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"It's a pain, but it's not like the end of the world": Students' experiences of emergency remote teaching

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A chasm exists between pre-COVID online learning literature, focusing on teachers and students who have chosen online teaching and learning, and post-COVID literature, in which teaching and learning are forced online. This research focuses on students' experiences of the move to online learning, the strategies they employed and their overall perceptions of differences between face-to-face and online learning. A single semi-structured interview was conducted with 16 students at the end of the semester in which learning was migrated online. When the learning was moved online, the students were all 3 weeks into their second year of a bachelor's degree in the humanities and social sciences. The interview data was collected soon after the students completed these courses and analysed using thematic analysis. Generally, the findings of this study support other post-COVID studies, finding that students who were required to study online had more negative experiences than positive ones. Students who are enrolled in full-time face-to-face qualifications also appear to have different needs from those who choose to study online. Students felt that they would have benefited from more structure during emergency remote teaching, such as synchronous learning experiences scheduled at a fixed time.

Implications for practice or policy:
- Lecturers should conduct lectures synchronously in emergency online learning for on-campus students.
- Teaching staff should include their faces in recorded instruction in asynchronous online modes.
- Teaching staff should offer tests in alternative formats rather than avoiding them in online learning.
- Universities should prioritise tutorials, workshops and laboratories in face-to-face mode over lectures in hybrid education.

Keywords: emergency remote teaching, pedagogical issues, learning strategies, online lectures, narrative enquiry

Introduction

The year 2020 was an unprecedented time with lives being dramatically altered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic had dramatic effects on most areas of peoples' lives, including their experiences of teaching and learning. Around the world, teachers migrated their teaching online very abruptly. In New Zealand, 48 hours' notice was given before the country went into a full lockdown, which lasted for 7 weeks. Thus, institutions and teachers had 48 hours to gather the resources necessary to conduct all education online from their homes. At the university where this research was conducted, the announcement was made 3 weeks into the new academic year. The mid-term break was brought forward and extended to 3 weeks, giving teachers and students 3 weeks at home to prepare for the emergency remote teaching. Following the 3-week break, online learning continued until the end of the semester, a period of 9 weeks.

A chasm exists between pre-COVID literature on online learning and post-COVID literature on emergency remote teaching. Pre-COVID online learning literature focuses on contexts in which both teachers and students have chosen online formats of teaching and learning, whereas post-COVID literature paints a very different picture of teaching and learning being forced online, without alternatives. Although pre-COVID online learning literature is useful in illuminating effective instructional methods and learning

strategies for online learning, during the pandemic most teachers and students did not have the expertise required to make the most of online learning, neither did they have enough time to develop this expertise before emergency remote teaching began. A fair amount of literature documents experiences with online learning during this time of crisis. However, the majority of the research utilises questionnaires for data collection or analyses overall engagement and achievement of students during this time.

I was engaged in a longitudinal study with students in the humanities and social sciences which began before the COVID-19 pandemic and extended beyond it. Relationships had already been developed with the 16 students involved in this research, as they had been involved in the longitudinal study for a period of over 1 year when the crisis began. Having established relationships with the students allowed me to ask specific questions about their experiences of emergency remote teaching. This research focused on students' experiences of the sudden move to online learning, including their perceptions of the online teaching and learning they were involved in, the strategies they employed to get through the learning and their overall perceptions of the differences between face-to-face and emergency remote teaching.

Literature review

This background section will include insights from both pre-COVID and post-COVID research on aspects of online learning that were salient in the interview data collected for this research.

Technology

One major difference between pre-COVID and post-COVID online learning is issues relating to technology. Teachers and learners pre-COVID had time to prepare appropriate technology for online teaching and learning and/or could make the decision to teach and learn online on the basis of the technology available to them. In addition, before the pandemic, students in on-campus learning environments could make use of computers and Wi-Fi on campus, meaning that they could effectively complete online aspects of courses even without access to their own device or Internet connection at home. In a COVID-19-related study in Spain, del Arco et al. (2021) found that 76% of students had access to both a device and an Internet connection. Almost a quarter of students not having means through which to access course content is likely to damage to teaching and learning experiences.

As the pandemic approached, schools and universities scrambled to provide suitable devices to students at short notice. However, inevitably there were not enough devices available for all students. In addition, even with a suitable device, unsatisfactory Internet connections prevented some students from effectively participating in online learning. Furthermore, lockdowns required almost everyone in many countries to stay at home and work and study online. This placed significant additional demand on Internet services (Feldmann et al., 2021), meaning that Internet connections which were previously satisfactory struggled to keep up with demand and became less reliable. Similarly, households with more members, such as families, may have had sufficient devices when everyone left the house each day for work or school. The same number of devices is unlikely to have been sufficient when all family members worked and studied at home, causing difficult decisions within households as to how to manage allocation of shared devices.

In the context in which this study was conducted, providing devices to students was prioritised, and as a result, not every teacher or tutor had access to a dedicated device at home. Sharing devices with other members of the household prevented some teachers and tutors from being able to carry out the responsibilities they usually would in an 8-hour workday. In addition, since all schools were closed, those with families often had childcare responsibilities or had to supervise school-aged children who were learning from home, making it difficult for them to spend 8 hours each day working. Such reductions in the availability of lecturers and tutors are likely to have had a significant effect on the extent to which they could support students, exactly at a time in which students are likely to have had higher support needs. Moreover, Muir et al. (2019) found that students were more engaged in online learning when

teaching staff were more actively engaged in it, so reduced availability of teaching staff also likely had a negative effect on student engagement in courses.

Student satisfaction

Student satisfaction with online learning and emergency remote teaching have also been divergent. Boling et al. (2012) collected data from students enrolled in a distance education programme, and they reported preferring online learning to face-to-face learning. Bosshardt and Chiang (2016) collected data from students students enrolled in online courses as well as students enrolled in face-to-face courses. Their findings were more nuanced; some students reported choosing face-to-face learning because of the inherent enforcement involved in having a fixed class time. This research is supported by Kim et al. (2017), who found that reducing the level of control students had over the frequency with which they could watch online lectures and the extent to which they could adjust the speed, pause, rewind and fast-forward led to higher concentration levels while watching the lectures and increased intention to continue studying.

Another pre-COVID study found that students with more previous experience of learning online were more satisfied with online learning than those with less previous experience (Wang et al., 2013). This result was corroborated after the start of the pandemic (Richardson & North, 2020). Unfortunately, most students studying in face-to-face format tend not to have significant previous online learning experience, suggesting that they are likely to be less satisfied with their experiences of emergency remote teaching. Indeed, one study of emergency remote teaching during COVID-19 (del Arco et al., 2021) found that most students were not satisfied with their online learning experiences during this time.

Being forced to study online against their will also affected the well-being of some students during the pandemic. Del Arco et al. (2021) reported that students experienced restlessness, concern, anxiety and sadness during this crisis. However, learning-related factors may also have impacted student well-being. Richardson and North (2020) found that, despite reporting spending more time on their learning, students also reported finding emergency remote courses more difficult than face-to-face learning.

Learning outcomes

Studies comparing learning outcomes of online learning and face-to-face learning pre-COVID tended to find that there was no significant difference between them. For example, Bosshardt and Chiang (2016) found no significant difference between online and face-to-face learning. A more detailed study compared fully online, fully face-to-face, blended learning and flipped classrooms (Thai et al., 2020). In this study, students were found to learn significantly more effectively from blended learning than from either fully online or fully face-to-face learning. The fully online learning condition was the least effective condition overall, followed closely by fully face-to-face. These findings suggest that in emergency remote teaching in which all learning is fully online, learning outcomes may be significantly negatively affected.

The amount of course content accessed by students during online learning is a clear predictor of performance. Li and Tsai (2017) found 36% of students in their study exhibited extensive use of course materials, 32% accessed lecture slides extensively, but largely ignored lecture videos and the final group of 32% rarely accessed any course materials. Of these three groups, the group who accessed materials the least performed significantly less well, while there was no significant difference between the other two groups. These results are corroborated by Han and Ellis (2021), who also found that students who accessed less course content performed less well. These results make sense as accessing materials in online learning is similar to attendance in face-to-face learning, and attendance has been found to have a significant effect on university performance (e.g., Newman-Ford et al., 2009). In the context of learning during the pandemic, students may have had difficulty accessing course content online due to lack of access to devices and unreliable Internet connections. Thus, such technological problems are likely to have had a significant negative effect on student learning.

Formats of teaching and learning online

Although all teaching and learning was conducted through online modes during the crisis, there is a range of formats for online learning, and there are likely to be significant differences in terms of learner satisfaction, performance and even ability to access course content depending on the format selected by a teacher. The most frequent suggestion in the literature is that course content should be broken into smaller chunks for online learning. Mayer (2019) has suggested breaking full-length face-to-face lessons into smaller parts for online delivery. Szpunar et al. (2013) have suggested that online lectures should be "as short as 10 minutes" (p. 4). And an empirical study on this question found that breaking lectures into shorter parts increased both learning and course completion rates (Mendez-Garbajo & Wolla, 2019). After breaking lectures into shorter parts for online delivery, course completion increased from 90% to 94%. This is the kind of expertise that teachers in online learning contexts learn through experience. Many teachers who had been teaching in face-to-face mode until the pandemic may not have known this. As a result, del Arco et al. (2021) found that "virtual teaching was carried out within the same parameters as face-to-face teaching" (p. 1), and although this was successful in conveying content to the 76% of students who had access to devices and an internet connection, it promoted passive transmission and reception of content.

One recent study asked students which formats they found most effective for learning online (Dinmore, 2019). Students in this study reported that lectures in which the lecturer's face appears, with lecture slides in the background, was the most effective (88% found this effective), while talking without slides (25%) and recording on-campus lectures (23%) were considerably less effective. However, talking with slides without the appearance of the lecturer's face was not included as an option in this study. It is unclear whether the most effective option (in which the lecturer's face appears, with slides in the background) was effective because of the presence of both talking and slides or whether the appearance of the lecturer's face was an important component of the perceived effectiveness. In addition, it is unclear whether the students who completed the questionnaire had actually experienced all of the options included in the questionnaire, so they may have perceived certain methods to be more effective without the necessary evidence to report this.

Similar previous research

A questionnaire study of 1904 students across six disciplinary areas found that students' experiences of emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic were more positive than their initial expectations (Lobos et al., 2022). However, initial expectations were negative to neutral, and the only area in which students reported positive experiences was online teaching, with all other areas reported as negative or neutral. Moreover, at the discipline-level, the expectations of students in the humanities and social sciences were lower than in any other disciplinary area, and experiences reported by those in the humanities were lower than in any other disciplinary area. These results suggest that some disciplinary areas may be more difficult to teach effectively online than others. In particular, in the humanities, which deal with human perspectives, relationships with peers and teachers may be more important than in some other disciplinary areas.

 In the present study, students were asked about their experiences and perceptions of their experiences of emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the students had recently completed 9 weeks studying full time, fully online after a full year studying fully face-to-face, they are likely have had sufficient personal experience of the practices they discussed to know the extent to which these practices were effective for them.

Methods

This narrative enquiry involved a convenience sample of 16 students who were already involved in the larger longitudinal study. I had already developed a relationship with these students, having interviewed them five times before the start of the pandemic. It was thus expected that sufficient rapport had been

developed for the students to speak frankly about their experiences and perceptions. A single semi-structured interview was conducted with each of 16 students at the end of the 9 weeks of emergency remote teaching. When the learning was moved online, the students were all 3 weeks into their second year of a bachelor's degree in majors within the humanities and social sciences, having studied the first year fully face-to-face. When the interviews were conducted, the students had completed 1.5 years of their degrees, in programmes which ranged from 3 years to 5 years in duration.

Ethical approval was obtained in 2019, approximately 1 year before the data for this research was collected, and all participants gave informed consent to participate in the study. I am a staff member at the university where the data was collected but I have not been involved in teaching the students who participated in this research.

In the university where this research was carried out, the default course arrangement is one to three lectures and one tutorial or laboratory each week. However, in reality, lectures take a wide range of forms: a traditional one-way monologue, a monologue with Socratic questioning, lectorials which include both periods of monologue and interaction between students, and seminar-style class sessions, for example. Although university systems use the word "lecture" to describe the majority of teaching activities, the amount of interaction involved during lectures depends to a large extent on the instructor offering the course. The same is true of tutorials and laboratories, except that tutorials are more likely to be based largely or solely on student discussion, and laboratories are more likely to be based on hands-on activities.

The participants were all New Zealanders who had been born and completed all their primary and secondary schooling in New Zealand. All participants had completed secondary school in 2018 and entered university at the beginning of 2019, enrolling in Bachelor of Arts degrees. Eleven of the 16 participants were New Zealand Europeans (69%), three were New Zealand Māori (19%), the remaining two were a New Zealander with a Pacific Island background and a New Zealander with African heritage.

During the semester in focus, the 16 students were enrolled in 29 courses across the three undergraduate year levels. One student was enrolled in one third-year course, five students were each enrolled in one first-year course, and the remaining 23 courses were second-year courses. There were between one and four students taking each course. Overall, the courses represented 18 different subject areas: Sociology (4 courses), Media Studies (3), Psychology (3), Criminology (2), Linguistics (2), Political Science (2), Public Policy (2), Accounting (1), Anthropology (1), Creative Writing (1), English Literature (1), Film Studies (1), Geography (1), History (1), Māori Studies (1), Marketing (1), Religious Studies (1) and Theatre Studies (1).

The interview data was collected soon after the students completed these courses, recorded, transcribed and then analysed in NVivo. Preliminary themes were derived from the literature reviewed above, and additional themes that became apparent in the data were added. The data was analysed iteratively until felicity was found.

Findings

Pedagogical changes

In the interviews, students were asked to explain how their courses changed as a result of moving online. Initially, most courses had consisted of lectures (between one and three per week) and either tutorials, workshops or laboratories (usually one per week). In one course, the lecture changed to a weekly discussion session with the lecturer at which students could ask questions about the course content or about upcoming assignments, which created "a really nice atmosphere." Although in all other courses lectures changed the least, students did discuss the range of different formats of online lectures, which will be discussed in the next section.

Tutorials, workshops and laboratories were the part of the courses in which the most change was reported. Four students reported that a weekly tutorial was replaced with a weekly worksheet or

discussion board post. Three students reported that tutorials which had been compulsory when face-to-face became optional when they were moved online. As a result of this change, three students mentioned that attendance dropped in online tutorials compared to face-to-face ones. One psychology course changed from practical face-to-face laboratories to pre-recorded lectures about the laboratory content. Overall, the more interactive aspects of courses were mostly not successfully migrated online, whereas the less interactive lectures were migrated more successfully, although with reduced opportunities for interaction.

Another area of fairly significant change was assessment items. Three students mentioned that the assessment items themselves remained the same, but the deadlines and/or weighting changed. Two students mentioned that an essay was replaced with a test, while another two reported tests being replaced with essays. Three students reported assessment items being scaled down due to the move online: One reported that a large, end of semester examination was replaced with a shorter test. One reported that a large-scale linguistic landscape project was replaced with a small-scale linguistic landscape project which could be completed within the home. The third student reported a research essay was replaced with a "general essay". Additionally, one student reported that in one course three assessment items were reduced to just one. Finally, one student reported that all assessment items which had been assigned as group assignments were changed to individual assignments.

No face-to-face examination period was held at the university for the semester in which the lockdown occurred. Therefore, all examinations and tests were changed to online, open-book tests. Interestingly though, not all students were clear about whether they were allowed to consult their books or notes during their online tests. In general, students reported that because of these changes to tests, longer and deeper responses were required, such as essay responses rather than short answers.

Lecture format

Course lecturers provided the online lecture content in four ways. The method most frequently mentioned was pre-recording lectures at home and uploading them onto the course management platform each week. Eight students mentioned courses managed in this way. Another three students mentioned that all lecture content for the course was pre-recorded and uploaded in bulk during the 3-week break, so that when teaching resumed, all lectures for the course were available for students to work through. There were also three students who reported that their lectures were held synchronously via Zoom, meaning that they were required to be online at the usual lecture time to attend them. However, although this format allowed for interaction between teacher and students, most students reported being reluctant to ask questions during Zoom sessions. Another three students reported that lecture content was not recorded for the move online; rather, the teachers of those courses retrieved recordings of last year's on campus lectures and posted them onto the course management platform for that year's students to watch.

In terms of what exactly was shared in the recorded lectures, there were three styles. The most frequent response, offered by seven students, was that the recording consisted of slides with audio recording, and that the lecturer's face was visible in the corner of the screen. Another six students reported lecture recordings that consisted of only slides and audio recording. Indeed, in one course, the tutorials changed to an online discussion board, lectures changed to the slides plus audio style of recording, and the student reported that she never saw the face of her lecturer or tutor throughout the 9 weeks of online learning. Finally, there was one course in which the audio recording and slide document were uploaded separately, and students had to open the slide document and click through the slides themselves while listening to the audio recording. Overall, opportunities for interaction were removed from most course lectures when they were migrated online, because of the asynchronous formats teachers employed, with almost all courses becoming traditional one-way lecture-style courses.

In terms of the length of lecture recordings, breaking lecture recordings into smaller chunks was by far more frequent than uploading regular 1- or 2-hour-long lectures. Fifteen students reported that some or all of their courses were recorded and uploaded as shorter chunks, while only one reported that all her

lecturers were recorded as regular full-length lectures. In terms of the length of the smaller chunks, the majority of lecturers seem to have broken lectures into chunks of 20 to 45 minutes (11 students reported lectures of these lengths, with the average length being around 30 minutes), while one lecturer uploaded lectures that were 5 minutes long, one lecturer uploaded lectures that were 10 to 20 minutes long, and one lecturer broke a 2-hour lecture into smaller chunks by uploading two recordings that were each 1 hour in length.

Academic outcomes

Grades
In terms of the academic achievement, as measured through course grades, most students felt that they achieved better than they would normally expect to, while a few reported that moving online had a negative impact on their grades.

Five students reported significantly higher grades than they would have otherwise expected. One student got an A for a course and reported "I didn't cheat, but I didn't do all the work, but I was still able to get the grades". Another student stated, "I'm not doing any extra readings, I'm doing the bare minimum to pass and then I end up getting a B+". The most extreme example was a student who reported "I haven't done a single reading … I bought the textbook at the beginning and haven't opened it … I didn't even go to tutorials" but she reported "I've still got an A- average and I'm not really sure that that should be possible. I don't understand how that's okay".

Another four students reported that they did slightly better than they normally would have expected to have done. One student had always performed better in written assignments than in tests but felt that his grades benefited from the open-book test format. One student stated, "I did find it difficult in some respects, but I didn't feel that that was reflected in the grades that I got". Another student reflected in this way:

> We actually did fairly well it seems, with grades … this semester, … I'm not sure if that's the lecturers being a bit more considerate, but I think also people were just working really hard and maybe they overcompensated a bit.

Another three students felt that moving to online learning had had a negative effect on their grades. One stated that she felt her grades were about 5% lower than they would usually have been. Another student reported, "I thought I really understood the concepts, but then … I still got alright grades, but I felt that they didn't reflect as much as I thought".

Learning
In terms of their ability to learn and understand the content of the online courses, students were generally less positive. Four students reported that in general they learnt less from their courses online compared to in face-to-face mode. One student stated "I could do probably better online, get better grades, but I wouldn't be learning as much". Another three students reported that it was specifically their decreased engagement in online courses that reduced learning. One stated, "I couldn't ask questions during the lecture, … I couldn't, like, listen to other people ask questions". Another stated that she felt that she was less able to retain the information she wrote about in her assignments "because we didn't have tutorials to go and talk about the assignment … I think I find that quite good for reflecting on what I'm actually doing, comparing it to what other people have done". One stated specifically that she felt she learnt more in the course which had synchronous lectures on Zoom, because "there was a lot of like discussion questions, and it just made you think a little bit more". One other student stated that they were less able to follow lectures when they were online because of the absence of facial expressions and gestures. Finally, there was one student who felt that she learnt more from online open-book tests than she did in traditional tests because "the content shifts from being regurgitating information to proving understanding … I feel like that's a lot more valuable … The things where I've had to go a bit deeper, that's information that has stuck with me".

Experiences

Students discussed a wide range of experiences related to learning online. These experiences were grouped into eight themes and will be discussed here in frequency order. The first theme was distractions, which were mentioned by seven students. Four students mentioned that in general they were more distracted when studying at home than when studying on campus. One student, for example, mentioned, "I'm sitting in my room and my beds right there, so I'm feeling sleepy or hungry or something. So I'm not as focused as I would be in an actual lecture theatre". Similarly, another student stated "once I got into it, it was fine, but I think having it in video form rather than in person, I found it quite hard to keep focused and actually listen to what the lecturer was saying". One student mentioned distractions in particular when the recordings were not broken into smaller chunks. She had one course with full-length recordings and another two courses whose recordings were broken into chunks and mentioned getting more distracted when watching the full-length recordings. Quite contrary to these ideas, the final two students found that they were less distracted with online learning compared to face-to-face learning. One stated "I get distracted in face-to-face ones, and it's easier to just stop the lecture online and focus again, like go for a break and then focus again".

The second theme was issues related to Zoom, which were mentioned by five students. One student reported that she was unable to join Zoom and was therefore unable to attend any educational offerings via Zoom in her courses. Two students mentioned that tutorials conducted online were awkward and uncomfortable. When it came to synchronous online lectures, one student mentioned that although helpful, they made her feel more anxious than face-to-face lectures, while another liked the fact that interaction was possible during synchronous online lectures: "If I had a question, I could type it and then he'd answer it then and there, but if you watched it later you couldn't do that".

The next most frequent theme in the data was loss of motivation, which was mentioned by four students. One student comment, in particular, summed up the ideas expressed by these four students:

> I just found it really hard to be motivated to watch them, it became less of "let's go to this lecture and enjoy the content" and more of "let's see how quickly I can get this lecture done". So I put everything on 2 times speed … the lectures were fine, but … there was no enjoyment in the lectures, for me. It was just content … I used to enjoy them when they were face to face.

More specifically, one student mentioned that having to do readings before a lecture or a tutorial "plays a huge role in [her] motivation for university". Another stated that "if [tutorials] were compulsory, that would kind of push you to do the readings each week, so that when you got there you could kind of follow what was going on". Being able to watch lectures anytime and choose not to attend tutorials led to a loss of motivation to do readings for these two students.

Another theme, also mentioned by four students, although in less depth, was doing a larger number of readings when studying online. In two cases, it was mentioned that there was less to do, and students had more time available, which encouraged them to spend more time on readings. In addition, one student had this to say:

> Because I had a hard time with paying attention with the lecture content … I would normally trade going to lectures instead of doing the readings … But over lockdown, I decided that readings were a lot easier to prioritise over lectures … [I ended up] doing more than just the required readings and diving into the recommended readings, I did that quite a bit.

For some students at least, while the interactive and social aspects of learning became more difficult, the solitary aspects became easier.

Another theme mentioned by three students was social pressure and support. Two students mentioned social pressure. For example, one student stated:

> It's polite when you're sitting in a lecture to not look like you're not paying attention, which helps me to pay attention. Just the social courtesy of it … Whereas just sitting at home on my computer, there's no consequence … I'm not making the lecturer feel like they're doing a bad job.

Similarly, another student mentioned that "that definitely takes out a lot of accountability. You kind of just feel that you can have it to the side and not really be in the tutorial like you would be in person". However, the third student focused not on the lack of social pressure, but on the lack of social support available when studying at home. She mentioned that if you are having a bad day, you could talk to another student about it when you see them in the lecture theatre, although they are not necessarily close enough to reach out to from a distance. In both of these ways, the lack of social interactions with others seems to have had negative consequences for these students.

The final experience, mentioned by three students, was that online lectures were considerably more time consuming than face-to-face lectures. One student stated that "with a two-hour lecture at university, you turn up, do the two hours. If you missed some notes, you missed some notes and you can accept that a lot easier". However, a large number of students mentioned during the interviews the ability to rewind and listen again to parts of the content that they did not take in the first time. This particular student said that "you've got an hour-long lecture. You spend 3 hours doing that lecture … then afterwards you have to read through it again … it's just a lot more". This was likely the case for many other students who did not specifically mention this.

Learning strategies

Nine of the 16 students mentioned applying specific strategies that were different from how they would normally study that they found helpful in dealing with the online learning situation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the way students approached written assignments did not change. What did change was studying for tests and examinations.

Two students mentioned changes relating to taking part in online tests, rather than face-to-face ones. One student usually handwrites her notes but created digital notes in the semester in focus so that she could search for the relevant information using Control + F during the tests. Another student found it difficult doing an online essay test on a single small screen after being used to having the reading texts and essay paper side by side. She dealt with this problem by breaking her small screen into two halves, having the readings on one half and the essay on the other half and then did planning on a piece of paper.

Six students mentioned that their tests or examinations had been cancelled for the semester. The result of this change was that they tended not to watch the lectures or do the readings every week, but rather focus on the lectures and readings on which the assignments focused. For example, regarding watching lectures, one student stated:

> I was only watching them for my assessments … for each assessment, I would just go through, choose a question to do, and watch the lecture on it. If I needed to watch a previous lecture as well, to get the context, then I'd do that.

Similarly, related to doing readings, one student stated, "sometimes it would be like, read this section. But then the tutorial worksheet would be specifically about Shakespeare, rather than the whole medieval or renaissance section … so I would read the Shakespeare one instead of the whole section". A student taking a Film Studies course also read the assignment sheets and only watched the films related to the assignments for the course. Indeed, one student reflected "I definitely think I work better having a test at the end of the trimester than not. It just gives you that extra motivation … to do it".

Overall, students' strategies for written assignments did not change. In addition, the change from face-to-face tests to online ones had only a small impact on students' study methods. On the other hand, cancelling tests and examinations altogether had a significant effect, reducing the number of lectures watched, readings read and other course activities completed. This is likely to have had a significant negative impact on learning.

Communication

At the end of the semester, students reflected on the differences between face-to-face and online learning. By far the most frequent theme in this data was perceptions relating to communication between academic staff and students. Seven students made 16 comments on this topic.

The most frequent theme in these comments (7) was that in the online context, the students felt that they "didn't know [their lecturers] from a bar of soap" and this feeling of not having any relationship with lecturers or tutors made them feel uncomfortable to reach out when they had questions or needed help. One student elaborated that "some lecturers are a little bit more open to answering questions than others … you work your way into that throughout the course" but in the online context this student stated that you never get to a point where you know them well enough to know how approachable and responsive they are. One student commented that in her course where the lecturer's face appeared in the lecture recordings, she felt more comfortable emailing him and emailed him much more frequently than the lecturers in her other courses: "I definitely think that that really helped".

Another theme in the comments (6) related to the difference between asking questions in person versus by email. Three students mentioned that in general it was easier to ask questions when you were in the same room as someone "especially if you think it might be a bit of a silly question, … you can just ask it and it doesn't matter", whereas it placed more importance on questions when they had to be conveyed through "you know, like a structured proper email". Another student was initially forthcoming in sending emails when she had questions but found:

> It did make a difference to how far I could get ahead or how much time I would end up putting into the assignment. Because in person, they can't really say "come back to me in a week's time". They usually answer it on the spot. Whereas by email you don't get an answer straight away.

As a result of the obstacle that emailing posed to students, one student reported that she would write questions for herself in her notes: "that was just like notes for myself to go and figure out what it was. But if it was in person, I probably would have been 'Hey, what does this mean?'".

In addition to these themes, one student mentioned specifically that even when interaction was synchronous, "it's harder to ask a question … because you can't really talk over top of people or anything". It appears that although seeing a lecturer's face and interacting with them synchronously breaks down communication barriers to a certain extent, not being physically present in a room with someone still poses difficulties in terms of feeling comfortable to ask questions. On the other hand, for a minority of students, studying online may actually increase their comfort level. One student mentioned that she feels more comfortable emailing instructors rather than asking questions face-to-face. For this student, studying online made no difference to her likelihood of asking questions. In addition, she stated: "I think it was quite good for me because often in tutorials I don't really speak up. I usually just take in what other people are saying, and that's fine". When her tutorials changed to a discussion board in one course, she felt that that the extent to which each person contributed was much more equal.

Overall reflections

Towards the end of the interviews, students were asked their overall reflections of online learning and their learning preferences going forward. One question asked was if learning were to be hybrid going forward, which aspects of courses should be face-to-face and which aspects should be online. Fifteen

students gave clear responses to this question. Eleven of these had a clear preference for tutorials, laboratories and workshops being held face-to-face and were willing to accept online lectures. Mostly, the reason provided was that there was less interaction in lectures, so it did not make as much difference if they were online, whereas the discussion and practical aspects of courses were difficult to emulate online. Three students stated clearly that hybrid learning would not be acceptable to them, that they would only accept the complete learning experience being offered in face-to-face mode. One student felt that it depended on the course and how engaging the lecturer was. The final student stated they she would prefer face-to-face lectures and would be satisfied with tutorials being online as long as they were synchronous.

Ten students offered overall reflections on the experience of online learning. No students reported preferring online learning after having experienced it. Of the 10, two stated that learning online did not make much difference to their learning compared to their previous face-to-face learning experiences. Another two stated that they would prefer to study face to face, but that if there was a really interesting topic which was only available in online format, they would be willing to take another online course. The largest group, four students, stated that they would not choose to study online, but if it was required in future semesters due to further lockdowns: "It's a pain, but it's not like the end of the world". The final two students were not willing to study online again. Both of these students stated that if learning were to be moved online again in the following semester, they would choose to take a break rather than participate in online learning. In addition, they both asserted that if learning were moved online permanently, they would withdraw from university to avoid that. Overall, a majority of these students disliked studying online, although some were less adamant about this than others.

Eight students' overall reflections focused on motivational differences between learning in the two modes. In particular, there were three notable themes in this data. Two students mentioned that one needs a high level of self-management to succeed in online learning. Two mentioned that most aspects of learning were not compulsory during lockdown, which made it difficult to find motivation to complete them. Another two students found that it is being on campus that motivates them to study in face-to-face contexts. "Being in that kind of environment, where you're surrounded by people that are in the same situation as you, is quite encouraging".

Seven students mentioned specific benefits of face-to-face learning that they would not have realised without the experience of having studied online. The benefits discussed by each student varied considerably. Two mentioned the benefit of building connections with other people in the same field. Other benefits included opportunities to hear others' perspectives on the topics studied, social interaction more generally, more opportunities to ask questions, to develop public speaking skills and even "the sensory experience" of being on campus. However, in addition to these benefits of studying face to face, two students mentioned a benefit of having studied online for 9 weeks: they now know how to study online, and if they were required to do it again, it would be easier for them.

Discussion and conclusion

Overall, instructors employed a range of pedagogical practices to adapt their courses for online teaching. They seemed to be aware of good practice, such as breaking lectures into chunks and showing their faces in lecture videos. Most students received higher grades over the semester than they usually would have. On the other hand, most tended to report learning less from their online courses. Some students reported spending considerable time on each online lecture and some reported doing a larger amount of reading than they usually would. The overall experiences of students were that it was difficult to find and maintain motivation when there was no fixed schedule and nothing was compulsory, it was difficult to avoid being distracted when learning in one's living space rather than having separate physical spaces for studying and living, and it was significantly more difficult to communicate via email and Zoom than it is face to face. Overall, a majority of these learners disliked learning online. However, for most of them it was the tutorials, workshops and laboratories that caused the largest number of difficulties online, and most

would be willing to accept online lectures going forward as long as these more practical aspects of courses could be conducted face-to-face.

The findings support Richardson and North's (2020) finding that although most students spent more time on learning activities online, they found that they came away with less grasp on the course content, finding it more difficult overall to learn online. Indeed, as mentioned by one of the participants in this research, it was perhaps the difficulty in grasping the course content which may have led them to compensate by putting more time into their studies. Spending more time on such activities may go some way towards accounting for the higher grades received. Interestingly, other studies of emergency remote teaching have had similar findings. Almomani et al. (2021) found that students received higher grades during emergency remote teaching, whereas the students felt that they had learnt less than their grades reflected. Similarly, Lobos et al. (2022b, cited in Lobos et al., 2022) found that students expected to receive high grades during emergency remote teaching, but did not expect to achieve learning that warranted those grades. Although the reason is unclear, there seems to be a clear pattern of higher grades corresponding with less learning during emergency remote teaching.

The few students who learnt through synchronous online lectures had positive reflections on this practice compared to asynchronous online lectures. They felt that they developed a relationship with their lecturers and were more easily able to ask questions in this format compared to lecture recordings. This practice is also likely to have helped in several other ways. Firstly, this would help to reduce the amount of time spent on each lecture, as students could not stop, rewind or replay a synchronous lecture. This is also likely to increase students' concentration during lectures and reduce distractions (Kim et al., 2017). In addition, having a fixed lecture time would help some students to maintain motivation, both motivation to actually attend the lectures and possibly motivation to prepare for the lectures by doing readings each week. Synchronous lectures would go some way towards providing the social pressure, the accountability which some students reported helping to regulate their behaviour. However, one student in this study was unable to join Zoom meetings due to technological issues. Thus, synchronous lectures may be a good alternative to face-to-face lectures in the event of further lockdowns, but it would be important to ensure that every student had the necessary technology or offer some alternative arrangement for such students.

Many comments focused on the extent to which students could see the faces of their lecturers and tutors during courses. Both ways in which synchronous interaction was facilitated by lecturers (replacing lectures with discussion sessions and synchronous lectures) were discussed in the most positive light by students. The largest number of courses used recorded lectures in which the lecturer's face was visible, which some students found to be helpful. At the other end of the spectrum, there were three students who reported recordings from previous semesters being used and one student who reported separate audio and lecture slide files, which students had to work through simultaneously. These practices were discussed in a negative light by students. Perhaps the most negative experience of students in this study was a course in which the student did not see the lecturer's nor the tutor's face and did not feel that she knew either of them well enough to approach them when she had a question. These findings are similar to those of Dinmore (2019), who reported that 88% of students found online lectures in which the lecturer's face and slides appeared to be effective for learning. At the other end of the spectrum, Dinmore found that only 23% of students found recordings of on-campus lectures to be effective for learning. Fortunately, in the present study, no students reported any lectures for which slides were not provided.

Generally, the findings of this study support other studies such as that of del Arco et al. (2021) in finding that students who were required to study online, rather than choosing to do so, have more negative experiences than positive ones. Furthermore, rather than becoming more satisfied with online learning or more likely to study online in the future after becoming familiar with this mode of learning (Richardson & North, 2020; Wang et al., 2013), the students had more nuanced views, similar to those in Bosshardt and Chiang (2016).

Apart from having more negative experiences overall, students who are enrolled in full-time face-to-face qualifications also appear to have different needs from those who choose to study online. Many students

choose to study online because of other commitments. Therefore, flexibility is of utmost importance. On the other hand, these full-time students had few other commitments, and the lockdown reduced these commitments even further as most people were not permitted to go to work. Therefore, maintaining a structure similar to face-to-face learning would have been desirable for most of these students, helping them to stay motivated, increase concentration and avoid distractions. The COVID-19 pandemic was unprecedented, and it was logical for educators to turn to the existing literature on online learning to figure out the best course of action. However, findings of research such as this demonstrate just how different emergency remote teaching is from regular online educational offerings and shows that online learning needs to be adapted in such situations, rather than adopted.

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