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# Chapter 12

## A Multidimensional Experience Perspective of Remote Online Education During the COVID–19 Pandemic

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The UK's higher education sector continues to be one of the most dynamic in the world, attracting 2,697,380 students by March 2021. The population of UK higher education students as a whole is extremely diverse and reflects a globalised version of contemporary higher education. Globalization, high-quality education, and increased competition for HE degrees have re-energized student migration, resulting in the formation of cross-cultural student environments at educational institutions worldwide. In essence, this culturally diverse higher education sector in the United Kingdom was expected to experience a range of effects from the COVID-19 pandemic crisis on students with asymmetric cultural backgrounds. This chapter provides a multidimensional experience of remote online education during the COVID-19 crisis.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The United Kingdom's higher education HE sector remains to be amongst the most pulsating worldwide education sectors that attracted 2,697,380 students by March 2021 (HESA, 2021). The general characteristic of the UK's HE students' population is vastly diverse and represents a globalised version

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of contemporary HE. Globalization, high-quality education and the intensified competition for HE degrees have invigorated the relocation of students from one country to another which contributed to the formation of cross-cultural students' environments across educational institutions worldwide (Altbach, 2015). In essence, this culturally diversified HE sector of the UK expectedly received a variant impact of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis on students of asymmetric cultural backgrounds.

It is vital for HE students to remain motivated during education experience to focus on gaining subject knowledge and perform well in their coursework (Banks, 2009) which will pave the way for their planned career routes. The motivation of HE students is also important to help them retain information and participate in classroom activities. However, the Covid-19 pandemic caused a huge impact on HE institutions' operations, including the mode of sessions' delivery and engagement practices. This chapter sheds light on the unprecedented transition in the UK's HE sector, that was brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, and the factors of culture and intrinsic motivation are likely to shape up students' experiences. This transition was marked by the heavy reliance on remote online education facilitated by information technology applications.

## **CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Culture is a complex construct and is defined extensively in the literature. According to Hofstede (2011) culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinct different groups of people one from another. However, within each group there may exist subgroups of distinctive conventions and behaviour. Cultural diversity, from another perspective, is featured by differences among individuals of varied backgrounds and ethnicities that are connected homogeneously (Banks, 2015). Cultural diversity has been highlighted as a positive factor and to play a vital role in organisations but the tendency in the literature is to focus on managing cultural diversity in business to drive growth rather than education institutions.

The understanding of the different values and beliefs of individuals and the way of interaction between them is essential for inter-cultural openness (Meer and Modood, 2012). According to Schwarzenhal *et al.* (2020), cultural diversity entices students to understand the values of other cultures and might help for improving their cross-cultural interaction. At the same time, cultural diversity can entail that crisis developments such as the Covid-19 pandemic are tolerated differently. The study of (Koul and Fisher, 2005) indicated a relationship between the cultural background of students and their differentiated perceptions of their surrounding environment. In relevance to the Covid-19 pandemic, the study of (Morris *et al.*, 2020) revealed that international students were enjoying their stay in another country during the pandemic but they were also experiencing financial difficulties.

Cultural background is advocated by Morera (2019) as an important factor that has a significant influence on students' views on learning. The cultural contexts of individuals and their educational backgrounds play an essential role, not only in their assignment preferences, but also in their adaptation and performance. The students within international educational institutions possess different learning experiences shaped by their cultural assumptions and expectations.

### **Cultural Experience**

Alsubaie (2015) highlights the relationship between culture and education and presents some cultural issues that may appear in the classroom such as social communication and group activities. Although

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the study (2015) has highlighted the importance of flexibility and social support when dealing with students in multinational classrooms, it overlooked the importance of the influence of cultural issues on the motivation of students. As has been previously proposed by Wu *et al.* (2015), the transition from one country to another takes time and endeavour for adapting to the new environment as the length of time is different for distinct individuals. The research points out some of the problems encountered in the adjustment of higher education students but it is not focused on more specific variables like the educational and cultural background that may affect students' behaviour. The transitional experiences vary, depending on the ability of student to adapt and cope with the challenges when joining into a new cultural environment. The different groups respond to the cultural changes in different ways as some might feel typically enthusiastic when others can experience language difficulties and boredom. The cultural issues of HE students have also been explored by Parr *et al.* (1992) where concerns on cultural differences between the students in culturally diverse universities were noticed and the study explored cultural dimensions like individualism, competitiveness, and assertiveness. Jamaludin (2018) emphasized that both cultural orientation and sociocultural adaptation are the most significant variables that had an impact on students, their experiences as well as their future intentions. Moreover, this depends on the external stimuli that emerge such as Covid19, and the social restrictions that caused a significant change to the educational process.

## **STUDENTS' INTRINSIC MOTIVATION**

Motivation is a complex psychological conception. It has been largely identified by DA and AR (2016) as the element that guides goal-oriented behaviour. Hallam *et al.* (2011) concluded that motivation and learning are deeply connected, and the lack of motivation hinders academic achievement. According to Henning *et al.* (2014), motivation to learn is deemed as the student's willingness to comprehend academic content and participate in academic activities.

There may be a range of different elements to impact students' motivation to learn and affect their engagement in-class activities. As stated by Ginsberg (2005) the levels of extrinsic motivation might have a negative impact on the performance and intrinsic motivation is considered as much more significant when it comes to achieving better academic results. For instance, international students are more likely to be externally motivated when they decide to study abroad as they are influenced by the poor quality of education and circumstances in their home countries (Henning *et al.*, 2014). However, extrinsic rewards like money and better conditions are not always an effective motivator for many students. Other factors such as social group behaviour and ethical and moral beliefs can impact the student's decision to participate in class.

The study of Lutfi *et al.* (2016) identified factors as family background, appreciation of completed studies, and gender stereotypes to result in poor performance and challenges in-class activities and discussions. The lack of cultural knowledge may be another barrier to motivation to learn according to the study of Hengyu (2016). Self-belief has been determined as vital for students' motivation and a link between self-belief and academic performance has been identified when students who possess a reduced level of self-belief achieved worse academic results (Edgar *et al.*, 2019).

Coutts *et al.* (2011) concluded that assessments might impact students' intrinsic motivation and mood and increases their tension and levels of stress. The formation of social groups for common learning and

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support may positively affect students' mood and decrease levels of stress. Nevertheless, each student has different assessment preferences which also affects their perceptions (Van de Watering *et al.*, 2008).

## **REMOTE ONLINE EDUCATION DURING COVID-19 DEVELOPMENTS**

The Covid-19 pandemic brought dramatic changes across many sectors in the entire world where the higher education sector is no exemption; It has had a substantial impact on education systems and caused the closure of institutions worldwide (Daniel, 2020). From another perspective, the learning experience of higher education transformed in line with the Covid-19 pandemic developments. For example, Gopal *et al.* (2021) proposed a number of factors that shaped up students' experiences during online delivery implied by the pandemic such as the efficiency of tutors, sessions' content and tutors' feedback. Empirical evidence, such as in Holzer *et al.* (2021), revealed that academic competence during the Covid-19 pandemic's transition may be influenced by self-regulated learning that may also have an influence on students' psychological fulfilment and emotions.

Online learning is a multifaceted concept that could be commonly described as access to learning through online technology (Moore *et al.*, 2011). There are significant differences between the online learning satisfaction of students who have better technological skills based on the students with a lack of previous skills who are more likely to experience any kind of challenges during the online learning.

In view of the Covid-19 pandemic developments, higher education institutions have moved to remote learning and started using educational technologies to avoid difficulties and strains. The majority of studies on the Covid-19 impact on the higher education learning environment were focused on using video-platforms like Zoom and Teams and how it was used by students and lecturers. For instance, the study of Vandenberg and Magnuson (2021) indicated different Zoom opinions between faculty and students; the students were found to have experienced more technological and psychological barriers and were not satisfied at all. Scull *et al.* (2020), indicated that learning in online classes is slower than in on-campus learning. De Oliveira Dias *et al.* (2020) additionally revealed that most of students are not actively attending the online classes due to worse communication experiences.

The online participation of students has been investigated in Dascalu *et al.* (2021) where the monitored behaviour of the students before and after the Covid-19 pandemic indicated an increment in on-line participation. Further research has provided evidence that the levels of stress among students are significantly increasing due to the inability to afford the technology, such as the internet and computers, needed to fully receive the most of online education (Akpınar, 2021). The study (2021) concludes that even online learning is facilitating the education system during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is a primary element causing mental health issues. Other factors affecting students' learning experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic included unstable internet connection and repeated interruptions by family members (Salman *et al.* 2021).

A recent study by Middleton (2020) found that most of the students have been struggling to adapt with online learning and the changes caused by the pandemic. The study shows the importance of distance learning as it is the best solution in the current situation and this statement has been supported by many students.

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### **DISCUSSION**

Cultural differences are the distinct values and beliefs of individuals belonging to a specific ethnicity or a country that sets them apart from others. According to Stromquist and Monkman (2014), cross-cultural diversity provides valuable exposure to the students and enables them to understand the values and ideas of other cultures in addition to improving their cross-cultural communication. Cultural background is an important factor that has a significant influence on students because it guides their behaviour and learning (Chuenjitwongsa *et al.*, 2018). In relevance to their cultural background, students may appear to have different views on assignments and learning preferences (van de Watering *et al.*, 2008). The cultural diversity of students can be assessed by using the cross-cultural model of Hofstede as it incorporates the five dimensions of national culture (Foskett and Lumby, 2003; Dimmock and Walker, 2005; Banks, 2015; Velten and Lashley, 2018). Hofstede's model enables the identification of differences in beliefs and values of students belonging to different cultures and providing useful insight for managing such differences.

From another perspective and as per (Kourova and Modianos, 2010), motivation determines the willingness of an individual to perform a specific task with attentiveness. The motivation to learn is viewed by Brophy (2004) as a student's ability to enjoy and understand academic activities and to gain its learning outcomes. The motivation to learn can be classified into two kinds that are intrinsic and extrinsic (Brophy, 2004; Arpan and Santoso, 2016). Intrinsic motivation for learning can be simply denoted as the situation when the students are already interested in learning a particular subject driven by an internal driving force. Extrinsic motivation occurs when factors like recognition, in the form of a reward, encourage the students to participate in learning activities. External regulated motivation factors may not always encourage students' engagement, such as when Stirling (2014) found out that despite external motivation some students dedicated less effort and interest (Stirling, 2014)

The Covid-19 outbreak is a worldwide challenge that has impacted the everyday life of the entire population (Fox *et al.*, 2021) and has caused significant strains to the UK's HE system that have resulted in dramatic changes. Since UK universities were not able to deliver the casual on-campus education, they were forced to urgently move to remote online education throughout two periods of lock-down. Universities had to make difficult decisions to adapt to this major transition (Ewing, 2021). Similarly, UK HE students faced multiple challenges such as transitioning and being accustomed to new remote online education models of learning, lack of in-person communication and the uncertainty of future developments. Such problems, to some extent, may still persist during the post Covid-19 transition that is marked by a hybrid delivery model combining both on-campus and remote online education.

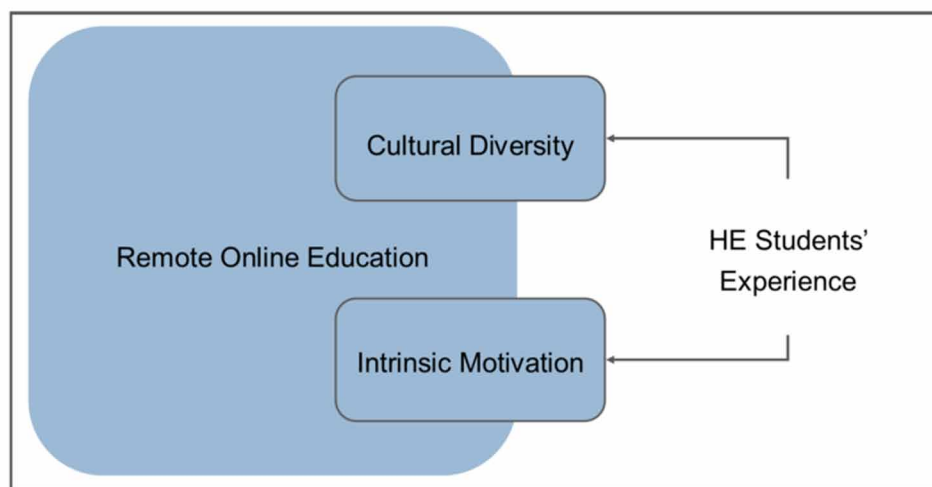
There has been substantial research on HE students' motivation in view of the impact of their exposure to a cross-cultural environment but there is a recognisable paucity in the research looking into how these factors affected HE students during experience during remote online learning implied by the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **CONCLUSION**

There have been multiple studies to investigate the students' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, these previous studies don't explore the UK HE students' experiences by adopting a multidimensional approach. In relation to coping with remote online education, most studies focus on traditional aspects of how students and educators cope with remote online learning technology but overlook the

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Figure 1. Multidimensional factors affecting remote online education



diversity amongst HE students and how this would affect their experiences of online education. For instance and in a highly diverse HE sector such as in the UK, international students may respond differently to the remote online education model that was pushed forward by the Covid-19 developments. Cultural differences between home and international HE students has been proven to impact students' experiences differently Hari (2021).

Individual factors may also have variable impact on students' experiences of remote online education. Differences in technological skills (Salman *et al.*, 2021) along with varied perceptions self-belief and confidence (Chue *et al.*, 2016) shaped up students' learning experiences at an individual level. In essence, different factors that have an impact on students' motivation during the Covid-19 pandemic have been considered by several authors but limited focus has been given to how these factors might influence different ways of learning, behaving, and communication of students within the remote online education model.

Due to its infancy, the current literature on how students experienced remote online education during Covid-19, and now post Covid-19, developments adopts a generic viewpoint and does not sufficiently recognise the impact of cultural and individual peculiarities. We propose adopting a synthetic approach to investigate the implications of culture and intrinsic motivation factors; in our conceptual framework, depicted in Figure 1, we propose that the remote online learning experience of HE students in diverse educational environments is likely determined by cultural and intrinsic motivation factors. For further reading of similar innovations applied in this domain, please refer to the following studies (Ali, 2019, 2020; M. Ali, 2019; Ali M *et al.*, 2018; Ali & Abdel-Haq, 2021; Ali & Edghiem, 2021; Ali *et al.*, 2017; Ali, 2021; Ali *et al.*, 2020a, 2020b).

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