

Exploring Students' Views In Synchronous Online Learning

Peejay Adducul¹, Kurt Karen Cabang², John Marie Mallonga³, Darin Jan Tindowen⁴, Kristine Mae Auayang⁵

School of Education, Arts, and Sciences, University of Saint Louis, Tuguegarao City, Philippines

Abstract: Due to the Covid-19, the Philippine education system shifted from face-to-face to distance learning modalities. This necessarily requires a paradigm shift in educational institutions, with different platforms providing the same level of competency and understanding. As a result, schools were forced to adopt online learning and resources as the new mode of instruction. The goal of this study was to find out how students feel about synchronous online learning. This study utilized qualitative research design employing basic qualitative research by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) to explore the students' views in synchronous online learning. This study used guided interview to gather the needed data and were analyzed using thematic analysis to figure out the experiences of the students. The study revealed that the students have different views towards synchronous online learning which contributed to the idea by demonstrating that synchronous settings are not consistent environment, but rather provide various options for teaching and learning.

Keywords— Synchronous Online Learning; College Students; Views; Covid-19; Motivation

1. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 Pandemic prompted the entire academic process to the internet, which most universities across the world have practiced. It is the first time that learners have formally participated in online learning due to this unexpected situation. As the Covid-19 rampantly spread, the mode of teaching-learning process changed from face-to-face to online very instantly. Because of the new mode, teachers and students had no choice but to resort to technology despite the complexities and challenges it post. Administrators and instructors of universities faced an abundance of students, new means of delivering educational content, and public anxiety as they had to handle a huge number of responsibilities all at once (Chauhan et al., 2020). This calls for the paradigm shift of schools to offer different platforms but the same level of competency and understanding. Because of this, schools were forced to adopt the use of online learning and resources as the new mode of learning.

In today's world, online learning is an alternative method in educating students. Online learning is rapidly expanding across all levels of education. In comparison to campus-based education, it is now more commonly defined as online learning that employs non-traditional approaches and delivery methods (Hernandez, 2021). Online education is adaptable because it allows both the teacher and the learner to select their own learning pace. There is also the extra flexibility of creating a schedule that matches everyone's schedule and provides a better balance of work and study. Learning facilitated by the use of digital tools and content that involves some form of interactivity, which may include online interaction between the learner and their teacher or peers (Valverde-Berrococo, et al., 2020).

Online education provides a diverse range of programs. It is easily available; one can learn or teach from anywhere in the globe without having to travel or adhere to a strict timetable. It enables a personalized learning experience (Josep, 2020). The difference in time and/or distance between learners and learning resources characterizes online learning (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Online learning is thought to be an agent for increasing the exchange of ideas between teachers

and students, as well as developing students' skills in using technology for learning (Forbes & Khoo, 2015), and it is thought to be an agent for enhancing students' professional learning and development (Turvey, 2012; Langcay, et al., 2019).

The use of a variety of learning delivery methodologies, such as online platforms or digital or printed modules is defined as flexible learning. There are the two digital learning settings on the online learning, the asynchronous and the synchronous learning modalities. Sometimes one modality alone is used and sometimes they are mixed. Asynchronous learning occurs in a different time setting in those interactions occur with a time lag between and among them. Asynchronous online learning is when teachers upload materials in their online platforms such as Learning Management System, and students comply and work on their own pace and time. On the other hand, synchronous learning occurs in the "same time" setting in those interactions transpire without a time lag in "real time" or with a very short one in "near-real time" (Mick & Middlebrook, 2015). Synchronous online learning makes use of Google meets, zoom clouds, Skype, Facebook messenger and learning management system on a particular schedule and time.

In terms of students' perspectives in this new learning environment, research comparing on-site and distant students' experiences revealed that these two groups experience the lesson differently in the synchronous scenario (Almahasees, Mohsen & Amin, 2021; Abbacan-Tuguic, 2021). The synchronous online learning technique is motivated by a goal to ensure that all students, regardless of location, have comparable learning experiences. The challenges, on the other hand, are in designing and implementing pedagogical techniques, as well as technology systems, that enable such similar learning experiences, which are commonly referred to as co-presence (Bedenlier et al., 2020). In general, it has been discovered that when synchronous online learning is implemented, it becomes more difficult to activate and engage online students to the same degree as face-to-face students. Distant students, according to both students and teachers, learned less, were more passive,

and frequently act as if they were watching TV rather than attending a class. One rationale for this is that, teachers use more monologue-based teaching tactics in their classes; however, this type of learning environment is not well suited for this type of learning (Lambert, 2020).

With the different literature gaps presented, the researchers were prompted to conduct this study to have an in-depth understanding about how students view online synchronous learning. This study aimed to determine the students' views in synchronous online learning.

2. METHOD

The study utilized a qualitative type of research employing basic qualitative research by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) to explore the students' views in synchronous online learning.

The participants of the study were the 42 college students from a university in Northern Philippines. The said university opted to implement online learning to aid the students' learning amid the outbreak of the pandemic.

This study utilized in-depth conversations or guided interview to explore issues related to the students' views in synchronous online learning modality. Questions that were not understood by the participants were elaborated and explained further by the researchers. The researchers utilized follow-up questions only when participants' answers in the interview are not clear. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to uncover the students' views towards synchronous online learning. The responses of the participants were analyzed and underwent the six processes under thematic analysis. The first part is familiarization where the researchers read through the text and take initial notes, generally looking through the data to be familiar with it. The second part is coding where the researchers highlighted the sections of the texts, coming up with shorthand labels or "codes" to describe the content. The third part is generating themes where the researchers looked over the codes they created to identify patterns among them and come up with themes. The fourth part is reviewing themes where the researchers made sure that the themes listed present useful and accurate representations of the data. The fifth part is defining and naming of themes where the researchers defined the themes involved in formulating each theme to figure out how it helps in understanding the data gathered. The last part is the writing of the analysis of data gathered by the researchers (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

When the results were gathered and examined, the researchers analyzed the data collected to ensure validity and credibility. In this investigation, the researchers also evaluated ethical concerns. The identities of the informants and their responses are kept confidential by the researchers. Furthermore, the researchers made sure to be reflexive enough in order to be impartial and critical to interpret the data gathered from the informants.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored the students' views on synchronous online learning. Two specific themes emerged based on the

results of the study. The following themes are as follows: (1) Benefits of Students in Synchronous Online learning, and (2) Challenges of Students in Synchronous Online learning.

Benefits of Students in Synchronous Online Learning

A. Flexibility of the Learning Modality

In today's education system, flexible learning was implemented to allow students to continue their education even in the midst of a pandemic. Flexible learning allows not only the teachers, but also the students to use a variety of learning modalities, such as online platforms or digital or printed modules. Some of the responses of the participants are as follows:

SOL 10: *"Advantages are the safety of the students as well as teachers in this pandemic to lessen interaction and avoid virus contraction or circulation, we can have a flexible time in doing assessments, everything can be done with the use of internet and less expense for some students and their parents..."*

SOL 24: *"For the advantage, you gain more reflections and one must possess flexibility, perseverance, and hard work to overcome the struggles..."*

SOL 28: *"It's very flexible and a good alternative since we have still way to continue our studies even it's pandemic because synchronous learning is interactive classroom management, direct instructions, we can raise our concerns and questions regarding the topics to understand the lessons..."*

In terms of the teaching-learning process between the teacher and the learners, the effectiveness of flexible learning when it comes to online learning modalities is very much acceptable and enjoyable (Arciosa, 2022). This implies that the synchronous online learning has the advantage of transferring learning to the students just like in the traditional classroom setting and it enables flexible schedules. Synchronous online learning allows students to participate in class discussions during the time set by the teacher and it promotes interaction of the people involved.

B. Easier Access to Learning

Another benefit of synchronous online learning enumerated in this study is that their involvement in online learning is easier. They participate in online discussions and activities that are beneficial to them. With the help of online learning, the students are able to learn in an easy way. Some of the responses of the participants are as follows:

SOL 16: *"I would say, it is somewhat effective. This really depends on factors like, the availability of the internet, books and other resources but most specially the motivation of the student to learn at home..."*

SOL 12: *"It is sometimes effective, it helps me learn things easily with the easier connection to my teachers and"*

peers. Yes, I have learned and understand things ...”

SOL 08: “It is effective in a way that it encourages me to take my responsibilities on time as a student. Absolutely, synchronous online learning helps me to gain a better understanding as I can ask questions in real-time. I can also have the sense of connection with my classmates and teachers as we learn together, which is why I became more engaged in and which helps me a lot with learning.”

During the discussions, the students are expected to engage themselves in every activity that they have. In spite of the distance learning, the students still feel the presence of learning regardless of the difficulties and challenges they encounter. In a study conducted by Wicks (2010), he mentioned that synchronous online learning is characterized by a structured learning environment that enhances and expands educational opportunities. As a result, students are getting more interested in online learning because it provides them greater convenience, accessibility, and flexibility while studying despite the pandemic. Another thing is that the students can easily learn, not only in discussions and activities but also because of the available resources online. They can easily learn because of the different strategies used by their teachers during online discussions. Synchronous online learning influences students’ learning and satisfaction. Hence, the synchronous online learning platform was described as easiest to use and learn with compared to the other modalities.

C. Enhanced Learning Motivation

With the implementation of the synchronous online learning, the students’ motivation was enhanced just like in the traditional face-to-face learning. Students perceive synchronous online discussions to be more focused, to have a stronger sense of contribution, to increase motivation, and to encourage higher course performance than asynchronous discussions. Some of the responses of the participants are as follows:

SOL 16: “I believe it is very beneficial especially in these uncertain times because it has a positive impact to learners’ commitment and their task motivation on time as it encourages students to be productive...”

SOL 14: “There are times that I struggle to finish my school works and I lost motivation to review because of the setup, but with the help of my friends and also my professors I tried harder and seek motivation by taking a break and fixing my schedule, I still struggle sometimes but I help myself through it and finish my school works within the deadline...”

The statements above show that motivation is a major factor for the students participating in synchronous online learning. Motivation promotes active learning, which may increase students’ engagement. When discussing teaching and learning methods to facilitate communication within

synchronous and asynchronous educational settings, researchers emphasize the importance of distinguishing between different types of activation and interaction, as well as how students are engaged in the learning process, as being more important of motivation for study success than the form of instructional delivery (Malkin et al., 2018). Students, on the other hand, take online courses for a variety of reasons. Some students are intrinsically motivated; they are the learners who value learning for their own sake. On the other hand, other students are extrinsically motivated by external factors such as grades, a degree, or the prospect having rewards as a result of their efforts. Extrinsic motivation heavily influences how students approach their learning in synchronous online learning.

D. Improved Time-Management

Another component recognized as effective for online learning is time management. Time-management refers to the ability to plan study time and tasks (Effeney, Carroll & Bahr, 2013). Time-management gives a massive impact and influences not only the student’s learning but also the students’ accomplishments. It has been identified that time-management is one of the dominant aspects that affect the students’ learning. Students who are efficient and aware of their time become more responsible and goal-oriented in managing challenges in their studies and daily lives. Some of the responses of the participants are as follows:

SOL 10: “I try to be even more responsible especially in managing my time.”

SOL 12: “The attitudes I have developed in the implementation of synchronous online learning modality is to check my time in order to attend class and have a constant reminder of what must be done and when is the deadline.”

SOL 18: “The attitude I have developed is that I always set goal and also I have to be on time and to manage my time well.”

The students’ responses imply that they have also developed the essence of managing their time. The study sought to examine the time management of the students in a synchronous online learning to determine their academic achievement and management. In line with this, Martin et. al. (2020) noted in their study that, time management items such as managing time effectively, meeting deadlines with few reminders (Zimmerman & Kulikowich, 2016), managing study time to easily complete assignments (Nieuwoudt, 2020), and including time management as a component of self-directed learning have been included in some online learning readiness scales (Mahyoob, 2020). Khalil et. al., (2020) also stated that other aspects such as students’ and professors’ interactions, accessibility of materials, and time management, can also affect the opinions of online education participants. This implies that students who have improved the essence of managing their time help them to achieve more and work more efficiently.

Challenges of Students in Synchronous Online Learning

A. Poor Internet Connection

Due to the rampant outbreak of the Covid-19, schools were forced to stop the traditional face-to-face learning and transitioned to the new mode of learning-- online learning. Students' internet access may also be a challenge, especially to those who live in remote areas, as some participants in this study noted. This issue has also been reported by previous studies which revealed that students encountered poor internet connection when engaging in synchronous online learning (Abdelmalak & Parra, 2016; Dhawan, 2020; Parrish, et al., 2021). Some of the responses of the participants are as follows:

SOL 17: *"It is hard because sometimes the internet connection is weak, especially in the inner villages and a lot of data is consumed during online learning."*

SOL 25: *"When I first encountered an online class, it was very difficult to study, especially when using only data."*

SOL 30: *"My experiences in synchronous learning first are technical problems like connectivity..."*

Students who are in rural areas experienced poor internet connection which causes them to have difficulties in learning. This is in consonance with the study of Suprabha et al., (2017) which stated that the technology and facilities as online learning not only requires internet access, but it is also requires internet connection at high-speed level (Coper, 2006). The presence of technical issues could impose a potentially modifiable barrier. Some flaws found during the delivery were limited connectivity, the lack of human resources and equipment, low image resolution, difficulties for establishing the connection, slight audio delays, and problems with the internet connection (Sunjaya, Chris A, et al. 2020). Further, students who are economically disadvantaged who cannot afford to buy necessary gadgets and do not have access to internet were forced to resort to modular learning, and worse, some were forced to stop in their studies.

B. Decrease on Self-motivation

During the pandemic, the decrease on students' motivation became more alarming since there are those who often get absent and do not pass their requirements on time. This challenge is common to those who balance their time with their studies and their work. In some instances, personal reasons may get in the way which may sometimes lead to students' instability in learning. As a result of decreased motivation, some students tend to get absent and others may be present, but they do not participate during online discussions and activities. Various elements have been proposed to promote online learning motivation in order to address engagement and participation issues. Some of the responses of the participants are as follows:

SOL 14: *"There are times that I struggle to finish my school works and I lost motivation to review because of the setup, but with the help of my friends and also my professors I tried harder and seek motivation by taking a break and fixing my schedule, I still struggle sometimes but I help myself through it and finish my school works within the deadline..."*

SOL 9: *"It is not that effective for me, I became lazy and unmotivated..."*

SOL 15: *"I struggled with my time-management and lost motivation to study but with the help of my classmates and friends I have adjusted with online learning..."*

The students' responses demonstrate that they are lacking motivation in synchronous online learning setup because of the number of activities they have to finish every day. Most students became stressed and unmotivated since they have not fully adapt themselves in this new learning modality and still prefer the traditional face-to-face classes. De Barba et al. (2016) discovered that state-level motivation during the learning process acts as a mediator between intrinsic motivation and participation. They also discussed how an online learning environment should support motivation and participation because situational interest is contextual and depends on how many activities and content can keep students' attention. Similarly, Batmang, et al. (2021) proposed that in order to deal with attrition, students require support that is tailored to individual needs. The results of this study imply that students have not completely adjusted to synchronous online learning because the interaction between them and their teachers is so limited that eventually results to decreased motivation for learning.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that college students have both desirable and undesirable views in synchronous online learning. This contributes to the idea by demonstrating that synchronous settings are not consistent environment, but rather provide various options for teaching and learning. Furthermore, the findings show a link between these environments and prerequisites for student engagement, as well as indicators of satisfaction, learning behavior, and perceived learning outcomes. Students prefer collaborative learning formats, self-paced learning, and the flexibility of an online environment, according to the findings. Students had expressed their belief that interaction is critical for the course's success not only with their teachers but also with their peers. The students' views resulted in the acquisition of knowledge and insight into the opportunities, potentials, and risks associated with organized synchronous online learning.

Future researchers may conduct study to determine the appropriate learning styles and tactics for students to learn and study comfortably in synchronous online learning. In addition, an extension of this study is to look into the views of college students in other learning modalities, such as asynchronous online learning, modular learning, blended learning and hybrid

learning in order to unravel the holistic views of students in distance learning.

5. REFERENCES

- [1] Abbacan-Tuguic, L. (2021). Challenges of the new normal: Students' attitude, readiness and adaptability to blended learning modality. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 6(2), 443-449. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.62.65>
- [2] Abdelmalak, M. M., & Parra, J. L. (2016). Expanding learning opportunities for graduate students with HyFlex course design. *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design*, 6(4), 19-37. <https://doi.org/10.4018/ijopcd.2016100102>
- [3] Almahasees, Z., Mohsen, K., & Amin, M. O. (2021). Faculty's and students' perceptions of online learning during COVID-19. *Frontiers in Education*, 6. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.638470>
- [4] Arciosa R. (2022). Effectiveness of flexible learning in teaching college subjects amidst Covid 19 pandemic at CTE, Sultan Kudarat State University, Philippines: Effectiveness of flexible learning. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 14(2), 1343–1358. <https://ijci.wcci-international.org/index.php/IJCI/article/view/848>
- [5] Batmang, B., Sultan, M., Azis, A., & Gunawan, F. (2021). Perceptions of pre-service teachers on online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology*, 9(3), 449-461. <https://doi.org/10.46328/ijemst.1595>
- [6] Bedenlier, S., Wunder, I., Gläser-Zikuda, M., Kammerl, R., Kopp, B., Ziegler, A., et al. (2020). "Generation invisible". Higher education students' (non)use of webcams in synchronous online learning. *Inter. J. Educ. Res. Open* 2:100068. doi: 10.1016/j.ijedro.2021.100068
- [7] Bozkurt, A., & Sharma, R. C. (2020). Emergency remote teaching in a time of global crisis due to CoronaVirus pandemic. *Asian Journal of Distance Education*, 15(1), i-vi. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3778083>
- [8] Chauhan, S., Gupta, P., Palvia, S., & Jaiswal, M. (2020). Information technology transforming higher education: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Information Technology Case and Application Research*, 23(1), 3-35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228053.2020.1846480>
- [9] De Barba, P. G., Kennedy, G. E., & Ainley, M. D. (2016). The role of students' motivation and participation in predicting performance in a MOOC. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 32(3), 218-231. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcal.12130>
- [10] Dhawan, S. (2020). Online Learning: A panacea in the time of COVID-19 crisis. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems* 0(0), 1-18 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047239520934018>
- [11] Effeney, G., Carroll, A., & Bahr, N. (2013). Self-regulated learning and executive function: Exploring the relationships in a sample of adolescent males. *Educational Psychology*, 33(7), 773-796. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2013.785054>
- [12] Forbes, D., & Khoo, E. (2015). Voice over distance: A case of podcasting for learning in online teacher education. *Distance Education*, 36(3), 335–350. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2015.1084074>
- [13] Hernandez, L. (2021). Strengths and Challenges of Distance Learning Modalities in the New Normal: Basis for Intervention Program. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(2), 80-87.
- [14] Josep, G. (2020). 5 Reasons why online learning is the future of education. Retrieved, July 26, 2020 <https://www.educations.com/articles-and-advice/5-reasons-online-learning-is-future-of-education-17146>
- [15] Kiger, M. E., & Varpio, L. (2020). Thematic analysis of qualitative data: AMEE Guide No. 131. *Medical teacher*, 42(8), 846-854.
- [16] Lambert, S. R. (2020). Do MOOCs contribute to student equity and social inclusion? A systematic review 2014–18. *Computers & Education*, 145,103693. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2019.103693>
- [17] Langcay, M., Gutierrez, J. P., Valencia, M. M., & Tindowen, D. J. (2019). Epistemological beliefs of pre-service teachers. *Social Studies*, 22, 12-20.
- [18] Khalil, R., Mansour, A. E., Fadda, W. A., Almisnid, K., Aldamegh, M., Al-Nafeesah, A., Alkhalifah, A., & Al-Wutayd, O. (2020). The sudden transition to synchronized online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia: A qualitative study exploring medical students' perspectives. *BMC Medical Education*, 20(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-020-02208-z>
- [19] Mahyoob, M. (2020). Challenges of e-Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic Experienced by EFL Learners. *Arab World English Journal*, 11(4), 351–362. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol11no4.23>
- [20] Malkin, A., Rehfeldt, R. A., and Shayter, A. M. (2018). An investigation of the efficacy of asynchronous discussion on students' performance in an online research method course. *Behav. Anal. Pract.* 11, 274–278. doi: 10.1007/s40617-016-0157-5
- [21] Martin, F., Stamper, B., & Flowers, C. (2020). Examining student perception of readiness for online learning: Importance and confidence. *Online Learning*, 24(2). <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v24i2.2053>

- [22] Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative Research A Guide to Design and Implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA Jossey Bass. - References - Scientific Research Publishing. (2016). Scirp.org. [https://www.scirp.org/\(S\(lz5mqp453edsnp55rrgjt55\)\)/reference/ReferencesPapers.aspx?ReferenceID=2631333](https://www.scirp.org/(S(lz5mqp453edsnp55rrgjt55))/reference/ReferencesPapers.aspx?ReferenceID=2631333)
- [23] Mick, C. S., & Middlebrook, G. (2015). Chapter 3. Asynchronous and synchronous modalities. *Foundational Practices of Online Writing Instruction*, 129-148. <https://doi.org/10.37514/per-b.2015.0650.2.03>
- [24] Nieuwoudt, J. E. (2020). Investigating synchronous and asynchronous class attendance as predictors of academic success in online education. *Australasian J. Educ. Technol.* 36, 15–25. doi: 10.14742/ajet.5137
- [25] Parrish, C. W., Guffey, S. K., Williams, D. S., Estis, J. M., & Lewis, D. (2021). Fostering cognitive presence, social presence and teaching presence with integrated online—team-based learning. *TechTrends*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-021-00598-5>
- [26] Sunjaya AP, Chris A, Novianti D. Efficacy, patient-doctor relationship, costs and benefits of utilizing telepsychiatry for the management of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): a systematic review. *Trends Psychiatry Psychother* 2020 Mar;42(1):102-110.
- [27] Suprabha, B. S., Shenoy, R., Rao, A., Rao, A., & Naik, D. G. (2017). Readiness And Utilization Of Computer-Assisted Learning Among Dental Students And Faculty. *Dental Hypotheses*,8(4), 87–93. DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v10-i5/7236
- [28] Turvey, K. (2012). Constructing narrative ecologies as a site for teachers' professional learning with new technologies and media in primary education. *E-Learning and Digital Media*, 9(1), 113–126. <https://doi.org/10.2304/elea.2012.9.1.113>
- [29] Valverde-Berrococo, J., Garrido-Arroyo, M. D., Burgos-Videla, C., & Morales-Cevallos, M. B. (2020). Trends in educational research about E-Learning: A systematic literature review (2009–2018). *Sustainability*, 12(12), 5153. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12125153>
- [30] Wicks, M. (2010). A National Primer on K-12 Online Learning VERSION 2 WRITTEN BY WITH SUPPORT FROM. https://aurora-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/iNCL_NationalPrimerv22010-web1.pdf