4	I am organized in online learning.
EX5	I take good notes over readings, PowerPoints, or video lectures.
EX6	I listen/read carefully online.
EX7	I find ways to make the course material relevant to my life.
EX8	I apply course material to my life.
EX9	I find ways to make the course interesting to me.
EX10	I really desire to learn online materials/courses.
EX11	I have fun in online chats, discussions or via email with the instructor or other students.
EX12	I participate actively in small-group discussion forums.
EX 13	I help fellow students/ classmates.
EX 14	I get a good grade in Online learning.
EX 15	I do well in online tests/quizzes
EX 16	I engage in conversations online (chat, discussions, email).
EX 17	I post in the discussion forum/ chats regularly.
EX 18	I am good at getting to know other students in online classes.
Student contentment level (CT)	
CT19	I was able to learn through the medium of Computer-mediated communication (CMC).
CT 20	I was able to learn from the online discussions.
CT 21	I was stimulated to do additional reading or research on topics discussed in the online course.
CT 22	I learned to value other points of view.
CT 23	As a result of my experience with the online course, I would like to participate in another online course in the future.
CT 24	The online course was a useful learning experience
CT 25	As a result of my participation in the online course, I made acquaintances electronically in other parts of the country/world.
CT 26	The diversity of topics in the online course prompted me to participate in the discussions.
CT 27	I put a great deal of effort to learn the system to participate in the online course.

A reliability test was conducted using SPSS to assess the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, revealing a Cronbach's alpha value of .946, indicating excellent reliability. Furthermore, the construct-wise testing, i.e., for experience and contentment, yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .946 and .879, respectively. Gliem and Gliem (2003) explain that the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient typically falls within the range of 0 to 1. A coefficient closer to 1.0 signifies a higher level of internal consistency among the elements within the scale. Additionally, in terms of validity, a Pearson's correlation bivariate test was carried out in SPSS to assess the validity of the questions. The analysis demonstrated that all the questions are significantly valid.

5.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The survey items were digitized using MS Forms, and survey links were generated. These links were then distributed to participants across different departments through communication platforms like MS Teams chats, WhatsApp, and email. Subsequently, the data was exported to an Excel sheet for further analysis.

As the study encompassed four groups of students (IT, Bus, Engr., and ELC), One-Way ANOVA in Excel was employed as a statistical tool to assess the significance of differences among each item. Moreover, descriptive statistics were utilized to determine the central tendencies of the survey items. Furthermore, a Pearson r correlation test was conducted to ascertain whether there existed a statistically significant relationship between participants' levels of experience and their levels of contentment.

6. Results

The subsequent sections elucidate the study's findings, which have emerged from the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data obtained through the questionnaire and open-ended questions.

6.1 Quantitative Findings

The forthcoming sections analyse the participants' demographic information, their overall perceptions of experience and contentment, the differences among cross-sectional learner perceptions, and the correlation between learner experience and learner contentment.

6.1.1 Demographic Information

The survey was conducted among 212 students ($N = 212$) at UTASA. As evident from Table two, both male (46%) and female learners (46% and 54%, respectively) took part in the survey. The number of participants from each department was equal, with 54 students from IT, Business, Engineering, and the English Language Centre (25% each). Regarding the devices used for attending online classes, while 8% of students utilized desktop computers, more than half of the students (55%) used laptops. 31% of learners reported using smartphones, while only 8% used tablets to access online lessons. In terms of Internet speed, nearly half of the participants (49%) indicated having a fast Internet connection, whereas 22% mentioned having a slow Internet speed. Over a quarter of the respondents (29%) stated that their Internet speed fell somewhere in between, not too fast nor too slow. The participants hailed from diverse living backgrounds, including villages (44%), towns (27%), and cities (29%), which could have influenced their Internet speed and choice of devices (Table 2).

Table 2: Demographic Information

Category	Items	n	%
Gender	Male	98	46%
	Female	114	54%
Departments	IT	54	25%
	Business	54	25%
	Engineering	54	25%
	ELC	54	25%
Devices	Desktop pc	17	8%
	Smartphones	65	31%
	Laptops	117	55%
	Tablets	13	6%
Internet Speed	Good	104	49%
	Bad	46	22%
	So-so	62	29%
Place	Village	94	44%
	Town	57	27%
	City	61	29%

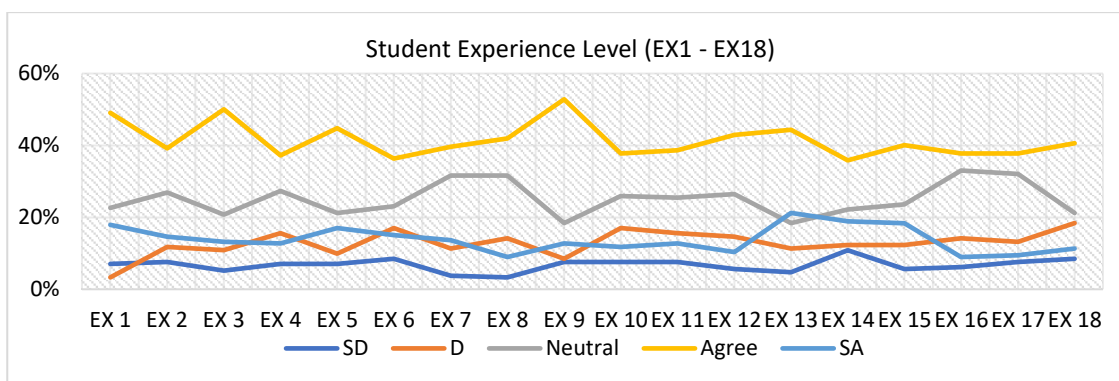
6.1.2 Learners' overall perception: experience and contentment

The researchers aim to determine UTASA students' overall perceptions concerning their learning experience and level of contentment. When considering various items comprising the construct of learners' experience (Tables 1 and 3) in attending online classes, it is apparent that more than half of the participants either agreed (A + SA) moderately or strongly with all items as illustrated in Table 3 and Figure 1. Notably, the highest percentage of participants (66%) concurred that they can find ways to make online classes interesting (EX9), while the same item (EX9) had the lowest percentage of undecided responses (18%) falling within the neutral range of 18% to 33% of respondents who remained neutral across all items. In contrast, 33% of participants did not have a definitive viewpoint on engaging in online conversations such as chats, emails, and forum discussions (EX16). On a less positive note, the highest percentage (26%) of students expressed opposition (D + SD) to the notion that they excel at getting to know other students in online classes (EX18, Table 3). Conversely, the smallest percentage of respondents (16%) disagreed with EX9.

Table 3: Student Experience Level (EX)

Items	SD	D	Neutral	Agree	SA	TOTAL
EX 1	7%	3%	23%	49%	18%	100%
EX 2	8%	12%	27%	39%	15%	100%
EX 3	5%	11%	21%	50%	13%	100%
EX 4	7%	16%	27%	37%	13%	100%
EX 5	7%	10%	21%	45%	17%	100%
EX 6	8%	17%	23%	36%	15%	100%
EX 7	4%	11%	32%	40%	14%	100%
EX 8	3%	14%	32%	42%	9%	100%
EX 9	8%	8%	18%	53%	13%	100%
EX 10	8%	17%	26%	38%	12%	100%
EX 11	8%	16%	25%	39%	13%	100%
EX 12	6%	15%	26%	43%	10%	100%
EX 13	5%	11%	18%	44%	21%	100%
EX 14	11%	12%	22%	36%	19%	100%
EX 15	6%	12%	24%	40%	18%	100%
EX 16	6%	14%	33%	38%	9%	100%
EX 17	8%	13%	32%	38%	9%	100%
EX 18	8%	18%	21%	41%	11%	100%

Note. EX- Experience; SD- Strongly Disagree; D-Disagree; N-Neutral; A-Agree; SA-Strongly Agree



Note. EX- Experience; SD- Strongly Disagree; D-Disagree; N-Neutral; A-Agree; SA-Strongly Agree

Figure 1: Student Experience Level (EX)

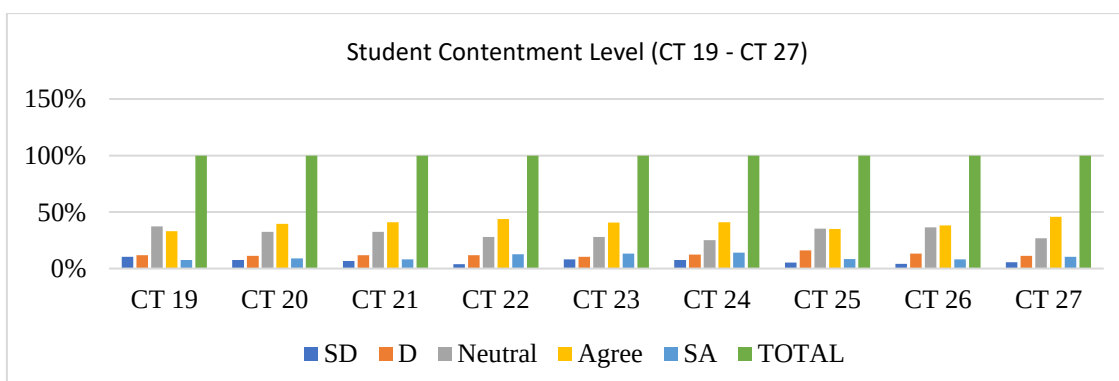
In addition, as depicted in Table four and Figure two, concerning the construct of learners' contentment with online learning (CT 19 – CT 27), the substantial majority (57%) of respondents (A + SA) concurred that they developed an appreciation for alternative viewpoints (CT22, Table 4, Figure 2). Following closely, the second-highest proportion (56%) of respondents indicated that they invested a considerable amount of effort to understand the system for participating in the online course (CT27).

Within the range of 25% to 37% of participants, there was a lack of clear opinion expressed for any of the items, as they remained neutral. However, a noteworthy percentage, ranging from 16% to 21% (D + SD), opposed all items falling under the construct of student contentment (Table 4, Figure 2).

Table 4: Student Contentment Level (CT)

Items	SD	D	Neutral	Agree	SA	TOTAL
CT 19	10%	12%	37%	33%	8%	100%
CT 20	8%	11%	33%	40%	9%	100%
CT 21	7%	12%	33%	41%	8%	100%
CT 22	4%	12%	28%	44%	13%	100%
CT 23	8%	10%	28%	41%	13%	100%
CT 24	8%	12%	25%	41%	14%	100%
CT 25	5%	16%	35%	35%	8%	100%
CT 26	4%	13%	36%	38%	8%	100%
CT 27	6%	11%	27%	46%	10%	100%

Note. CT – Contentment; SD- Strongly Disagree; D-Disagree; N-Neutral; A-Agree; SA-Strongly Agree



Note. CT – Contentment; SD- Strongly Disagree; D-Disagree; N-Neutral; A-Agree; SA-Strongly Agree

Figure 2: Student Contentment Level (CT)

6.1.3 Difference between cross-sectional learner perceptions

Furthermore, the investigation's second objective was to determine if there is a statistically significant difference among cross-sectional student perceptions regarding their experience and satisfaction in attending online classes. To address this, an ANOVA statistical test was conducted to compare the data from the four groups. The summary of values for sum, average, and variance can be found in Table 5 under the "Summary" section.

Table 5: Overall Analysis - Anova

Summary						
Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
IT	54	177.1852	3.281207	0.53071		
Business	54	184.6296	3.419067	0.692695		
Engineering	54	181.5926	3.362826	0.449796		
ELC	54	187.7407	3.47668	0.331239		
ANOVA						
Source of Var.	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	1.124848	3	0.374949	0.748237	0.524471	2.647188
Within Groups	106.2353	212	0.50111			
Total	107.3602	215				

Concerning the F-statistics, it's worth noting that a larger F-statistic indicates a greater variation between group means compared to the variation within the groups (Zac, 2021). In the present study, the F-statistic is recorded as merely 0.75, which is lower than the critical value of F (2.65). This indicates that there is 0.75 times more variability between groups than within groups, with a p-value of less than 0.53 (Table 5, ANOVA). Given that the p-value is 0.53, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05, one can conclude that there exists no statistically significant difference between the groups. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted, while the alternative hypothesis is rejected (3.2).

6.1.4 Correlation between learner experience and contentment

In Excel, a Pearson r correlation coefficient statistical test was conducted to ascertain the relationship between students' online learning experience and their contentment. The average scores of all items within both the experience and contentment constructs were analysed to compute the correlation coefficient. The test yielded a Pearson's r value of 0.837 ($p = 1$ to -1), indicating a robust positive correlation between learners' online learning experience and their contentment. This finding suggests that as learners' degree of positive experience increases, their level of contentment also increases, and conversely (3.3; Figure 3).

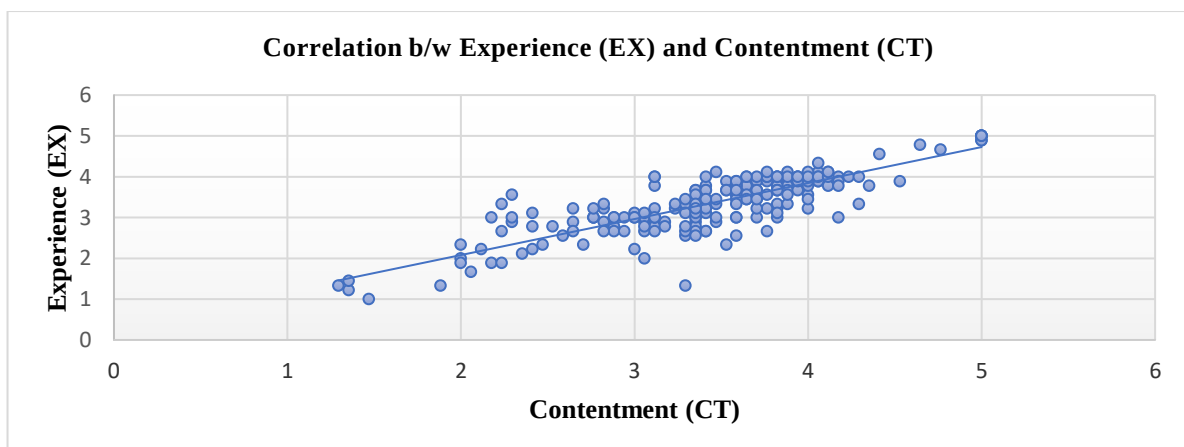


Figure 3: Relationship Between Student Experience and Contentment

6.2 Qualitative Findings: Learners' Comments or Opinion

The section below summarises learners' descriptive comments to the open-ended questions and informal interviews about how they felt about online lessons during Covid 19 lockdown (Table 6).

Table 6: Qualitative Findings: Summary

Criteria/ Themes	Reasons/ sub areas	Sample verbatim extracts
1. Negative experience	Low grades	S1- I hope not to go back to online learning because it spoils the student's grades. For example, the superior student gets low grades, and the non-achieving student gets high grades through cheating. S2- I am not into online learning I prepare offline learning. S3- ... I can't understand the lessons online. S4 - ... It is better to receive instruction directly from the teacher than to receive it online. S5 - I wish there will be no online classes ever again. S6- I don't want to learn online because of the Internet is bad, and I don't understand anything. S7 - ... online teaching not effective sometimes to get good marks. S8- It was a good idea to save people from the pandemic but now I don't think so. I think studying in school/University is better. S9 - Some my friends not serious about online classes S10 - Online learning is not good for all students
	Cannot understand	
	Bad internet	
	Not effective	
	No seriousness	
2. Positive experience	comfortable	S11 - The best and comfortable study ... We prefer the study of online. S12-...- Online education enables the teacher and the student to set their own learning pace, and there's the added flexibility of setting a schedule that fits everyone's agenda. As a result, using an online educational platform allows for a better balance of work and studies, so there's no need to give anything up... S13... It helps us a lot. We will save our time because the lectures will be recorded, and all activities are online. The world is developing and most universities and colleges around the world use e-learning. S14- i do 4 this idea about transition to online learning because it saves time and gives the student freedom to learn with different learning sources. S15- I think online learning will be quite easy to us. S16- Online study is very good because you can get good grades. S17 - I like online class because I can again the lecture when I want.
	Own learning pace and flexibility	
	Balance of work and studies	
	Time saving	
	Easiness	
	Good grade	
	Recorded lectures	
3.Improvement and suggestions	Teacher-student interaction	S18... Explanation should be more effective, as the teacher should make the students interact with him. S19 - If I have good internet will study online. S20- ... Improve audio and video quality.... S21 - Teachers need to turn on their camera while teaching. S22- I want to connect more with Ms or Mr in the online learning. S23- Choosing the right teachers for online learning. S24 - Students may be trained to engage in online classes.
	Better Internet speed	
	Audio-video quality	
	Turning on cameras	
	Training	

The qualitative data, acquired through open-ended questions and informal interviews, underwent analysis to address the research inquiries. Table six presents exemplar verbatim statements along with the themes extracted from each statement.

In total, 52 participants shared their comments regarding the Covid-19 online courses. Among these, most comments (46%) expressed opposition to online learning, while 28% conveyed a favourable perspective. The remaining 26% of comments took the form of recommendations for improvement or reflections on how online courses benefited learners (Table 6). Notably, it is intriguing to observe that some respondents provided detailed explanations for both their support and opposition to online classes.

7. Discussion

The study facilitated researchers in obtaining an overall perception from learners across various departments. The cross-sectional analysis, as indicated in Table 5, revealed that no statistically significant difference existed between the groups. Nevertheless, the descriptive statistics provide stakeholders with insights that slightly more than half of the participants agreed with all items within the constructs of experience and contentment. However, a significant portion of participants – nearly half – either remained undecided or disagreed with every item in the study. This diverse range of responses highlights the need for further investigations, particularly concerning students' neutral or negative opinions on various parameters. For instance, almost a quarter of participants expressed disagreement with all items within both the experience and contentment constructs. Similarly, more than a quarter of respondents maintained a neutral stance regarding different survey items (Tables 3 and 4; Figures 1 and 2). These negative and neutral responses could potentially stem from certain psychological and technological challenges faced by the learners (Milla, et al., 2021).

The qualitative data analysis (Table 6) yielded insights into the factors that likely influenced learners' positive or negative responses to various items within the constructs of students' experience and contentment (Tables 3 and 4; Figures 1 and 2). The analysis ultimately identified three key themes: negative experience, positive experience, and improvement and suggestions (Table 6). Concerning learners' negative experiences or experiences of online learning, certain participants perceived a lack of objectivity in grading students' performance. These participants felt that diligent learners were not adequately rewarded, with S1 stating, "it spoils the student's grades. For example, the superior student gets low grades, and the non-achieving student gets high grades through cheating." Additionally, respondents like S3, S6, S7, and S9 held negative views about online learning due to reasons such as lack of comprehension among students, poor Internet connectivity, ineffectiveness, and reduced seriousness in attending lessons. S4 expressed, "It is better to receive instruction directly from the teacher." (Table 6.1). These underlying reasons may have contributed to respondents' negative responses within the quantitative data (Tables 3 and 4; Figures 1 and 2).

Furthermore, the demographic profile of the respondents reveals that approximately half of them lacked access to reliable Internet services. Similarly, a significant proportion of learners hailed from rural areas, and many did not possess smartphones (Table 1). Consequently, these factors could have contributed to a negative experience of online class participation for certain learners (Nikolopoulou, 2022). In contrast, learners from more advanced locations, such as towns and cities with better Internet speed, might have had more positive experiences and contentment, as noted by Panigrahi, et al. (2021).

In contrast, Table 6.2 illustrates the reasons behind learners' positive experiences and contentment regarding online learning. They expressed positivity due to: a) comfort, b) personal learning pace and flexibility, c) balancing work and studies, d) ease of use, e) achieving good grades, and f) the ability to review recorded lessons. These themes align with the advantages of online learning outlined by Debych (2023). For instance, S12 highlighted, "Online education enables the teacher and the student to set their own learning pace, and there's the added flexibility of setting a schedule that fits everyone's agenda," while S17 mentioned, "I like online class because I can again the lecture when I want" (Table 6.2). These reasons might underlie the agreement of more than half of the respondents with variables within the constructs of student experience and contentment as observed in the quantitative results (Tables 3 and 4; Figures 1 and 2). These positive responses resonate with the findings of the study conducted by Yen and Nhi (2021), which reported that learners had a positive experience with online learning.

Finally, participants in the research offered valuable suggestions for improvement, encompassing: a) enhancing teacher-student interaction, b) ensuring better Internet speed, c) improving audio-video quality, d) encouraging camera usage, and e) providing training (Table 6.3). These recommendations can guide stakeholders in addressing specific shortcomings and enhancing the online learning system. These areas of enhancement

correspond with challenges previously identified by researchers (Debych, 2023; Jose and Jose, 2021; Milla, 2021).

S7 suggested, "Explanation should be more effective, as the teacher should make the students interact with him," while S12 advised, "Students may be trained to engage in online classes" (Table 6.3). Addressing interaction, it is crucial to promote student-to-student interaction, given that more than a quarter of responses indicated a lack of socialization with classmates (Table 3, Figure 1). Moreover, S19, S20, and S21 emphasized the importance of "good internet ... audio and video quality ... turning on their camera while teaching" (Table 6.3) for enhancing online classes. By incorporating these recommendations into future research and practice, stakeholders and upcoming researchers can gain insights into the factors contributing to respondents reporting neutral opinions regarding various variables within the quantitative aspect of the study (Tables 3 and 4; Figures 1 and 2).

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

In summary, the study successfully achieved its objectives of exploring the perceptions of UTASA learners across departments regarding learner experience and contentment. This process has offered researchers valuable insights into the implications of online learning within these domains. The learners' varied responses to the survey items have facilitated investigators and stakeholders in comprehending both the positive and negative facets of the process. Drawing from the analysis, findings, and discussion, the subsequent recommendations are put forth for stakeholders, including the administration, teachers, and students.

- Teachers should find make use of variety of online tools such as general posts, chats, group channels, survey, quizzes, etc to employ different teaching and learning techniques to ensure learners 'optimum class participation.
- Students should be made aware of and encouraged to participate actively in online learning activities to interact with their peers and teachers.
- Administration and public authorities should carry out a need analysis to find out students' backgrounds and learning needs with respect to Internet speed and connectivity, learning devices, and their ease of use of learning management system (LMS) for online lessons.
- Learners may be provided with training to use the online learning platforms after analysing their learning needs.
- In addition to the initial need analysis, stakeholders should conduct follow up investigation to learn how effective are the measures taken to meet their needs, and what further improvements should be done.
- Online audio and visual clarity should be checked and ensured by teachers during the process of online teaching and learning.
- Further studies should be carried out to determine learner perceptions of the process of the online learning in terms of gender and its cultural implications as participants included both males and females from closed to open cultural contexts.
- Future studies can also focus on the implications of online learning on UTASA students from different backgrounds (Towns, Cities, and villages) using different devices (Smart phones, Desktop, laptops, and tablets).

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