

## Unplanned Transition to EFL Online Learning: An Analysis of Students' Perceptions in a Vietnamese University


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### ABSTRACT

This research intends to investigate their perspectives on the abrupt transition to online learning at Electric Power University in Vietnam. The research questions were answered using a mixed-methods technique. After 9 weeks of online-only instruction, 87 university students were sent a 25-item questionnaire utilizing the Monkey survey program. A random follow-up interview was done with ten students who consented to participate in the interview in order to acquire insight into the specific concerns. The majority of students preferred face-to-face classrooms over online learning, and the majority had no intention of studying online in the future. During the time of 'forced' online learning, however, the majority of students thought their teachers were eager to offer them support and valuable feedback. The results have significant ramifications for instructors and teachers in relation to online learning and teaching in comparable contexts.

**Keywords:** online learning, students' perceptions, COVID-19

### Introduction

The spread of the Covid-19 pandemic around the globe has significantly altered almost all facets of life, including education, and Vietnam has not been an exception. After the innovative Covid-19 began its worldwide attacks, institutions in Vietnam abruptly converted their face-to-face courses to mandatory online-only instruction. Moving traditional classrooms with physical attendance to the cloud might be difficult for both professors and students.

#### *The educational setting when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out:*

Shortly after the 2019 new coronavirus originated and mutated into a worldwide pandemic, the second academic session began at Electric Power University. Until the National Assembly approved the solid action to prevent the spread of COVID-19 through the practice of physical distance, lessons were conducted regularly through face-to-face sessions for the first several months. In the middle of March 2020, all universities in Vietnam, including EPU, will be required to cease all activities and shift their lessons online. The quick change to 'mandatory' online instruction has subsequently led instructors and students to experience a number of shocks, particularly given the lack of prior preparation.

#### *Context of the study: Blended learning course in EPU*

- *Benefits of blended learning course in EPU*

Before the outbreak of the Covid -19 pandemic, freshmen at EPU were accessed to the ELT blended learning course. The General English (GE) course takes place in the two semesters of the first year. This course is credit-bearing, and students need a passing grade in each one to graduate. In other words, English is a compulsory subject at EPU. Students come from various disciplines, including Electric Engineering, Energy Management, and Business Administration. Class sizes range between 40 to 50 students for each teacher, with each student receiving two to four face-to-face teaching hours a week on average. A course runs for about 15 weeks of a semester.

This is a blended learning course, so online learning has become an integral part of the learning process. Students are required to finish online progress tests and exercises every week with an automated grading system.

The General English (GE) course at EPU lends itself nicely to face-to-face delivery since lecturers may physically assist students via in-class Interaction. The GE course's face-to-face component is taught over two semesters and 105 periods (each period is 50 minutes). On average, students have between three and six class times every week. It is not difficult to see why face-to-face channel becomes the primary style of instruction for the GE course. First, it has been the conventional mode of instruction at EPU and a number of other institutions in Vietnam for many years. The course book (Life-Pre Intermediate) will give the curriculum in terms of content and sequence. Consequently, it is the way in which the fundamentals are originally introduced and performed. In addition, the lead mode may govern the speed of the course by ensuring that all students finish the main subject at the same time prior to the follow-up activities that they can do at their own leisure online or via self-study. Online or independent study assignments augment the curriculum and offer controlled practice and extension opportunities for students.

- *Challenges of Blended learning course in EPU*

However, the significance of online learning in this blended learning course could be clearer. The online components of the course are given using the learning management system Life Online Workbook (MyELT), an integral part of the Life series. MyELT is a web-based learning management system created by National Geographic Learning to support several textbooks. MyELT provides instructors and students with more flexibility and convenience with its teacher-led assigned activities and self-study choices, which are available anytime, anywhere.

MyELT provides English language learners with engaging exercises that reinforce and consolidate the language and abilities presented in each National Geographic Learning program. This LMS offers few opportunities for teacher-student Interaction. It is a popular learning management system because its automated grading system and online tool for supporting students' self-study in consolidating their information have decreased instructors' workload significantly.

Despite technological advancements in education, the online learning experience of university students has received little consideration. This research intends to examine the attitudes of EPU students about the quick shift to 'forced' online learning in light of significant changes or problems. This inquiry will thus give a deeper knowledge of the online learning experiences and perspectives of students. Surjono (2015) found that online learning that is tailored to students' learning preferences is more likely to be effective. It is intended that this research would aid educators in preparing for any future educational disruptions and in designing learning that is responsive to students' perceptions and expectations.

## Literature Review

### *The Necessity of online learning due to the crisis of Covid 19*

During the previous academic year, the effects of the worldwide pandemic impeded higher education in Vietnam. The Corona Virus has prompted universities to transition from face-to-face to online teaching. This catastrophe will force institutions previously resistant to change to embrace contemporary technologies. This calamity will reveal the profitable side of online education. We can handle a huge number of pupils in any area of the globe and at any time with the aid of online teaching methods. All institutions must combine a variety of online instructional techniques and strive for greater technological adaptability. Numerous institutions throughout the globe have completely digitized their operations in response to the severe need of the present circumstances. Online education is becoming the only viable answer to this problem. At this time, excellent promotion of online teaching and learning is vital. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of Vietnamese institutions offering online courses has expanded significantly. There was an overnight transition from conventional classrooms to virtual classrooms, which means that educators have modified their whole educational approach in order to address new market conditions and adapt to changing circumstances. During this difficult period, the question is not whether online teaching–learning techniques can give excellent education; rather, the problem is how academic institutions will be able to embrace online learning on such a large scale (Carey, 2020).

Globally, resistance to change will be of little use to educational institutions. They will be evaluated based on how quickly they can adjust to the changes and their ability to maintain quality. The reputation of educational institutions is in jeopardy due to the scrutiny of the whole society. In light of this, their adaptability may be determined by how effectively they respond to this crisis and how well they retain the quality of their education. In reality, academic institutions could hardly change their whole college courses overnight into online resources. Numerous variables relating to the perspectives of students and instructors, their learning and teaching styles, IT literacy, and technological platform conditions... All of them pose significant obstacles to the efficacy of entirely online learning at this moment of sudden change with little prior preparation.

On the other hand, the pandemic also forced many academic teachers unwilling to use e-learning or without the appropriate competence to use e-learning in their teaching activities effectively. All teachers and students were suddenly forced to move to a learning system via electronic devices and the Internet. Forced e-learning, although necessary- it enables the educational process to be maintained. At the same time, it might create unanticipated and often undesirable changes in students' perceptions of their teacher and online learning.

### *Students' preparation for wholly online learning*

Even before the Covid 19 pandemic, online education had become prevalent in many nations. There are two primary forms of online instruction: asynchronous and synchronous. As teachers save readings and lesson materials on the learning management system, asynchronous online education is not delivered in real-time (LMS). In contrast, synchronous online teaching is a live session given in real-time using online platforms such as video conferencing or live video platforms. However, there are still disputes in the literature about the possibility of substitution. In reality, a mix of asynchronous and synchronous modalities of education should be used to enhance the effectiveness of online learning (Moorhouse, 2020)

When faced with a rapid shift, however, many educational institutions are faced with the daunting challenge of introducing online learning to their faculty and students. According to Gyamfi (2018), students are likely to be influenced by online learning while it is new to them, prompting them to continue using it. Moreover, students' preparation correlates with their online learning performance. As proven by (Hung, 2016), it is vital to assess the preparedness of students for online learning in order to comprehend how to accomplish successful online learning.

#### *Students' motivation and satisfaction with online learning*

The concept of student satisfaction, it is described as "a student's subjective judgment of the different educational achievements and campus life experiences" (Elliott & Shin, 2002, p. 198). Contributing to an individual's happiness are satisfying needs, desires for success, and potential intellectual fulfillment. According to Callaghan et al. (2013), online learning satisfaction influences intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, the intrinsic drive has a tight association with academic accomplishments (Gottfried et al., 2009). Moreover, intrinsic motivation is one of the essential components for effective online learners. According to Hue and Jalil (2013), intrinsic motivation has a substantial relationship with positive attitudes and beliefs toward internet usage.

Multiple studies have measured the amount of student satisfaction with online learning. According to Dziuban, Wang, and Cook (2004), students were more likely to express a high degree of satisfaction if their teachers demonstrated efficient communication and course organization. Moreover, Shea et al. (2003) demonstrate that students who got appropriate feedback and teacher contact reported high levels of learning experience satisfaction. In addition, Ke and Kwak (2013) show that active learning, genuine learning, and learner autonomy contribute to student happiness.

The motivation to learn may relate to students' willingness and desire to engage in the learning process (Gray & Di Loreto, 2016). It is essential for teachers to encourage pupils to adopt a more active learning approach. Mandernach et al. (2011) illustrate that instructors should assess students' views of their "support and maintain learning" participation (p. 280). However, online learning is not assured when pupils are not motivated. Therefore, teachers should guarantee that pupils are actively engaged in learning by sparking their curiosity and fostering engagement.

#### *Related studies*

There have been a number of studies evaluating students' perceptions of online learning in a variety of global settings during the last several years. For instance, Smart and Cappel (2006) investigate the attitudes of undergraduate students towards the incorporation of online components in two business courses. Students' perceptions that the online modules lacked sufficient "new" knowledge was the most prevalent problem identified in their research about online learning (p. 211). A few years later, Shraim and Khlaif (2010) investigated the attitudes of secondary school pupils toward E-learning. Despite the fact that they may not yet be prepared to use e-learning, their findings demonstrated that the majority of students had good sentiments regarding its usefulness. However, according to their results, the majority of students were worried about their time since the e-learning approach distracted them.

In addition, Morris (2011) studies the perceptions of online learning among college students in the United States using a questionnaire, interviews, and artifact evaluations. The data indicated that students felt distant or alone in their online courses. However, the situation improved with the assistance of their professors, whose engagement and support they regarded to be the most beneficial in the course. In addition, Skordis-Worrall, Haghparast-Bidgoli, Batura, and Hughes

(2015) investigate the perspectives and experiences of students in their online courses. Their findings suggested that their participants had both favorable and unfavorable sentiments regarding online education. As with the research by Morris (2011), their results indicate that one of the most influential elements of learning is the instructor component, which involves offering assistance and timely feedback. Furthermore, the technique of lecture delivery was not as crucial as the lecture substance and quality.

Since the spread of Covid-19, there has been an increase in online learning research in Vietnam. In her work, Nguyen Thi Thuy Trang (2020) examines the effects of the covid-19 epidemic on higher education institutions and the adaptations made by these institutions in response to the issue. Due to coronavirus limitations, 71% of domestic students reported some desire to pursue their degree online, while just 29% responded that they had no interest in studying online. In addition, 57% of students said that they anticipate colleges to offer adequate online platforms and to transfer more of their courses online.

Connectivity to the Internet by the instructor and the pupils is a factor that influences learning (Hsiao, 2012; Pham & Tran, 2019 ). The study shows that access to online learning may be restricted to people whose Internet connections are insufficient to complete tasks. This challenge has gotten more apparent to the degree that learning must be dependent on technical tools and that educational institutions, teachers, and students fight to get these resources.

In another study investigating student experience and satisfaction (Thach Pham, Phuong Lai, Vinh Nguyen, and Hai Nguyen, 2021), online interactions with material, teachers, and peers were important determinants of student satisfaction. It was underlined that instructors play a significant role in enhancing learner-instructor Interaction by offering pedagogical instructions utilizing various interactional matrices, technology tools, and learning analytics.

According to the existing literature, numerous types of research have been suggested and done to assess the influence of covid 19 on online learning in different countries, including Vietnam. However, these researches focused mostly on the elements that influence online learning and the obstacles it faces. In addition, little attention has been made to the rapid shift from traditional classrooms to online learning, particularly the exploitation of the students' perspective in this setting. In order to fill the void, the purpose of this research was to investigate the prospective attitudes of university students in Vietnam (EPU) on the fast shift to 'forced' online learning due to the COVID-19 issue.

### *Research Questions:*

The study aims to seek answers to the following questions:

- 1. What are the perceptions of Electric Power University students on online learning and teaching?*
- 2. What challenges are students in the university facing in “forced” online learning?*
- 3. To what extent are students willing to “forced” online learning?*

## **Research Method**

### *Pedagogical Setting and Participants*

This study was conducted at Electric Power University (EPU) with 87 EFL freshman students, determined based on convenience sampling. A sample of convenience basically refers to



“drawing samples that are both easily accessible and willing to participate in the study” (Teddlie & Yu, 2007, p.78).

The students were selected randomly for the research. They come from varieties of majors like Electric Power Systems, Energy Management Systems, Business Administration, Business Accounting, and Electronics Engineering. They were studying the English blended learning course as a compulsory subject. According to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), the student's English level was A2 at the time of the study, and they had 4 hours of English classes per week during two semesters. All of them had to take the English online assignments as an integral part of the online phase in the blended learning course.

Since the outbreak of Covid 19 in January 2021, the EFL course has been shifted in to wholly online. All participants in the survey of the current study were asked to complete the questionnaire when they had nearly finished the academic year with one semester of wholly online learning.

Convenience sampling is applied in this study with the aim of collecting data from students randomly from different majors. The rationale for utilizing this kind of sampling lies in the fact that it is affordable, and I can access the participants quite easily. Moreover, in this mode of sampling, members of the target population are homogeneous

#### *Data collection*

A web-based survey (Monkey Survey) was designed to investigate students' perceptions toward “forced” online learning. Survey items were developed in relation to the constructs mentioned in the Literature review. The survey consisted of 5 main sections:

- Section 1: Students’ perceptions on the usefulness of Online Learning
- Section 2: Students’ perceptions towards instructors
- Section 3: Students’ perceptions on technological skills
- Section 4: Students' perceptions on willingness to online learning
- Section 5: Students’ perceptions towards the challenges in online learning.

Items were measured using a Likert 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The final version of the survey is a 25-question.

In addition, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 10 students as interviews can produce a wealth of information and cover any number of content areas, providing a relatively inexpensive and efficient way to collect a wide variety of data not requiring formal testing (Marczyk, DeMatteo, Festinger, 2005). The interviews consisted of 3 open-ended questions, which aimed to collect more data on students' views regarding wholly online learning. The participants for the interview were chosen randomly to ensure the validity of the qualitative data. The interview was a focused group interview that was carried out through zoom due to the social distance at the time of the study. Each participant was interviewed for about 5 minutes.

The results of the interview were thematically analyzed to have a deeper understanding of the reasons for students’ perceptions. All interview data were recorded and then transcribed and translated into English. The author then read all the transcripts and found out the main themes related to all responses. The thematic approach focuses on identifying, interpreting, and establishing relationships among patterns noted in narrative materials.

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among patterns noted in the interview, such as themes related to Internet instability or Interaction.

### *Reliability*

Using the Cronbach coefficient alpha, reliability was evaluated twice, first during the pilot test and again after data collection for the current research. The instrument's Cronbach coefficient alpha value was 0.911. A well-constructed scale, according to Mueller (1986), should have a reliability coefficient of 0.80 or above. Since the Cronbach coefficient alpha for the scale used in this investigation was more than 0.80, it is regarded as trustworthy.

Regarding the semi-structured interview, all participants volunteered, resulting in zero non-respondents.

### *Data Collection Procedure*

In order to compile the student questionnaire, the researcher generated a pool of items by examining the aforementioned relevant literature. Taking into account the characteristics of the participants and the setting of the research, 25 items were selected from this pool. A professional in education has reviewed the questionnaire questions and revised their phrasing to eliminate ambiguity. Pilot testing was conducted using a convenience sample of 12 students. Students did not raise any issues with the questionnaire's clarity and readability. As a consequence, the researcher made no modifications to the device.

Participants were given the questionnaires two weeks prior to the conclusion of the school year. The questionnaire was filled out by 87 students selected based on convenience.

Due to the covid-19 epidemic, the interview was performed online as well. The four interview questions were prepared using a Google form and distributed to ten students who volunteered to answer the questions.

### *Data Analysis*

As the purpose of this study is to determine how EPU EFL learners viewed "forced" online learning when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, the findings were analyzed descriptively, which involves describing a phenomenon in detail using a variety of data collection methods such as frequencies, percentages, Mean and SD, and data analysis.

In this research, SPSS 22.0 was used to analyze the quantitative data. The Interview-qualitative data was evaluated using content analysis, which requires carefully going through each transcript by assigning codes such as numbers or words to identify textual features (Dawson, 2005).

## Findings and Discussion

### *Descriptive results*

Table 1. Perceptions towards the perceived usefulness of online learning

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
1. Online learning can save costs and expenses	87	1.00	5.00	2.9811	1.08292
2. Online learning supports the communication between instructors and students.	87	1.00	5.00	2.8868	1.06807
3. Online learning support learning autonomy.	87	1.00	5.00	3.1698	1.13909
4. Online learning enhances the quality of learning	87	1.00	5.00	2.3585	1.07586
5. Online learning encourages sufficient access to education.	87	1.00	5.00	2.7170	1.06297

As illustrated in Table 1, in general, participants have a rather negative perception of the usefulness of online learning. It is noticeable that most of them disagreed about the quality of online learning, with a Mean below 3. In addition, they are also doubtful about the chances that they can access education sufficiently in the virtual learning environment. Most participants do not highly appreciate online learning in supporting communication with instructors. Interestingly, item 3 ranks the highest mean value, which reveals that students tend to believe that this mode of learning partly enhances learning autonomy. Not many participants seem to take cost and expenses into consideration regarding the usefulness of online learning.

Table 2. Perceptions of students towards instructors in online learning

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
6. Instructors could organize the lessons efficiently	87	1.00	5.00	3.2830	1.08091
7. Instructors' teaching and lesson delivery was clear and well-organized	87	1.00	5.00	3.0755	.95774
8. Instructors could raise students' interests in learning	87	1.00	5.00	3.1698	1.03284
9. Instructors were willing to provide assistance when needed	87	1.00	5.00	3.4906	1.01190
10. Instructors provided useful feedback and suggestions.	87	1.00	5.00	3.3019	1.06672



As can be seen clearly in Table 2, participants generally did not display a positive attitude toward their instructors in the process of online learning. Most of them had neutral opinions about the way and how effective online lessons were delivered. Notably, many of them do not think that their teacher can enhance their interest in online learning. However, the majority of participants confessed that their instructor was willing to support them in this new learning environment.

Table 3. Perceptions of students towards technical challenges (IT literacy)

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
11. I am confident about my IT skill to study online	87	1.00	5.00	3.4528	1.04819
12. I think using electrical devices (smartphone, laptop..) is easy	87	1.00	5.00	3.4906	1.04922
13. I met no difficulties related to technology in online learning	87	1.00	5.00	3.2075	1.14956
14. I have sufficient experience in online learning	87	1.00	5.00	3.2453	1.10776
15. The Internet connection is not stable enough for online learning.	87	1.00	5.00	3.0189	1.11787

Regarding technical challenges, surprisingly, not many students find this problem really matters in the process of online learning. The descriptive results in table 3 convey the fact that they are quite confident about their ability to employ technical devices. They believed they could solve technology-related problems during their learning time. The biggest obstacle regarding technical difficulties is concerned with Internet instability.

Table 4. Perceptions towards a willingness to online learning.

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
16. I prefer face-to-face classrooms to online learning	87	1.00	5.00	3.8302	1.15585
17. Instructors should adopt online learning in the future	87	1.00	5.00	2.7358	1.14608
18. I feel interested when learning online	87	1.00	5.00	2.8868	1.03144
19. I am willing to study online in the future.	87	1.00	5.00	2.8679	1.12725
20. Online learning is more comfortable than face-to-face classroom	87	1.00	5.00	3.1887	1.12757

When it comes to how students are willing to continue this mode of learning in the future, most of them admitted that they preferred the traditional face-to-face classrooms. Therefore, it is understandable that they do not show agreement with adopting this learning style in the future. In addition, participants show little engagement in online learning, although they may feel that online learning, in some ways, can bring them comfort when they can study at home while attending classes.

Table 5. Students' perceptions towards challenges they faced in online learning

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
21. I faced some language difficulties in communication during online learning	87	1.00	5.00	3.3585	.85697
22. I found that I was easily distracted during online learning	87	1.00	5.00	3.4906	.97315
23. I think I did not have enough preparation for online learning	87	1.00	5.00	2.8679	.89952
24. I faced technical problems during online learning, such as an unstable Internet connection.	87	1.00	5.00	3.2642	1.07687
25. I found that online learning demotivated me.	87	1.00	5.00	3.0377	1.01834

According to the data from the survey, as demonstrated in table 5, the biggest challenge that most students faced in online learning lay in language communication with their instructors. It has revealed the fact that they felt that their language is not proficient enough to exchange ideas with teachers in online lessons. More importantly, the majority of students agreed that they were easily distracted by external factors while participating in online learning. In general, technical problems, in some ways, represented challenges for them when accessing virtual classes. It cannot be denied that a number of students lost their motivation when being exposed to forced online learning.

### *Semi-structured Interview*

#### ***Q1: In your opinion, what is the biggest advantage of online learning?***

Regarding the merits of online learning, the majority of students referred to convenience in terms of saving traveling time and energy. They felt much more comfortable when they could stay at home or any place while joining the course. Therefore, they had better time management to fully attend the class. A student said: *“Online learning really helps me enhance learning autonomy when I have to arrange the time myself without much control from the instructor”*.

#### ***Q2: In your opinion, what is the biggest shortcoming of online learning?***

It is not surprising that there is a variety of disadvantages related to this mode of learning. The most common difficulty that they found in this learning process involved the constraints in communicating and interacting with peers and teachers. This is a coincidence with the above descriptive result. In addition, most of the interviewees expressed their doubt about the effectiveness of online lessons when their content was not fully delivered to learners, especially in speaking skills and pronunciation.

*“The biggest disadvantage of online learning lies in the fact that this virtual environment makes me feel isolated and lonely. I find it hard to connect with my instructor or my friends. After all, online classes can never replace traditional ones”* (student B)

#### ***Q3: What changes would you recommend to improve online learning quality in the future?***

It is so interesting to better understand students' suggestions for bettering online courses in the future. The most common recommendation among participants in the interview is concerned with improving chances for communication and Interaction synchronously and asynchronously. They highly appreciated the initiatives of the teacher in designing the lessons that can create chances for collaboration in a virtual environment. Especially, scaffolding took a lot of attention from respondents in upgrading online learning quality and enhancing engagement. They strongly suggested that teachers should give them sufficient support outside class, particularly immediate feedback.

*“If only the instructor could give us more support and scaffolding-like materials after each lesson. It can be a video made by her to review the lesson or some kinds of activities to make us involved even asynchronously”* (student C)

## **Discussion**

In general, students at EPU did not highly appreciate online learning in terms of quality, effectiveness, and the content delivery of the instructor. The majority of them have shown reservations about digital learning. The main technical problem they encountered was an unstable Internet connection. This finding is coincident with research carried out by

Muhammad Adnan and Kainat Anwar (2020). In their study, lack of access to Internet facilities, lack of proper Interaction and contact with students and instructors, and ineffective technology were among the major challenges faced by higher education students of Pakistan. The sudden shift from the traditional classroom and face-to-face learning to online learning has resulted in a completely different learning experience for students. Most students, especially those from remote and mountainous areas, do not have access to high-speed or reliable internet services and are, thus, struggling with online learning. Students and parents almost felt this difficulty from middle to lower-class economies. They did not have an adequate budget to provide an internet network. Everything did not stop there. Even though the Internet is in their hands, students still face difficulties accessing the internet network due to the geographical location, which is quite far from the signal coverage.

According to Burston (2014), in online learning, good pedagogy will be nonsense if there are problems with technology access. Therefore, it is understandable that most participants were unwilling to participate in an online course for future study.

In addition, the challenge that students in EPU face in online learning is a lack of Interaction between teachers and students and students among themselves. It represents a constraint in understanding the lesson and acquiring knowledge. The other difficulty that encounters the process of forced online learning is the absence of sufficient scaffolding from the teacher when students put their very first step in this learning mode.

### **Conclusion and pedagogical implications**

The study aimed to investigate students' perception of forced online learning and give an explanation about this fact in a university in Vietnam concerning different aspects like instructors, students' willingness or challenges, as well as the usefulness of this learning environment.

The above results seem to align with existing literature about distance matters in delivering coursework (Billing et al., 2001; Olson & Olson, 2000; Wells & Dellinger, 2011). For students, who were already feeling isolated and frustrated, remote courses seemed to lack connectedness, leaving them with additional feelings of isolation and frustration.

In general, students in EPU did not show a positive attitude towards this learning mode. They did not believe that online learning could enhance learning quality. This is the consequence of some factors like the way instructors delivered the lessons and Internet instability. This finding coincides with the study by Tran The Phi and Nguyen Trinh To Anh (2022). They found that learners' attitudes toward learning had a major influence on their learning during online sessions, whereas technological impairment was also the main problem(p.13).

Another study by Hoang To Thu Dung and Tran Quang Hai also supports this result. They have come to the conclusion that although many students agreed that E-learning was necessary, many of them also agreed that it was ineffective. It may be because they need to become more familiar with online learning, are experiencing technical or academic difficulties, or are easily distracted by their surroundings. Consequently, they have an impact on the quality of online teaching and learning, as well as the effectiveness of E-learning. (p.31).

In addition, challenges that they faced during the learning process included difficulties in communicating with peers and teachers due to language proficiency. Although the majority of

students admitted that their instructors partly provided them with support and feedback, it was strongly suggested that there should be more activities that enhance collaboration. It has been proved by the research that forced online learning as inevitable and necessary for the survival of educational institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic is not the preferable way of studying. It may cause some serious unintended consequences for both teachers and students if there are no improvements and adjustments in pedagogy.

Firstly, instructors must prepare thoroughly before each online lesson. They should bear in my that their role now is an online teacher. A virtual learning environment is definitely different from the traditional one that they had got used to for many years. Therefore, online lessons should be designed based on time, necessary content or core content, and students' needs. Both time and content should be reduced because students easily get zoom fatigue and get distracted by the surrounding factors.

Secondly, another important factor in enhancing online learning engagement is increasing teachers' presence. In work on teaching presence, Anderson, Rourke, Archer, and Garrison (2001) delineated three critical roles that a teacher performs in the process of creating an effective teaching presence. The first of these roles is the design and organization of the learning experience that takes place both before the establishment of the learning community and during its operation. Second, teaching involves devising and implementing activities to encourage discourse between and among students, between the teacher and the student, and between individual students and groups of students and content resources (Anderson, 2002). Third, the teaching role goes beyond that of moderating the learning experiences when the teacher adds subject matter expertise through a variety of forms of direct instruction.

Finally, scaffolding plays an evitable role in supporting students in online learning. In the research's context, too little scaffolding could result in students' inability to successfully complete or perform certain tasks and instructional activities, leading to anxiety, frustration, and, finally loss of motivation and attrition. With regard to the mode of lesson delivery, both synchronous and asynchronous were synthesized in every lesson. In providing students with scaffolding, the asynchronous mode is more flexible and, thus, was utilized after each online lesson.

Limitations of the study include sample size and the context of the research where English is taught as a non-major subject. While the current sample is limited in size and representativeness is unknown, surveying is more systematic now that students have had wholly online classes for two terms. The survey sample was relatively small, and no demographic variables were represented. The sample may not be representative of all students. The topic was timely and required some haste at a time when most institutions were forced to move to online learning and had to deal with a variety of other unforeseen issues. Given these constraints, the researchers decided recruiting directly from universities would not result in a higher yield. In addition, the pandemic has made face-to-face recruitment an impossibility. Therefore, the generalizability of the results is unknown.

The article has paved a new line of research, including examining both genders as differences, as the sample in the current research was not representative. Exploring the transition to online learning across the course would be valuable as many institutions are still utilizing a blended format for many courses. In addition, the investigation of students' attitudes and perceptions may be different from the initial stage. It requires a longitudinal study because perceptions among students are a malleable construct that is highly context-dependent. It may change over time when their instructors have made certain improvements to adjust to the virtual

environment. Moreover, after a period of working online, they will gain more experience in interacting and collaborating with their instructors and their peers.

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