The Impact of Online Learning on Post-Secondary Students in Canada Post-COVID-19: A Case Study on Hospitality and Tourism Students

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Abstract

In the early weeks of 2020, COVID-19 was declared as a global pandemic. This led to a series of life-changing events for most industries as governments worldwide were forced to mandate severe measures aiming to control the spread of the rampant virus. To most educational institutions, these restrictions triggered off shifting most of their course delivery to online learning. The purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of shifting course delivery, in post-secondary Hospitality Management education, from in-person learning to online learning, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, on students' learning experience. The study adopted a case-study methodology in a Hospitality post-secondary school in Canada. The study found that factors such as online learning format, course load, technology, communication, and tuition fees, all influence the overall online learning experience for students.

Keywords: COVID-19, Post-Secondary institutions, online learning, Hospitality, and Tourism.

Introduction

The entire world started 2020 with a grave and life-changing problem as COVID-19 was declared as a global pandemic (Holshue *et al.,* 2020). All industries across the globe were affected by this crisis, as governments of all nations worldwide executed severe measures aiming to control the spread of the pandemic. As the number of cases was phenomenally increasing, governments restrictions reached the point of lockdowns. Post-secondary institutions were not excluded as they were all instructed either to close or to shift to online learning (Bryson & Andres, 2020). Although several studies have highlighted the impact of online learning on students learning experience, very limited literature has accentuated its impact in a Hospitality Management education context. The researchers emphasize that the literature needs more attention to that context due to the peculiarity of hospitality management programs and the characteristics of their courses that constitute a mixture of theoretical and practical content.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of shifting course delivery, in post-secondary Hospitality Management education, from in-person learning to online learning, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, on students' learning experience. The study aims to explore how post-secondary institutions approach synchronous and asynchronous teaching, from a student perspective; and how both approaches affect students' learning experience. A single case-study approach was adopted in this study.

This case study was conducted in a Hospitality post-secondary school in Canada. This study is the first empirical case study in North America that focuses on the impact of the pandemic-related shift to online education on the learning experience of post-secondary Hospitality and Tourism Management students. It contributes to the literature, Methodology, and practice of Hospitality and Tourism Management education.

Review of Literature

The year 2020 prompted many changes in many industries around the world. Most of the educational institutions had to undergo a massive shift in their program delivery in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic (Küsel, Martin, & Markic, 2020). As a result of government restrictions in numerous countries, particularly North America, post-secondary institutions had to shift their course delivery from the traditional face-to-face (in-person) delivery to online delivery (Baloran, 2020; Bird, Castleman, & Lohner, 2020; Chung, Subramaniam, & Dass, 2020; Liu e*t al.,* 2020; Patricia, 2020). The outbreak also resulted in widespread school shutdowns, and many schools have opted for education using online learning platforms (Clark, Nong, Zhu, & Zhu, 2020). In the case of Hospitality and Tourism Management programs, shifting to online delivery could be complicated since such programs offer courses that include lab content. Online delivery of those courses, may be challenging to both students and professors.

In North American countries, as well as many other countries in the world, online learning wasn't a newly introduced approach in education. Before the pandemic hit, online learning was the fastest-growing segment in North American higher education and was increasingly adopted in public and private not-for-profit institutions (Paulsen & McCormick, 2020). In Canadian higher education institutions, most online programs offered before the COVID-19 outbreak were blended, not fully online (Colley *et al.,* 2019). However, after the COVID-19 hit, the situation may not be the same. Having a fully online learning experience, without any physical interaction between students and their professors, is potentially more problematic and challenging for students. Let alone, the fact that international students who reside outside of Canada, and cannot enter the country due to the shutdown of the Canadian embassies around the world, may also be severely affected from the delivery of a fully online program.

Recently, online learning was increasingly valued by working professionals who saw it as the most convenient approach to obtain postgraduate qualification while employed, which is referred to in many schools as continuing education (Aitken, 2020; Colley *et al.,* 2019). It was also seen as an essential tool that helps students to empower their learning experiences and to prepare them for the global workforce (Alhanash & Almalki, 2020). Another value of online learning is that it was considered a suitable means that provides opportunities to adapt learning experiences in real-time (Bryson & Andres, 2020). Research also found that student engagement with video lectures, self-assessment, social tools, and additional videos was related to the duration of student usage of online platforms (Kim, Lee, Leite, & Huggins-Manley, 2020). Even though online learning has been considered worthwhile for different categories of students in the last few years, it's currently being delivered in a different environment. Industry professionals were affected by the pandemic hit. Many of them lost their jobs and became financially challenged.

This was also the case for international students who were dependent on their part-time jobs in order to fund their tuition. Again, this may have certain implications on the learning experience of students.

In the light of the COVID-19 outbreak, the research found different outcomes to online learning in educational institutions around the world. For instance, some research found that students were ready for a shift towards online learning; although the majority of students were found to be more inclined to prefer face-to-face learning (Baloran, 2020; Chung et al., 2020; Patricia, 2020). In addition, research in educational institutions in other countries such as China found that the shift to online learning was gauged to be more beneficial to substandard students more than it was for above-average ones (Clark et al., 2020). However, other researchers reported that online learning led to a decrease in course completion rates driven by increases in both course withdrawal and failure (Bird *et al.,* 2020). Other research also highlighted that online learners reported lower levels of environment support, collaborative learning, and faculty interaction when compared to face-to-face learners (Paulsen & McCormick, 2020). None of the previous studies were conducted in any educational institutions that offer Hospitality and Tourism Management programs, particularly in North America.

In addition to the outcomes of online learning, and despite its recognized value, the shift to online learning was not lacking challenges for students. The major challenges reported among online learners were having serious psychological and mental health issues and anxiety (Baloran, 2020; Husky, Kovess-Masfety, & Swendsen, 2020; Son, Hegde, Smith, Wang, & Sasangohar, 2020; Sundarasen et al., 2020), and feeling of vulnerability (Sahu, 2020), particularly among female students (Cao *et al.,* 2020; García-Álvarez *et al.,* 2020; Islam, Barna, Raihan, Khan, & Hossain, 2020; Zheng, Goh, & Wen, 2020).

In addition to psychological and mental health issues, students were also found to be facing other difficulties such as poor internet connectivity (Chung *et al.,* 2020), lack of interaction and communication with the professor, and virtual classmates (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Friedman, 2020). Research also found that students, in an online learning environment, were disengaged from the virtual classroom (Friedman, 2020). Online learning also had several academic challenges for students as they reported a lack of sufficient time to complete their tasks, and a lack of understanding of their task instructions (Friedman, 2020).

Another aspect of online learning that may have implications on the student online learning experience, is the online learning format. As previously mentioned, post-secondary institutions in North America delivered online learning was in a blended approach (both synchronously and asynchronously). The synchronous format involves delivering virtual classes where students interact live with their professor(s) as well as with each other. It may also involve the professor sharing a presentation (both verbal and visual) with the students. The asynchronous format involves the professor pre-recording their presentations, posting them on the online learning platform, and interacting with students via direct messaging or emails. Studies have reported that students prefer the asynchronous format of online learning (Chung *et al.,* 2020). Although this format may

be suitable for international students who reside outside of Canada, this may not be convenient for local ones who require more interaction.

Higher education institutions can improve the online learning experience of their students mainly by reducing/eliminating the challenges. Post-secondary school professors need more training that would reinforce their online teaching skills (Chung *et al.,* 2020). Institutions would improve the online learning experience by investing more in providing technical support to both students and professors (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). They should also invest in improving their infrastructure in the area of information technology (Chung *et al.,* 2020; Küsel *et al.,* 2020). In addition, professors would need to allow more flexibility in terms of course assignment deadlines, and other course outline mandates (Aitken, 2020).

Methodology

The purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of shifting course delivery, in post-secondary Hospitality and Tourism Management education, from in-person learning to online learning, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, on students' learning experience. The study aims to explore how post-secondary institutions approach synchronous and asynchronous teaching, from a student perspective; and how both approaches affect students' learning experience.

Qualitative research

Qualitative research focuses on the description of context and often emerges from situated problems in the field. It is based on the use of an inductive approach that constitutes observing specific interactions; conceptualizing general patterns from these observations; making tentative claims; and drawing conclusions that build theory (Tracy, 2019).

Case study

A case study approach was adopted in this research due to two reasons. First, the study is seeking to explain a contemporary circumstance. Second, the study objective required an extensive and "in-depth" description of a social phenomenon (Yin, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the world. Consequently, all industries had to adapt to new norms to survive. Education institutions had to shift the delivery of their courses to an online delivery which has affected students' learning experience. The adoption of a case study approach in this research was essential as it helps the researcher explain that impact extensively.

This case study was conducted in a Hospitality and Tourism Management post-secondary school in Canada as part of a project that involves other research papers. This study is the first empirical study in North America that focuses on exploring the issues that post-secondary students face in post-COVID-19 online learning by drawing the impact of asynchronous online learning models.

Hospitality and Tourism Management post-secondary institutions in North America deliver multiple programs ranging from one-year certificates, two-year diplomas, four-year degree programs, and post-graduate certificates. The programs offered in the case institution involve the delivery of courses that constitute lab content. During the data collection process, all the courses in that institution were being delivered fully online.

Sampling
Post-secondary students of Hospitality and Tourism Management participated in this study. The researchers used purposeful sampling by purposefully choosing data that fit the parameters of the project's research questions, goals, and purposes. The researchers also targeted a maximum variation sample by accessing a wide range of data or participants who will represent wide variations of the phenomena under study (Tracy, 2019). Students from all programs and semesters were targeted in this study to ensure the inclusion of usually marginalized data.

Data collection and analysis
Case study research can employ various data-collection tools, including interviews and document analysis (Daymon & Holloway, 2010; Dooley, 2002; Tracy, 2019). Qualitative interviewing is referred to as in-depth non-standardized, nondirective, unstructured, and open-ended interviewing (Daymon & Holloway, 2010; Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). Qualitative interviews provide opportunities for mutual discovery, understanding, reflection, and explanation. They shed the light on subjectively lived experiences and viewpoints from the perspective of respondents (Tracy, 2019). Interviews represent one of the most important sources of case study evidence. They help researchers by suggesting explanations of key events, as well as the insights reflecting participants' perspectives, in this case, study: Students (Yin, 2018).
The researchers conducted an unstructured interview utilizing a questionnaire that was sent to the participants (students) in advance. Students were allowed to prepare their answers before the actual interview, which was conducted one-on-one in a virtual setting. Students were allowed to express themselves without any direction or involvement from the interviewers. The average duration of each interview was about 15-20 minutes. A generic email was sent to 250 full-time students in a post-secondary institution in Canada. The email was targeting Diploma, certificate, and degree students. Part-time students (i.e. Continuing Education students) were excluded from the study. The response rate was 78% (195 students agreed to participate). Volunteering interviewers conducted the interviews with the students via Microsoft Teams. All interviews were recorded with prior consent from the interviewees. Document analysis was also utilized in this study. Documents are useful in qualitative research due to their low cost, ease of access, and endurance over time (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). This study utilized academic plans and course outlines that were shared with the researchers, with prior consent from the Academic departments.
To analyze the data, the researchers used Computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) as it provides options for organizing, managing, coding, sorting,

and reconfiguring transcribed data (Tracy, 2019). All data were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo software. The researchers also developed typologies as means of analyzing the collected data. Based on this strategy, the impact of online learning on students' learning experience was categorized and broken down into multiple elements.

Verification

In qualitative research, verification refers to the mechanisms used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to ensuring reliability and validity and, thus, the quality of the research design (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Research design represents a logical set of statements; hence, researchers can judge the quality of their research design according to certain logical tests (Yin, 2018). This study utilized three tests to ensure the quality of the research design. A Construct validity test was conducted to help identify correct measures for the concepts being studied (Yin, 2018). It requires the researchers to select the correct tool for the concepts being studied (Dooley, 2002). An External validity test was conducted to help demonstrate how the findings can be generalized (Yin, 2018). The more individuals being interviewed, the more and variable observations can be made, yielding the same results, which enhances external validity (Dooley, 2002). A Reliability test was conducted to ensure that the data collection procedures are repeatable, with the same results (Yin, 2018).

Results and Discussion:

The purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of shifting course delivery, in post-secondary education, from in-person learning to online learning, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, on students' learning experience. The study utilized document analysis, and qualitative interviewing, and document analysis to collect data that help achieve the aim of the study. The researchers were able to obtain documents that helped achieve the objective of the study. These documents include academic plans and course outlines.

Academic plans showed highlighted an issue that may be strongly related to students' learning experience. Due to the pandemic, all educational institutions had to shift to a contingency approach in their academic planning. Academic departments were forced to reduce the dependence on part-time professors, and maximize the hours for full-time professors.

This approach led to condensing the course delivery, and subsequently, increase the class sizes. For example, based on Academic plans of pre-COVID-19 semesters involving an in-person course delivery environment, a typical course delivered to a cohort of 120 students, would require that the cohort would be divided into 4 classes (30 students each). This is mainly related to the learning experience, and classroom capacity requirements. However, Academic plans of post-COVID-19 semesters show that class sizes were condensed to sections of 60 students per class, to accommodate the contingency of relying mainly on full-time professors.

Course outlines helped the researchers explore how professors were adjusting the assessments and activities to align with the online course delivery. Most of the course

outlines of theoretical courses didn't show significant changes in the way the course is delivered, particularly course assessments. Course outlines of practical courses were significantly adjusted to accommodate the restriction of lab access to students mandated by the institution to adhere to government restrictions.

During the interviews, students were asked to openly give their opinion on their online learning experience, their accessibility to technology, what issues/concerns they have, and how connected they are to their professors. Based on the answers of the students, several topics were highlighted as issues associated with online learning. These issues are the overall learning experience, technology glitches, course load, communication, stress, and tuition costs.

In terms of the online learning experience, the majority of students felt disappointed with the quality of education they were experiencing in an online environment. They explained that the classes are packed with so many students, which is above the average class size they are accustomed to. The level of engagement among students is substandard. A student stated: "*As a student, I feel like I am being overworked, under-taught, overpaying, and overly stressed out*". Some students stated that they are emotionally affected by the lack of engagement from their professors, due to a lack of personal connection in their emails.

Students also expressed their frustration with the lack of control from the professors' end on the students neither during the regular lecture/class, nor during the exams. Students felt a high level of disappointment due to a lack of fairness and control from the professors.

In terms of online learning format. Most of the students were in favor of a blended approach that combines both synchronous and asynchronous learning. Courses that are only delivered asynchronously involved more distractions, lack of focus, lack of sufficient time, and lack of live support from the professor. A student commented: "*I am being taught by YouTube, not my teachers*". Students who complained about the asynchronous side of education stated that their professors record their lectures, upload them on the online platform, provide them with links to other videos that are publicly available on other websites on the internet, and give them assignments remotely.

Some students thought that asynchronous learning gives them a lot of flexibility to "watch" the lectures whenever they want/can. However, the majority of students preferred synchronous learning (live classes/lectures). Although it doesn't compensate them with the same level of engagement and social interaction that they get from in-person classes, they believe it's better than asynchronous where all the engagement is lacking.

Another challenge students are facing regarding online learning is related to students with a disability or special accommodation. A lot of students have special needs, and the majority of them expressed their frustration with the lack of ability (from their professors' end) to meet their educational needs. A student said: "*my professor doesn't accommodate disability students when they are teaching*".

In terms of Technology, most students highlighted several issues. Some issues relate to the functionality of the platform that the institution use (and supports) for course

delivery. Most students stated that the platform encountered a frequent episode of disconnection.

Most students also stated that a lot of faculty were not sufficiently trained to use the platform. Some faculty were not utilizing all functions and options available in the platform (i.e. the ability to upload videos, and the use of online discussion boards). A student said: "*It would be helpful if all the professors followed the same process using blackboard*".

Other issues highlighted relate to the bandwidth of their internet connection. Students were complaining that their internet connection was either slow or frequently disconnecting during busy times (i.e. 8:00 am – 12:00 pm). A huge concern related to Academic Integrity was also pointed out during the interviews. Students highlighted that the technology that is supported by the institution is not maintaining the fairness system among students during exams. Students reported many cases where other students have been cheating on exams, as the platform used is not preventing it.

In terms of the course load, most students stated that they felt the course loads have increased as a result of online learning. The depth and the breadth of the work assignments, tests, and research they are required to do for every course are mostly described as overwhelming, and stressful. A student stated: "*I have a minimum of 3 assignments due EVERY week - if we were in class this would never be the case*". A significant number of students have revealed that their mental and emotional health is affected by the amount of work they are required to deliver in an online learning environment. They are required to spend a long time in front of their computers, with a limited level of engagement, and lack of flexibility in deadlines.

In terms of communication, the majority of students expressed their dissatisfaction with the level of communication and attention they are getting from their professors. Most of them claimed that the lack of communication involves a lack of timely email responses from their professors, lack of clarity around course assignment expectations, and lack of personal connection to foster relationships. A student stated: "*Teachers take more than three days to respond to an email; and when a reply is finally received, the assignment is already passed due*". Another stated: "*Teachers post clarification of course content the SAME DAY the assignment is due*".

The study also found that the majority of international students are residing outside of Canada. This is due to the restrictions that the Canadian Government placed in terms of borders and immigration. Students who enrolled in the first semester after the pandemic hit, were unable to enter the country due to the shutdown of most Canadian embassies around the world. Consequently, most international students had to remain in their own countries, and commence their online learning in their respective programs remotely.

This led to numerous issues as a result. The first and most effective outcome was the fact that synchronous learning was challenging for the students due to the phenomenal time difference. In some cases, for classes starting at 3 pm local time in Canada, international students in China and Vietnam were forced to be online at 4 am and 3 am respectively, for them to interact live with their professors and classmates.

An international student stated: "*Currently living in Japan, so it is much harder to adjust the time. Sometimes, I have a class that starts at 5 am; so I tend to wait until then. One day the class only lasted for just 10 minutes*". This outcome was even more severe during exams, which in most cases had to be live as professors didn't have much of a choice. Other professors were able to switch their methods of assessment from exams to assignments to overcome this impediment.

The other outcome was psychological. International students who reside outside of Canada were unable to feel connected to their college. This led to a general feeling of isolation among that cohort. A student commented: "*It feels like the college and professors have forgotten about us*". Another student added: "*Professors post long videos and instructions without even addressing any emotional aspect of the situation we all are in*". international students, as well as the rest of the cohort, are also working part-time jobs to be able to cover their tuition costs. A student stated: "*Please consider international students. I can't join in live classes because of the time difference, but some professors are doing an in-class assignment and I had to do it alone even though it is for a group of 3-4. Furthermore, some test time was only two to three hours which is exactly at my working time*".

Another outcome that resulted from this finding is that international students residing outside Canada, have different quality levels of connectivity for their internet service. Even if they manage to overcome the time difference impediment and attend live classes (with both audio and video connection) with their professors/classmates, they still face a lot of challenges with the bandwidth of their internet connection. As a result, they get disconnected several times in a single class. This immensely affects their learning experience.

In terms of tuition costs, most students believed that shifting to online course delivery should have been associated with a reduction in tuition costs from the institution's end. A student said: "*We are not going to class on campus and have all been required to obtain proper devices, internet, and a workspace at home to attend classes and continue with our education*". Another student stated: "*Online and face-to-face classes are completely different. I don't think it's right to pay the same price and take classes*".

The majority of students who made this remark were international (not domestic) students who are required to pay three times what domestic students pay for tuition fees. They believe that since they are not utilizing the facilities they had on campus when their classes were in-person, they should be entitled to a discounted fee. An international student stated: "*Please give a solution for international students. We paid too much to see online classes*". Many students suffered severe financial difficulties as they lost their jobs as a result of the restrictions associated with the pandemic.

Conclusion

This study is to explore the impact of online learning, in post-secondary Hospitality Management education, from in-person learning to online learning, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, on students' learning experience. The study aims to explore how

post-secondary institutions approach synchronous and asynchronous teaching, from a student perspective; and how both approaches affect students' learning experience.

This study adopted a case study approach. This case study was conducted in a Hospitality post-secondary school in Canada as part of a project that involves other research papers. It is the first empirical study in North America that focuses on identifying the challenges that students in post-secondary students experience in online learning post-COVID-19.

Key findings in this study identified six main areas of concern for students. In terms of their overall learning experience, disappointment was the common theme in the majority of students' answers. Students were generally disengaged in virtual classrooms with the lack of personal interaction with their classmates and also with their professors.

In terms of the online learning format, students were mostly in favor of a blended approach that combines both synchronous and asynchronous classes, synchronous delivery was preferable to domestic students as it allowed them to virtually interact with each other and their professor. Whereas asynchronous delivery was more convenient to international students who were dwelling outside of Canada, as it accommodates their needs being in different time zones.

In terms of technology-related issues, the majority of students identified several challenges related to the functionality of platforms supported and delivered by their institutions, and the lack of fully utilizing their platforms from the professors' end. Other challenges highlighted were related to International students who are connecting from different countries around the world. Their challenges were mainly focused on the quality of their internet connection and bandwidth, which is in most cases incomparable with the same in Canadian cities. The other technology-related issue identified was related to academic integrity as students were unsure it was fully maintained in fully-online course delivery.

In terms of the course load, a key finding of the study is that students were experiencing heavier course loads in an online environment, than an in-person course delivery. This ultimately had a negative impact on both their mental and emotional health, from the students' perspectives.

In terms of communication, a key finding is that students were disgruntled about the level of communication their professors had with them. Overall, students felt that professors became more distant, less clear, and less connected with them, in an online environment. The drastic impact occurred with international students as most of them unwillingly resided abroad due to the closure of Canadian embassies, and consequently, their inability to obtain their visas to come to Canada. As a result, the difference in time zones made it even more difficult for the students to leverage the synchronous format of online course delivery.

In terms of tuition fees, the key finding is that students were disappointed with the fact that the institution's management did not reduce their tuition fees as a result of shifting to online course delivery. Students were displeased as they mostly believed that they are not

getting value for their money spent. Once again, the impact on international students in this area was more severe as they pay more than what local students do.

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تأثير التعلم عبر الإنترنت على طلاب ما بعد المرحلة الثانوية في كندا بعد COVID-19: دراسة حالة عن طلاب الضيافة والسياحة

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2 قسم الدراسات السياحية ، كلية السياحة والفنادق ، جامعة المنيا ، مصر

الملخص العربي

في الأسابيع الأولى من عام 2020 ، تم إعلان كوفيد -19 على أنه جائحة عالمية. أدى ذلك إلى سلسلة من الأحداث التي غيرت حياة معظم الصناعات حيث اضطرت الحكومات في جميع أنحاء العالم إلى فرض تدابير صارمة تهدف إلى السيطرة على انتشار الفيروس المستشري. بالنسبة لمعظم المؤسسات التعليمية ، أدت هذه القيود إلى تحويل معظم الدورات التدريبية إلى التعلم عبر الإنترنت. الغرض من الدراسة هو التحقيق في تأثير تحويل تقديم الدورة في تعليم إدارة الضيافة بعد المرحلة الثانوية من التعلم الشخصي إلى التعلم عبر الإنترنت ، نتيجة لوباء كورونا المستجد بناء على تجربة تعلم الطلاب. اعتمدت الدراسة منهجية دراسة الحالة في مدرسة الضيافة ما بعد الثانوية في كندا. وجدت الدراسة أن عوامل مثل تنسيق التعلم عبر الإنترنت، وحمل الدورة التدريبية، والتكنولوجيا، والاتصال، والرسوم الدراسية، تؤثر جميعها على تجربة التعلم الشاملة عبر الإنترنت للطلاب.

الكلمات الرئيسية: وباء كورونا المستجد، مؤسسات التعليم ما بعد الثانوي، التعلم عبر الإنترنت، الضيافة والسياحة.