

## SOUTH KOREAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' VIEWS OF ONLINE LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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**Received:** 16/02/2021 **Accepted:** 22/03/2022

### ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has created many formidable challenges for educational institutions around the world. This case study sought to gain insight into South Korean university students' satisfaction with online learning during the pandemic. It also obtained participant recommendations for improving online learning. Participants included 20 South Korean students studying at a university in central South Korea. Data included open-ended surveys, a focus group, and semi-structured interviews. Most students had mixed feelings in regard to satisfaction with online classes. A salient result is a need for more interaction in online classes. Students also provided a wide range of recommendations to improve online learning. Through these recommendations, university educators and administrators can better optimize online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and after the crisis has dissipated.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, South Korean universities, student satisfaction, benefits of online learning, disadvantages of online learning.

### INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in mass disruptions on a global scale and impacted many aspects of daily life, including educational systems. Nations around the world scrambled to quickly mitigate the impact that COVID-19 had on society and to reduce the number of infections and deaths. As a result of the crisis and apprehension about spreading the virus, many schools and universities around the world determined that online learning would be the best solution (UNESCO, 2020). The sudden spread of the coronavirus on a global scale left minimal time for administrators and educators to develop effective mitigation plans. Many universities were ill-prepared to deal with myriad challenges that arose during the transition to online learning platforms (Daniel, 2020).

At the beginning of the spring semester of 2020, which starts in early March for South Korean universities, administrators began determining the best course of action amidst the impending crisis (Bahk, 2020a). Many universities delayed the start of the semester, and some opted to have online classes for the entire spring term. Other universities took a more gradual approach by extending online learning for a limited period of time so that they could regularly assess the situation during the crisis. Public schools in South Korea also delayed the start of the semester and were instructed at the end of March to employ an online learning system for an indefinite period (Bahk, 2020a). As the semester progressed, some universities stayed online while others took on different approaches with a hybrid method being popular.

In South Korea, many university instructors struggled to utilize online learning platforms including learning management systems, video conferencing platforms, and instant messenger systems (Park, 2020). Moreover, some universities experienced technical challenges as programs ceased to work, servers crashed, and attendance tracking measures failed. University students also complained about the online lecturing systems, and some demanded at least partial tuition be reimbursed (Bahk, 2020c). The Association of Student Councils Network conducted a survey of 12,213 university students in late February, and 83.8% of participants stated that they should obtain a partial refund (as cited in Bahk, 2020c). Students indicated that they were not used to online learning systems and that more measures needed to be taken to assist students with disabilities (Bahk, 2020b). Additionally, students mentioned that certain practical and laboratory classes cannot be effectively offered online.

Regardless of any challenges that online learning presents, it is critical for universities to be proactive in reducing the spread of the novel coronavirus. Since the initial outbreaks, there have been new variants that have led to myriad obstacles (Bollinger & Ray, 2022). As of early 2022, the pandemic continues to present educational challenges and disruptions around the world (Khalil, Humayun, & Jhanjhi, 2021; Reimers, 2022). The future of the novel coronavirus is uncertain, and universities and other educational institutions must proactively implement measures to promote effective learning while protecting the general population. Moreover, online learning programs will likely continue to expand in the post-COVID-19 period. Data from this period can provide much-needed insight into online course development and modification.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The first aim of this study was to gain insight into how South Korean university students describe their satisfaction with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and the second was to obtain input from South Korean university students to improve online classes. Although preliminary data has been released in the media (e.g. Bahk, 2020c) on students' opinions of university and governmental educational response to the COVID-19 pandemic, at the time of data collection, there was a dearth of scholarly research related to student satisfaction with online learning in the South Korean university context as a result of the pandemic. At the time of this writing, there are still limited publications, especially qualitative, that examine South Korean university students' satisfaction with online classes during the pandemic. Furthermore, technology and online learning platforms are constantly evolving, thus necessitating up-to-date research. Universities and individual instructors have also taken different approaches to online learning making it important to examine students' satisfaction with these diverse methods. The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. How do South Korean university students describe their satisfaction with online learning in light of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What recommendations do South Korean university students have to improve online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Student Satisfaction**

Satisfaction is a feeling or sense of having needs or desires fulfilled (Saif, 2014). Universities often implement evaluative measures to ensure that student satisfaction is achieved (DeShields Jr. et al., 2005). At the

tertiary level, student satisfaction encompasses a wide range of dimensions. From an academic perspective, satisfaction can be achieved through positive university experiences and superior services and amenities (Weerasinghe et al., 2017). Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006) discuss the specific role of personal and institutional factors in promoting student satisfaction. Personal factors include demographics, employment background, preferred learning styles, and student grades. Institutional factors comprise instructional quality, perceptions of feedback, attaining academic goals and objectives, and suitable teaching styles. Wilkins and Balakrishnan (2013) provide a thorough list of criteria that influence student satisfaction including the quality of educators, university facilities, technology integration in the classroom, feedback quality, learning resource availability, library services and resources, and student-instructor relationships. Numerous other factors also influence student satisfaction including having ample opportunities for student development, the climate of the campus, teaching methodology, and having flexible academic programs and courses that meet the needs of diverse students (Douglas et al., 2006).

### **Online Learning Challenges**

Although online learning has played a major role in many universities around the world over the last few decades, many were not adequately prepared to deal with the challenges of online learning that arose as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Bahk, 2020b). Even in the best of circumstances, online learning can present myriad challenges, but having to quickly implement an online learning system during the pandemic was especially problematic for many universities. Prior to the pandemic, there were numerous studies (e.g. Halim & Hashim 2019; Varshneya, 2017) conducted on the challenges and limitations of online learning. These barriers may likely have been exacerbated during the pandemic since some instructors had no experience or limited experience teaching online, and many students were also unfamiliar with online learning platforms and expectations.

Research has highlighted primary deficits of online learning, which makes it imperative for educators and administrators to examine the literature already available to reduce problems that are likely to occur. Online activities can result in students becoming distracted, resulting in less interest or focus on the class lesson (Melor et al., 2012). Technical issues can be particularly cumbersome in online learning environments (Halim & Hashim, 2019). Furthermore, students have different learning styles and needs, which can also create a dilemma in online learning since many activities and lessons use a one size fits all approach (Gillett-Swan, 2017). In addition, Gillett-Swan (2017) stresses that there may be an increased workload for instructors, especially for those who are not accustomed to online teaching. In the nascent stages of online learning, many students and faculty members were not familiar with the online learning platforms, which aligns with pre-COVID-19 research that discusses a wide array of technical issues that obstruct online learning (e. g. Varshneya, 2017). There are certainly other factors that impact the success of online learning, and student satisfaction can be hampered if course objectives and goals are not met. A significant shortfall of online learning is the elimination of authentic face-to-face interaction, which is present in traditional classrooms (Akkoyunlu & Soylyu, 2006). Some universities may have had fewer challenges in implementing an online learning system since they already had online, blended/hybrid, or flipped learning classes in place.

### **Benefits of Online Learning**

There are various studies (e.g. Daniel et al., 2016; Roach & Lemasters, 2006; Strong et al., 2012) that have reported the benefits of online learning. Online learning is certainly not without its challenges, but research also clearly highlights numerous benefits including more diverse communication options, allowing learners to work at their own pace, and providing access to online tools and resources to aid in academic achievement (Lu & Chiou, 2010). Additionally, it provides opportunities for group work and can be a more flexible way of studying, particularly for people with substantial family or work responsibilities. The wide range of benefits includes potential improvements in pedagogy, instruction, and curriculum design (Wang & Vasquez, 2012). Online learning also affords more versatility in allowing students and faculty the ability to learn at any time and location (Varshneya, 2017). Moreover, students can have greater opportunities to communicate and engage with classmates and build self-confidence (Halim & Hashim, 2019). Implementing a wide range

of activities that use various forms of multimedia can increase satisfaction and improve the overall learning experience online (Pazilah et al., 2019). Online learning programs can also be cost-effective for universities; nevertheless, educators and administrators must ensure that the courses are rigorous and fulfill academic objectives and goals.

Through online teaching, instructors can also more carefully foster a learning environment that meets the specific needs of diverse learners (Pourhossein Gilakjani, 2014). The younger generation is known for being more technologically proficient, and online learning can provide several benefits for academic development (Melor et al., 2012). Online learning presents opportunities for faculty and students alike. Certainly, many challenges need to be addressed, and technology is not without faults. However, online learning affords many educational benefits, and during a major local, national, or international crisis, universities may need to turn to online learning to ensure that students are fulfilling their academic goals. In addition, during a crisis, students may need to take on additional family or work-related responsibilities that they may not normally have. Asynchronous learning activities in particular can be beneficial for learners to complete at their own pace without having to worry about time restrictions.

### **Online Learning Satisfaction**

In pre-COVID 19 studies in South Korea, students reported benefits of online learning in terms of cost, saving time, and improved learning benefits (Hwang et al., 2010). A study by Han et al. (2013) found that South Korean university students' satisfaction with online learning was average but not high. However, more recent, nationwide data is critical for assessing the overall state of online learning, especially during the pandemic since online learning was the norm in most South Korean universities. Early data obtained in March and April of 2020 (e.g. Bahk, 2020b; Bahk, 2020c) indicate difficulty with ensuring adequate student satisfaction for many South Korean universities since complaints were continuously mounting early in the spring semester. Universities had to quickly develop online learning programs, make adaptations as needed, and obtain faculty and student feedback to promote a quality learning environment for the entire duration of the semester.

Studies have been conducted on online learning satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lederman (2020) found that the number of students (n=1000) highly satisfied with online learning decreased significantly from 51% prior to COVID to 19% during the pandemic. Additionally, three-fifths of teachers reported having challenges with student interaction in online courses during the pandemic. Early pandemic research has indicated that the success and effectiveness of online learning depend heavily on course content and design as well as engagement between students and instructors (Demuyakor, 2020). Furthermore, although many students are supportive of online learning, some have had technical difficulties that inhibited successful learning. Another major problem that has emerged is that many instructors do not have online teaching experience (Author citation; Bao, 2020). Instructors play a significant role in ensuring student satisfaction and quality learning through active discussions with students, focusing on the needs of learners, and creating effective assignments (Bao, 2020). A study at an Indian university found that online learning was viewed unfavorably in comparison to face-to-face classes, especially when examining interaction, presence, quality, and general satisfaction (Nambiar, 2020). In a large-scale study conducted with 30,383 students in 62 studies, results indicate that students are most satisfied with instructor support and universities' public relations (Aristovnik et al., 2020). However, there are issues that negatively impact satisfaction including students' professional and academic plans as well as "boredom, anxiety, and frustration" (Aristovnik et al., 2020, p. 1). Examining factors pertaining to student satisfaction in online courses during the COVID-19 pandemic is essential for ensuring students' academic needs are met.

In South Korea, studies have emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic that examine student satisfaction in online classes. Choi, Kim, and Robb (2020) found that in online classes focused on tourism and hospitality, satisfaction was improved through better relationships between students and instructors. Additionally, having more diversity in course activities and lessons is crucial for student satisfaction. Babar (2020) examined satisfaction among South Korean undergraduate students and found that most students had taken online classes for the first time and that student satisfaction was largely determined by interaction,

student motivation, the structure of the course, and instructor assistance and knowledge. A study by Lee (2020) found that higher interaction, including both student and instructor presence, in online classes led to increased student satisfaction in online classes for dental hygiene students. A study conducted in late 2020 found that South Korean university students (n=313) who are satisfied with online learning and find it to be useful also report a stronger acceptance of technology (Han & Sa, 2021). Another South Korean study conducted in May and June of 2021 reported that professor rapport and having sufficient support in place improves students' (n=207) satisfaction in online classes. A study by Jung and Shin (2021) found that the platform quality, course content quality, and delivery quality had a positive impact on students' (n=182) satisfaction in online classes in South Korea. Results provide much-needed insight into deficits and strengths that should be considered when developing online learning courses. These studies will also be beneficial in the post-pandemic period when educators and administrators determine how to implement or modify online or blended learning courses.

## METHOD

This case study was conducted at a mid-sized university in central South Korea during the spring semester of 2020 when the COVID-19 was starting to spread rapidly. A case study is a qualitative approach that seeks to address a problem in a single setting (Creswell, 2007). Case studies comprise varying forms of data including interviews, focus groups, observations, and records (Yin, 2003). Participants in this study included 20 South Korean university students who were majoring in English language and literature. Participants were obtained through convenience and purposive sampling. Prior to the pandemic, the university offered online classes that students could take as electives, but these classes were not considered the norm. Face-to-face classes had been the dominant form of education in the pre-COVID period. During the spring semester of 2020, most of the courses at the university were conducted through WebEx, since it was available for free. Some instructors used the Zoom teleconferencing program to conduct classes but paid for the subscription. At the beginning of the semester, instructors were authorized to upload video lessons, but as the semester progressed, live classes were required. The researchers have expertise in educational technology and have been researching this field prior to the pandemic. They also have extensive experience teaching at the university level.

Due to the need for social distancing, the data were collected online and over the telephone. First, 20 students (11 males and 9 females) completed an open-ended survey (See Appendix A) through the university learning management system. These questions pertained to students' satisfaction with online learning. The questions also sought to obtain recommendations to improve online learning. A focus group was conducted with participants to further expand on these responses and gain more insight into the participants' views. The focus group was conducted through the Zoom teleconferencing program and lasted about 25 minutes. The session was longer, but part of the time was spent asking questions that were not directly related to the research. There were six participants (4 males and 2 females) who were obtained through purposive and convenience sampling. Zoom has been evaluated as a tool for conducting qualitative and mixed-method research studies. Archibald et al. (2019) found that Zoom research study participants were highly satisfied with their interview experience, and only a few had technical problems. Semi-structured interviews were conducted over the telephone with nine students (7 males and 2 females). Interviews averaged between 10 and 15 minutes. These interviews expanded on responses in the open-ended survey. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Case studies provide "description, analysis, and naturalistic summaries" of primary themes that emerged from the case (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 382). The researchers examined common themes that surfaced from the open-ended survey, focus group, and semi-structured telephone interviews. They sought to gain a more holistic view of the case by examining patterns, categorizing major topics, statements, and quotations that were extrapolated from the data. Finally, the researchers developed specific codes based on the dominant themes. Codes were checked for duplication, and member checking was conducted with three (Mirae, Jihee, and Kangmin) of the more vocal participants.

## FINDINGS

### Examining Satisfaction: Students' Views of Online Learning

#### Balanced Views

In terms of satisfaction, students had balanced views of online education, reporting moderate satisfaction toward online learning. Most students (n=16) provided mixed responses regarding their satisfaction with online learning. They discussed their frustrations with online classes but also understand the need for and benefits of online classes. None of the participants were completely satisfied with online learning. Various examples are provided, which highlight some of the benefits and disadvantages of online learning. Furthermore, in the open-ended survey, students indicated that they had a moderate amount of satisfaction toward online learning. Students provided detailed responses regarding their mixed feelings toward online learning. Jiyoo stated, *"I'm worried because I'm not used to online classes, but I think this is the best way to do it right now."* Siwoo had varying views and used the words *"ashamed," "nervous,"* and *"excited"* to describe his feelings about online learning. He felt a little worried about interacting with people online but was excited about this new experience. Seoyun said, *"Although online classes are convenient because I commute to school, online classes feel completely different from learning in person."* Another example discussed by Hajoon is,

*There are obvious merits of online learning. We don't have to go to class, and we can take a class anytime. Nonetheless, I prefer offline classes. We are not familiar with online classes. Only some professors are familiar with it, which makes it hard to enjoy it.*

Chulsu provided a more detailed response on the pros and cons of online learning. He stated that he feels very uncomfortable with online learning, but there are certain advantages, too. He expanded on this:

*It requires much more focus to listen to the professors' lectures. But there are some comfort points. Because I don't have to prepare to go to school, and I just have to turn on my laptop in the morning. This is convenient, but online lectures are more inconvenient for me overall. I'm kind of tired from being at home all day too. It is a little depressing.*

Other problems mentioned include the embarrassment of showing faces on webcams (n=4), feeling awkward studying online (n=3), requiring synchronous lessons (n=3), and having various technical issues with the learning management system and video conferencing programs (n=6). Benefits of online learning discussed include saving time (n=6), general convenience (n=10), and reducing the spread of the coronavirus (n=8). In terms of satisfaction with online learning, there were mixed results, which centered on both pros and cons of the online learning experience.

#### Inferior Education

Three students discussed the inferiority of online education, which negatively impacted their satisfaction with online learning. Seunghyeon expressed disappointment about online education. He said, *"Because I really love having a real class, I felt really disappointed when I got a message from the university."* He also stated that there is plenty of information that he can learn online for free. *"I am attending university to experience reality. If I want to get a piece of information online, I can just watch YouTube videos."* Mirae understands the need for online classes but says that there should be some type of quality control, especially if tuition is not reduced. She emphasized that *"Korean students and professors are not very familiar with the system and the fact that the system hasn't been tested and proven yet, might cause lower quality of class with less productivity."* Sooah reiterated this by stating that online lectures are a good idea as long as assignments and assessments are consistent with face-to-face classes, but she was worried about the quality. Although this was not a dominant theme, several students (n=3) felt that online learning was lacking in terms of quality; furthermore, students (n=2) stated that there were major gaps in terms of preparation and quality in their online classes with some classes being more engaging and effective than others.

#### Communication Barriers

Five students discussed communication barriers in the online classroom, leading to a reduction in their satisfaction in the online classroom setting. Kangmin said it is very difficult to have communication in

online classes, but he understands the necessity of online learning. Deoksu also discussed his disinterest in online classes because of a lack of face-to-face communication. He mentioned that he cannot concentrate well in class. These thoughts were also shared by Jaeseop who wants to have real communication since he is majoring in English, and using a webcam is not practical. Some students' perceptions were more negative. For example, Jinho emphasized that he is incredibly bored because he just sits in front of the computer all day and does not communicate with people in real life. Jihoon expressed similar views by discussing the benefits of having better communication on campus, but he likes the convenience of studying at home. These students missed the real-life interactions that they were accustomed to in face-to-face classes. Furthermore, as English majors they expected more chances to engage in authentic conversations and activities with their peers and instructors.

### Negative Views

Four respondents (Deoksu, Jaeseop, Jinho, and Seunghyeon) only discussed negative views and were not satisfied with online learning citing various reasons including boredom, communication issues, lack of realistic learning, reduced quality, and having less focus in online lectures. For example, Deoksu stated,

*I feel so bored being at home all day and logging into my lectures. I really miss being on campus and interacting with professors and students face to face. I feel like I am wasting my money. Some professors' classes are much better than others, especially with live classes. Just making videos is not real teaching though.*

Jinho stated that online classes are not very interactive and he can easily learn from free online videos. He was disappointed that some professors seemed to do a minimal amount of work and did not take the time to get input from students. Jaeseop and Seunghyeon provided similar examples about the frustrations that they had with online learning. Although the majority of participants had mixed views of online learning, four were not pleased with the online learning environment and only discussed negative points about the experience.

### Improving Online Learning

Students provided several recommendations for improving online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. An emphasis was placed on the importance of live learning as well as interaction and ensuring that professors and universities are fully prepared. Sooah stated that universities should “*proceed with online lectures in real-time through remote learning programs.*” She expanded on this by saying, “*Online classes are a burden to both professors and students. Professors should spend more time preparing the class. The students can't feel the heat of the real classes, so students can feel bored.*”

Other examples reiterated the need for real-time lectures. Mirae stated,

*I think some professors are working really hard to improve classes, but some are still doing the same things that are frustrating to students. Having real-time lectures using Zoom is more beneficial than Webex lectures. In Zoom, we can have breakout room discussions. Most professors are not using Zoom though.*

Jihee said that simply lecturing is not an effective way to learn. She emphasized that:

*In regular classes on campus, students get bored by listening to long lectures. These long lectures are also boring online. When students watch pre-recorded lectures, they often just let the video play to show that they watched the lecture. Most students are not even really listening to the lectures. Having some type of authentic real-time interaction is important.*

Other examples were discussed by students. Kangmin mentioned that some students feel like professors are giving too many assignments to compensate for the lack of face-to-face instruction, which is particularly burdensome. He also mentioned spending more time on online class assignments in comparison to face-to-face classes. Areum stated, “*I think we should always be prepared for this situation (a crisis). Our university is not used to online lectures because this happened for the first time. I think it is a good way to prepare for this opportunity.*” It is vital for universities to have effective mitigation plans in place to deal with potential crises and to implement more effective online learning programs in future semesters if needed. Students provided

a wide range of practical methods for improving online instruction including requiring real-time classes (n=9), using Zoom instead of WebEx since breakout rooms could be used (n=3), having more virtual office hours for problems (n=2), and improving technical support (n=4). The most salient result was the need for real-time lectures that foster a sense of community and engagement. However, three students stated that synchronous lessons were a burden.

## DISCUSSION

Online learning programs were quickly implemented at many universities around the world as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, some universities were not adequately prepared for the challenges that quickly surfaced. Research question one aimed to examine how South Korean university students describe their views of online learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most students (n=16) had balanced views about online classes, expressing a moderate amount of satisfaction with online classes. There was a wide range of balanced views that highlighted both pros and cons of online learning. The responses included some of the same concepts that were addressed in the literature on the benefits and disadvantages of online learning. These mixed responses largely align with recent COVID-19 era studies, which have reported both positive and negative factors that impact student satisfaction in online classes.

Some of the negative points about online learning included having to use webcams, feeling awkward, requiring synchronous lessons, and having technical problems. Students also discussed the inferiority of online learning and communication barriers. Four students only mentioned negative points and highlighted boredom, communication problems, a lack of realistic learning, reduced quality, and having problems focusing during class. Some of these problems have been addressed in germane studies on the challenges of online learning. Melor et al. (2012) found that online activities can result in student distraction. Varshneya (2017) examined the barriers of technological problems in online education. In a COVID-19 era study, Demuyakor (2020) discussed technical issues that impacted student learning. These problems may have been a more significant problem earlier in the semester, especially for students who were not familiar with online learning. Since this study was conducted early in the semester, and many of the students may not have been familiar with online learning, students may have reported more negative views. In the early stages of the COVID-19 educational response, many challenges and barriers were expected (Lederman, 2020). Nevertheless, it is vital for universities to prepare for a better outcome and try to proactively address potential problems early on.

Positive aspects discussed by the students (n=16) with balanced views include saving time, convenience, and reducing the spread of coronavirus. With the exception of the latter point, these benefits have been thoroughly documented in research (e.g. Lu & Chiou, 2010; Varshneya, 2017). The flexibility of online learning gives students the opportunity to study in various locations and at their own time, especially with asynchronous activities. Daniel (2020) states that having asynchronous activities gives students and instructors more flexibility. At the beginning of the semester, the university did not require live classes, but this policy changed. This can be viewed as a pro or con depending on individual perspectives. Having live classes provided some benefits and may have made the classroom environment seem more authentic; however, it may have been burdensome for both students and teachers who would prefer more flexibility. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, some online classes only consisted of asynchronous activities and did not require live interaction. There are a wide array of other benefits addressed in the literature that were not discussed by the students including diversity in pedagogy, curriculum, and activities, access to a greater range of resources, having a greater focus on diverse learning styles, and providing a greater range of communication tools (e.g. Daniel et al., 2016; Halim & Hashim 2019; Lu & Chiou, 2010). Examining the students' perceptions as the semester progresses or at the end of the semester may result in additional responses; conversely, students may identify additional weaknesses after having more exposure to online learning.

Akkoyunlu and Soylu (2006) discussed the lack of face-to-face interaction in online learning that can inhibit student satisfaction. A dominant theme in COVID-19 studies that examined student satisfaction is the importance of interaction and presence (e.g. Aristovnik et al., 2020; Bao, 2020; Demuyakor, 2020). Studies (e.g. Babar, 2020; Choi et al., 2020; Lee, 2020) in the South Korean context also highlighted the need for interaction for improving student satisfaction. This was a major limitation of online learning mentioned by



students in the study who wanted more authentic communication opportunities. There was also concern about being able to focus. This is documented in Melor et al.'s (2012) research, which found that students lose interest in online classes and may have difficulties following online lessons. Another South Korean study conducted in May and June of 2021 reported that professor rapport and having sufficient support in place improves students' (n=207) satisfaction in online classes. Although this study did not specifically examine rapport nor did this emerge directly in the results, students did highlight the importance of interaction in the online setting. Shin (2021) found that learning platform, course content quality, and delivery quality all played a critical role in students' satisfaction. In this study, students provided insight into their experiences with online learning, which includes examples related to delivery, content, and involvement.

Aristovnik et al.'s (2020) study during the COVID-19 era indicated that boredom and frustration can lead to problems with student satisfaction. Some of these experiences and concerns relate to the preliminary data released in the media that highlighted varying issues that impacted student satisfaction (Bahk, 2020c), but initial data tended to highlight technical problems whereas participants in this study emphasized a larger range of problems. Examples of boredom and frustration were discussed including having to watch videos instead of participating in live lectures and not having enough interaction. This could be attributed to having already experienced several weeks of online learning and that most of the technical issues or glitches had already been resolved. The future is unknown and the pandemic will likely continue to impact education systems across the world. Educators should aim to implement best practices in online education to foster a supportive and engaging learning environment that is centered on student needs.

Students reported mixed views in terms of satisfaction with online learning. To improve the deficits, it is critical for educators and administrators to regularly seek input from students to ensure academic achievement and student satisfaction. According to Daniel (2020), universities will continuously learn from this period and should determine which aspects of e-learning have been most beneficial. Educators need to provide quality feedback, ample learning resources, and strive to improve relationships with students (Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013). Educators and administrators should focus on an effective holistic approach to online learning that promotes student satisfaction through quality content, delivery, and interaction.

## CONCLUSION

As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, many universities scrambled to put together an online learning plan in a short period of time. Students had a moderate level of satisfaction in terms of online learning. Ideally, in future classes that are conducted online, instructors and administrators will examine the deficits of previous semesters that need to be addressed to ensure student satisfaction and that learning objectives are being met. Furthermore, students provided several practical recommendations for improving online learning that can be implemented in future classes during the pandemic and even during normal circumstances. It is critical that institutions proactively implement measures to prepare for potential crises that may occur (de Geus, 1988). According to Rieley (1997), "We need to change our mental models of what is and what is not; we need to learn how to better plan for the future; we need to understand what our futures might be" (p. 1). There are various scenarios that universities need to prepare for, and traditional forms of education may not be effective in future crises. Even prior to the pandemic, online learning was becoming more normalized in many parts of the world. Universities can use the research from this period to strengthen post-COVID-19 online and hybrid learning courses.

There are a wide range of practical implications that educators and administrators can consider when designing and adapting online courses. The future of COVID-19 impact is unpredictable, and it is likely that many universities will continue with online or hybrid classes in the future. It is critical for educational institutions to examine the scholarly literature available to determine the best course of action for future classes. Student satisfaction is paramount in designing and delivering online courses. This study provides insight into South Korean students' perceptions of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and includes practical recommendations for improvements that can easily be made without significant adjustments. A dominant factor emphasized by students is the need for adequate interaction in online classes. Examining effective ways to improve online interaction is critical, especially in classes that focus heavily on communication.

Prior to the pandemic, online learning was gaining traction, but through the pandemic and the forced transition to online learning, myriad studies have been published on online learning. Educators, administrators, and stakeholders should begin to synthesize this recent data and best determine how to use the information gleaned to make more informed data-driven decisions to positively impact technology integration in schools. In analyzing the data, it is critical to examine the timing of data collection, setting, context, the background of students and instructors, course content, and other significant factors when making important decisions related to technology use in the classroom.

This study was limited to one university in South Korea. It would have been beneficial to examine students' perceptions at other universities. However, due to the timely nature of this study, it was essential to gather data quickly. This study was also limited to students majoring in the English language. Although they took classes outside of the department, their experiences and perceptions may be limited to mostly English department classes. Additionally, students may have been inclined to discuss what they deemed as socially acceptable answers, which may not have aligned with their actual views. It would have also been beneficial to gather data from other classes at the university or other universities in South Korea. Future research can examine more specific components of online learning. This study was conducted in the early stages of the pandemic, and gaining more insight into specific aspects of remote learning would be beneficial. A dominant theme in this study was the importance of interaction. Future studies can examine interaction at the student-student level and student-faculty level using various online learning management systems and videoconferencing platforms.

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## APPENDIX A

### Open-Ended Survey Questions

Note: These questions were expanded on during the focus group and semi-structured telephone interviews.

1. How do you feel about your online learning experience?
2. How satisfied are you with online learning?
3. How satisfied are you with course interaction in your online classes?
4. How satisfied are you with course content in your online classes?
5. How satisfied are you with course delivery in your online classes?
6. How satisfied are you with your overall learning experiences in online classes?
7. Based on your experiences, what have been some benefits of online learning?
8. Based on your experiences, what have been some disadvantages of online learning?
9. What recommendations do you have to improve online learning?
10. Do you have any other thoughts you want to share related to your online learning experience?