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Article

INFLUENCING FACTORS FOR POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN EMERGING ONLINE PLATFORMS: PERSPECTIVE OF MANAGEMENT UNDERGRADUATES IN SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

Positive learning environment is crucial for education to maintain physical and mental wellbeing in the learning process. The rapid and dynamic evolution of the contemporary world has accelerated the reliance of education on online. Hence, discussions on online platforms are fundamental. This study aims to identify the factors that influence creating a positive learning environment by adopting a qualitative research approach with open ended and semi-structured questions using interview technique for data collection. The sample was selected based on convenient sampling technique by considering undergraduates from the faculty of management studies and commerce at university of Sri Jayewardenepura as the population. According to study findings, User friendly platforms and digital accessibility, Availability, Accessibility and quality of E-materials, Autonomy and independence in learning, Quite spaces and isolation, Interactions, Emotional support, monitoring and supervision were identified as positive factors and Poor materials, Barriers for technology and connectivity, Negativities in Self-directed learning, Isolation, Less interactions, inconsistent feedbacks and low engagement were identified as negative factors in creating a positive learning environment in an online platform. However, the impact differs according to perspective of participant. The study will provide valuable insights to improve online learning strategies and policies to develop online platforms.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the fundamental human rights according to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations which explains the importance of education in creating fully rounded human beings while reducing the global poverty level, developing gender equality by giving equal opportunities, universal access to education (UNESCO, 2023). There are some countries such as Sri Lanka, Germany, Norway, Sweden which offer free education for people to enhance the living standards (UniAcco, 2025). Sri Lanka is one of the countries that provides formal, standard and free education that basically going with traditional physical classroom setting under main four categories such as Pre-Primary, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary education (CED, 2021). There is a high number of provincial schools even after the year 2020 under government free education (CED, 2021). After the establishment of free education policy in 1947, Sri Lanka was able to do a huge impact on people in achieving universal primary education, high literacy rates and many more. It was comfortable to execute traditional physical classroom setting education all over the country in the past. However, it is harder in the present with the dynamic nature and high level of uncertain situations such as Covid 19 pandemic (Haththotuwa & Rupasinghe, 2021). Hence, there was a need for a transformative alternative approach for the educational system with dynamic educational landscape. As a solution for that, the online educational system emerged (Haththotuwa & Rupasinghe, 2021).

Online educational system involves the utilization of advanced technologies, new pedagogical methods that facilitate to learning virtually (Huang & Wang, 2023). According to the World Economic Forum in 2022, it has proven that the number of learners who have been registered for online courses and enrolments for online courses in the world from 2016 to 2021 has shown an increasing trend. According to these statistics and trends, online learning can be described as the fastest-growing market in the education industry with 900% growth in 2024 since 2000. 70% of students in the world believe that online learning is better than traditional classroom learning (devlinpeck, 2024). Hence the usage of online learning platforms is increasing day by day.

Positive Learning Environment can be described as an environment that includes prominent levels of engagement and motivation, a positive emotional climate, a supportive environment among peers, strong faculty-student relationships, meaningful experiences, and small class sizes with a greater supervision. Apart from that the sense of community within the institution is also essential for a positive learning environment (Rusticus et al., 2023). Development of higher educational system in Sri Lanka can be identified under 6 main eras when looking back for the history (Wickramasinghe, 2018). The first one is the Colonial Educational System which was there between 1505 and 1948. In this era there were Portuguese, Dutch and British influences for the higher education. Then free education was established after becoming independent in 1948. It was adopted from kindergarten to the university level which helped to improve the opportunities to general population for participation in the learning process. After that there was a greater expansion of higher educational institutions in Sri Lanka. Under that the number of state universities was grown with the first formal higher educational institution called the University of Ceylon. Starting from this era, the government paid special attention to expanding the state university system while ensuring the establishment of at least one university in each province. Hence there were 15 State Universities when it comes to year 2005 (Wickramasinghe, 2018). Even though the higher educational system was expanded, the issue of quality and relevance of education had arisen. There was a huge gap between the levels of skills provided by the universities and the skills demanded by the labor market created a lacking situation of soft and technical skills within the graduates that are required by the employers(Jayasingha & Suraweera, 2020). As a remedy the international development assistance was received by Sri Lankan higher educational system by focusing on broadening the scope of undergraduate education with research, postgraduate education, distance learning. As the final era the current trends and future directions were considered in the educational field. Hence lifelong learning, collaborations with different universities, online platforms for higher education

were highlighted (Wickramasinghe, 2018). A major concern was given to this online learning system due to sudden and unexpected situations that happened. Those circumstances emphasized the easiness of giving the learnings through online platforms, wider opportunities of gaining knowledge (Pulasthi & Pulasthi Dhananjaya Gunawardhana, 2020).

Problem Justification

Sri Lanka has a free education with many facilities and a unique educational context with a range of educational institutions including schools, universities, and vocational training centers. However, rather than going with traditional physical educational system, which is more familiar in Sri Lanka, people had to adopt with online learning educational mode due to some reasons such as Covid 19 pandemic impact, easy access to education, flexibility and convenience level, technological advancement, resource optimization, global competitiveness and the busy lifestyles of the people (De Pasqual et al., 2021). Sri Lanka faced for a significant challenge with the sudden closure of schools, universities during Covid 19 pandemic period. But Sri Lanka was able to manage those experiences quickly. That provided a valuable example for other countries on the process of overcoming obstacles in online education. Sri Lanka has adopted innovative practices and strategies in educational system to ensure an uninterrupted learning process for the country that can serve as an example model for other similar countries. Sri Lanka has implemented a practical and intelligent policy implication that help to improve the educational system and the future decision-making process (Haththotuwa & Rupasinghe, 2021). It proves that Sri Lanka is one of the major contexts to discuss the study since it provides a unique perspective on the challenges, strategies, and consequences regarding the online learning in a diverse and dynamic landscape while being a role country for other affected countries (Haththotuwa & Rupasinghe, 2021).

According to Rusticus et al. (2023) there is research on key elements of a positive learning environment from the perspectives of both students and faculty in the context of Canadian University. As per Haththotuwa & Rupasinghe (2021), they have highlighted the adaption of online learning system during Covid period, focusing on universities in Sri Lanka. According to another study, it has identified that there is a need to do further research on exploring student contributions to the learning process and effectiveness of various types of interactions in online learning platforms when creating a positive learning environment (Nolan-Grant, 2019). The current study fulfilled the gaps of not studying the factors affecting a positive learning environment in emerging online learning platform with the view of undergraduates from the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce at University of Sri Jayewardenepura along with the mentioned gap in the previous studies. The study was able to achieve the main objective by identifying influencing factors for a positive learning environment in an emerging online learning platform while addressing the research question of what are the influencing factors for creating a positive learning environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Background

There are many theories related to a positive learning environment in an online educational system that provide a better understanding about the importance of creating a positive learning environment within the online educational mode such as Self Determination Theory (SDT) which is one of the fundamental theories that explains the concepts in human motivation and behavior introduced by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan (Huang & Wang, 2023). SDT highlights intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is about the activities that are doing for the own interest and enjoyment of ourselves. Extrinsic motivation focuses on the activities related to rewards and recognition which are coming from the outside or from the external parties. It shows the essential factors for a positive environment to learn (Reeve, 2012). Community of Inquiry Theory (CoI) which was developed by Garrison, Anderson and Archer in 2000, talks about online learning experiences through a well-

developed model with a special reference to higher education (Picciano, 2017). This framework discusses the online educational context where traditional physical face to face interaction is absent. It highlights communication, interactions, quality of delivery to create a better environment to learn via online platforms (Picciano, 2017), Rhetorical and Relational Goals of Instruction Theory (RRG) emphasizes two main things which are required to create a positive learning environment in an online educational mode called Rhetorical Goals and Relational Goals. Rhetorical Goals emphasize the importance of clear communication on course contents to maximize student understanding and Relational Goals highlight the value of building and maintaining better connections and relationships within the learning environment (Kaufmann & Vallade, 2020), Critical Literacy and Communication Theory can be used to understand the importance of enhancing student learning and engagement level in the online educational system (Brown et al., 2022). Under this theory Critical Literacy concept and Communication Theory can be identified. Moreover, the reconceptualization of University Culture, Transition as Familiarization, addressing 'Eco Shock', Expectation Management can be emphasized in line with the concept of Critical Literacy (Brown et al., 2022) and Communication Theory underlines some other key concepts such as Transactional Communication, Barriers to Effective Communication, Role of Academics.

Empirical Review

A Case Study conducted for United Arab Emirates on the topic of "Exploring Undergraduate Students' Attitudes towards Emergency Online Learning during COVID-19" has emphasized that feedback is crucial from their point of view to identify the relevance of online education to do the future planning and improvements of online materials as well as the strategies (Hussein et al., 2020). A study conducted by focusing on university students in Sri Lanka has explored some Positive and Negative factors, perspectives regarding the online learning platforms. Many of them have stressed the positive things on the online learning platforms, especially in the Covid 19 period while giving some suggestions, such as improving infrastructure, support systems, and other strategies to enhance the effectiveness of the e-learning platforms (Weerathunga et al., 2021). Another study conducted by Canadian University especially have mentioned flexibility as a value regarding online learning and some lapses related to engagement, support, and interaction that are having a significant impact on the overall online learning experience (Rusticus et al., 2023b). Another study on Postgraduate students in a Master Program at Deakin University has focused especially on Open and Distance Education with the importance of positive learning environment in online learning environment (Stacey & Rice, 2002). It has highlighted the engagement of learners within the learning process through group collaboration and social constructivism (Stacey & Rice, 2002).

METHODOLOGY

The study focuses on lived experiences and actual perceptions regarding the factors that influence creating a positive learning environment in the online learning platforms. It is related to Phenomenological research design which is a qualitative research approach that has been developed by Edmund Husserl by highlighting the importance of personal experiences and perceptions. It focuses on understanding the lived experiences of people and the way they perceive the world around them (Groenewald, 2004). Convenience sampling has been adopted, which is a non-probability sampling technique that can be used by researchers, if they are going to select participants aiming the accessibility and easiness to get a deeper perspective (Etikan, 2016). The study selected 24 undergraduates as the sample from the whole population who have considerable differences among each other on online learning experiences as per a similar study has been done for a Canadian University has taken 22 Undergraduates using convenience sampling technique (Rusticus et al., 2023c). When it comes to the current study, it was better to adopt 'Interviews' since it is based on in-depth discussions with the participants. Interview is an interactive form of data collection technique which is one of the most

appropriate data collection methods in qualitative research (Jain, 2021). According to the study, it was more suitable to use Semi-Structured and Unstructured Interviews probably took 30-45 minutes for one interview. Basically, the interviews were face-to-face interviews but in case there were some online interviews as well which were conducted via zoom or voice record. Before starting the interview, researcher asked for the consent of the participants to participate in the study and conducted in a way that they can express their true and actual feelings and experiences regarding online learning platforms without making any interruption for their responses. The study conducted a Thematic Analysis based on the steps introduced by Braun and Victoria to analyze the collected data through interviews. Thematic Analysis is more suitable when the research is going to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of the individuals (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

The study has used Member Checking method to validate the collected data. There the researcher shared the findings and the interpretations with the participants to get their feedback on the accuracy of the collected data and the findings.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The selected sample for the study was carefully selected to generate a meaningful outcome from the study. It will provide a better idea about the influencing factors for creating a positive learning environment in an online learning platform.

Table 1: Profile of the Sample

Participant	Age Category	Gender	Hometown	Year
A	20-25	Female	Panadura	3rd year
B	20-25	Male	Giradurukotte	4th year
C	20-25	Male	Kandy	4th year
D	20-25	Female	Galle	4th year
E	20-25	Male	Bandaragama	4th year
F	20-25	Female	Kegalle	2nd year
G	20-25	Female	Galle	1st year
H	20-25	Female	Neluwa	4th year
I	20-25	Male	Rambukkana	2nd year
J	20-25	Female	Piliyandala	4th year
K	20-25	Female	Kadawatha	4th year
L	20-25	Male	Kurunegala	1st year
M	20-25	Female	Rathnapura	3rd year
N	20-25	Female	Nuwareliya	4th year
O	20-25	Female	Kelaniya	4th year
P	20-25	Male	Kandy	1st year
Q	20-25	Female	Awissawella	3rd year
R	20-25	Female	Ruwanwella	2nd year
S	20-25	Male	Mahawa	1st year
T	20-25	Male	Kadugannawa	2nd year
U	20-25	Female	Horana	3rd year
V	20-25	Male	Badulla	4th year
W	20-25	Male	Ramukkana	1st year
X	20-25	Male	Jaffna	4th year

The sample was consisting with 14 female and 10 male members from different district of the country in different years in university. Based on the collected data, 2 key themes were identified including sub-themes under each category to be supportive to achieve the expected research objective from the study.

Table 2: Identified Themes

	Themes
Influencing factors for a positive learning environment in emerging online learning platforms	1. Positive Factors that Help to Create a Positive Learning Environment
	2. Negative Factors that Lead to Damage a Positive Learning Environment

1 Positive Factors that Help to Create a Positive Learning Environment

1.1. Breaking the barriers for Tech-Driven Learning: User-Friendly Platforms and Digital Accessibility

Technological Accessibility refers to the availability and usability of technology for both learners and instructors in the learning context. There should be better access to equipment and resources such as computers, reliable internet connections to get the maximum of the online platforms with the Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) especially due to the COVID pandemic situation (Winter et al., 2021). As per a study has been conducted in University of Southern Queensland in Toowoomba in Australia, has highlighted the importance of having Technological Accessibility (Brown et al., 2022). Apart from that based on a study conducted in a Canadian University emphasizes the essentiality of having good technological accessibility. Current study participants also expressed importance.

"*I didn't have any proper device to go for the online lectures in my 1st year of the university. With the Covid pandemic the lectures were online, but I could not participate in the live sessions and sometimes, I couldn't watch recorded videos due to this issue. So, I used to use the lecture notes of my friends always. But after that I took a loan which was granted to university students at a lower rate to purchase a laptop, then I was able to use it properly to do my university work and other things. I enrolled to some online IT and English courses….*"

(Participant 14, 4th year)

Access to reliable and stable internet connectivity ensures uninterrupted access for the live sessions, downloadability in recorded lectures, access for online resources to enable the learners keep in touch with the learning process without any disruption.

"I am from a rural area. I had to face lots of issues, especially in facing examinations and submitting assignments and exam answers. Because sometimes I could not submit them on deadline since I was facing connection issues. Actually, it was a huge problem for me when I was there at my home. I lost marks for my assignments due to these delays in submitting them, yeah actually when after coming here all those issues were cleared because in our university we are having free Wi-Fi facility as well……".

(Participant 8, 4th year)

There should be a proper knowledge in the usage of those devices and platforms.

"Proper knowledge on ZOOM, MS TEAMS, LMS helped me in conducting and attending classes conveniently and effectively. And I have the knowledge on the usage of devices like laptops, tablets and mobile phones. Actually, I do online classes for Advanced Level students so, it is very important to have this knowledge with me to tackle with the technology to give my best to the students…..".

(Participant 5, 4th year)

There should be well-designed, innovative platforms such as proper LMS systems, video conferencing systems, survey systems, search engines to make a simple and efficient learning process through online platforms. These things will reduce the struggles and issues in using online learning systems by the undergraduates while making an effective learning process.

"Since there is well organized and simple interface in LMS, attractive and orderly nature of the organization of materials, slides, other references in the LMS, easy options in video conferencing methods like ZOOM, MS TEAMS gave a better motivation for me to be engaged with the online learning process even though we are not meeting our instructors physically. And, since there are well organized lecture recordings which are easy to refer and use later rather than using only the live lectures allowed us to prepare our notes and take things into our minds……".

(Participant 21, 3rd year)

According to the facts, it reveals that access to devices, internet and LMS platforms enabled students to overcome geographical and time related berries in learning. However, the benefits that can be obtained through online learning platforms differ because the students from rural area are reported greater challenges compared to their urban counterparts. This stresses the concept of Digital divide as well while raising concerns on inclusivity. These facts prove the importance of having technical and connection facilities and knowledge with learners to enhance their experience in learning.

1.2. Backbone of Learning: Availability, Accessibility and Quality of E- Materials

Learning materials are the resources and tools that are necessary for the learning process. Based on a previous study, undergraduates who have participated in interviews emphasized that the lack of supporting materials for the lectures had a negative impact for their learning process to obtain a positive experience from the online learning platform (Rusticus et al., 2023c). Also, if there is clear, focused and learning objective oriented content, it will improve the engagement and the motivation of the learners.

The study participants have pointed out the importance of learning materials.

"Actually, the materials which are in very quality level and only relevant to our scope without being overloaded from information help us to be focused on the learning process without having any boring feeling on the slides or the learning materials….".

(Participant 9, 4th year)

"Due to the usage of online learning platforms, it provides a greater level of access to many resources worldwide to achieve our learning targets. I use some e-libraries to collect data and yes I use ChatGPT to find relevant resources for me because it suggests the e-places where the resources are there and another one is Copilot is also helpful for me…".

(Participant 15, 4th year)

Apart from that, Well-structured and organized materials make it easier for the learners to refer to the materials, learn things easily and achieve the learning outcomes easily.

"Our teaching materials, slides and other relevant referring documents have been uploaded in a very organized and orderly way using the numbers, topics of the lessons which make very convenient environment to use them easily without struggling to find them here and there…."

(Participant 20,2nd year)

"Actually it was so convenient to use specially our LMS to download material so quickly as we required them, and find other relevant links for assignments, quizzes, surveys because our instructors have maintained their organized and orderly manner in uploading them…."

(Participant 3, 4th year)

Study participants appreciated the availability of well-structured, clear and accessible learning materials. In addition, some participants valued the availability of global resources including e-libraries and AI tools which help in widening the exposure. These points emphasize the cruciality of having proper materials and the proper order of them in online learning.

1.3. Empowering Self-Directed Learning: Autonomy and Independence in Learning and Motivation

As per a quantitative study conducted with universities in China found that, the autonomy satisfaction and competence satisfaction are positively correlated with behavioral, cognitive and emotional engagement in online learning activities (Huang & Wang, 2023). Autonomy and competence have stronger positive influence on individual engagement compared to relatedness (Huang & Wang, 2023). Self-Directed Learning (SDL) can be identified as the ability of the learners to identify their learning needs, formulate goals, identify resources, and evaluate their learning outcomes individually. This is critical especially in a learning mode like online learning (Morris & Rohs, 2023).

According to the study participant,

"Actually, since I have a self-direction towards the learning process, it motivated me to use many additional resources as well as to explore unknown things to learn more.so, I think that doing like merely listening the lecture is not enough for us now specially by being an undergraduate we have to search for more than what instructor is saying so, that's why I use this self-study method for me….."

(Participant 18, 2nd year)

"I believe that the self-study is the best method to improve our abilities, skills, knowledge and learn those things deeply. Actually, we have the freedom to search and learn with this self-study mode so, it motivated me a lot to learn…."

(Participant 23, 1st year)

There should be proper motivational factors for the learners to be motivated within the learning process especially in a self-directed learning process. Learners motivate themselves as well as some external factors help learners to go towards the achievement of their goals.

"I have a desire to make my family proud on myself so, that intension motivated me to perform well in the learning process even though I am in the online learning. actually, we were there with many difficulties so, learning was the only thing with us to get rid of from them so, I believe that um on my way to achieve the success of not only in my life but also in my parents' lives….."

(Participant 8, 4th year)

Online learning mode enables learners to manage their own pace and schedules where learners are motivated to develop their intrinsic motivation and sense of ownership in learning as emphasized in Self-Determination Theory. As per the interviews, it can be pointed out most of the senior undergraduates are valuing independence as they possessed the maturity to self-regulate. However, autonomy and independence were issues for less experienced, immature learners. According to the study findings, it can prove the essentiality of empowering self-directed nature in online learning platforms with proper guidance and balance to maximize the benefits.

1.4. Isolation as a facilitator to promote Online Learning: Quiet Spaces, Deeper Learning

In the context of online learning, isolation is often viewed as a negative factor due to its association with a lack of social interactions and emotional connection. Isolation in online learning can be explained as an individual's absence or low number of meaningful ties with other people (Raza et al., 2021). A study

which is related with Athabasca University in Canada highlights *"emotions play a crucial role to create a better online learning experience because positive emotions lead to create positive outcomes while hiding negative outcomes like stress, anger, isolation, etc."* (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012)

Based on the evidence collected through the interviews it highlights the positive impact towards creating a positive learning environment in the online learning platform from Isolation.

"I believe that in most of the cases people see this isolation as a bad thing for a learner. Obviously, it may be, because some are willing to do things with others rather than doing them alone but for me, it is very much helpful in managing my time effectively, allowing me to balance my learning with other personal and professional responsibilities such as my part time job because I am doing an online business…."

(Participant 14, 4th year)

For some of the participants Isolation creates a better environment to enhance the concentration and the productivity especially quiet spaces allow some learners to balance both academic and personal commitments. However, according to the learning style of the learner the benefits can be differ. Especially the introverted learners are benefitting more from this fact.

1.5. Nurturing Positive Relationships in Virtual Learning Spaces: Interactions, Emotional Support, Monitoring and Supervision

As per a quantitative study conducted in China found that, Relatedness satisfaction is positively correlated with behavioral and emotional engagement but negatively correlated with cognitive engagement (Huang & Wang, 2023). Behavioral, cognitive, emotional engagement have a positive relationship with academic achievement in the online learning context (Huang & Wang, 2023).

According to the current study,

"Online learning platforms made us easier in doing group works and group assignments. In assignments, we used to take a zoom meeting and do those practical tasks together while being in the meeting and do the updates using a WhatsApp group like even though we are not together physically we are in a same activity even we can do a in mid night by connecting to each other….."

(Participant 10, 2nd year)

Through the online platforms learners are always facilitated with collaborations via zoom, WhatsApp and LMS forums. According to social constructivism, it explains that knowledge can be co-created through collaborations via peer interactions. Apart from group projects, informal peer support reduces the feeling of isolation and enhances engagement. Relationships and emotional support are necessary especially in a virtual learning system.

1.6. Provide Guiding Hands: Monitoring and Supervision

Monitoring can be described as an ongoing systematic process of observing, tracking and recording activities to measure the implementation of a program and assess its effectiveness over time (Mensah, 2022). According to the classical understanding, Supervision can be used to ensure the alignment of the implemented activities with the predetermined plans. On the other hand, according to the Cybernetic Systems Concept (Modern View), it emphasizes the importance of adapting to the changes in the environment and the necessity of rapid corrections when deviations occurred from expected outcomes (Nasution et al., 2022).

"if we feel like we are monitored by our instructors or basically the lecturers, we tend to do things in a very good manner. Personally, I believe that monitoring and supervision keep the learners on the right

track, especially in a platform like online learning platform it is essential to have this monitoring and supervision to keep the learners on the right track because there is a higher chance to go for wrong things with this online platform…."

(Participant 2, 4th year)

Participants highlighted that regular monitoring and supervision help them a lot in remaining focused and accountable on their learning process. Even though it is required a balance should be there because, over monitoring and supervision can damage the sense of autonomy of the learner.

2. Negative Factors that Lead to Damage a Positive Learning Environment

2.1. Poorly Created Resources Can Diminish Learning Experiences: Data Overloaded, Poor designs, Less Attractiveness

"Sometimes slides and the reading materials had spelling and grammar mistakes that reduce the quality of the materials, and some materials and slides were unclear and less attractive which harder for us to understand the concepts and contents in those materials……".

(Participant 9, 4th year)

This evidence describes the negative impact of poor designs and poor materials towards creating a positive learning environment in an emerging online learning platform. Excessive or irrelevant data can make data overloaded with content that can make a confusion on students and make it difficult for them to focus on their learning objectives. It is significant to have not only the learning materials but quality material for the lecture.

"*Actually, sometimes when it comes to the lecture materials, reading materials, those are notthath understandable for us. One of the reasons for that is unnecessary data overloading nature. And sometime the colors, fonts, animations, and pictures used for the presentations were not that attractive, clear and good for us to being active in the learning process such as using highlight colors. Sometimes we experience that there are spellings, and other mistakes in the lecture material, at those times lecturers made them according to our feedback. But in most cases lecturers do not focus on our responses, especially regarding the presentation colors, fonts, frames, and images. They focus on the content not the attractivenes……"*

(Participant 24, 4th year)

A significant barrier was created with poorly designed slides, overloaded presentations and unstructured contents. It reflects that the quality of resources directly determines the learning outcomes. Inconsistent standards undermine the engagement of learners in learning process.

2.2. Barriers to Technology and Connectivity: Accessibility, Connectivity Issues, Device and Platform Limitations

Under Technological Accessibility there are some factors that were able to identify through the interviews such as connectivity issues, device limitations and platform limitations.

"The main challenges in this online system as, I would say the power cuts and Wi-Fi issues, which are having a greater level of ability to disrupt for our learning and the continues engagement in learning. I started following charted accountancy course, at there also I faced lots of barriers when I am in my home in watching videos…..".

(Participant 19, 1st year)

Device Limitations also highlighted a greater level of negative impact towards creating a positive learning environment. Device Limitations refers to the unavailability of suitable devices, or the challenges like high costs or outdated hardware can limit students' ability to access or use online platforms effectively. There are some licensing requirements as well.

"Sometimes I couldn't download some applications and software required to do the learning processes and practical lessons so, it is a huge problem for me to gain the maximum knowledge that can be achieved by me and sometimes, I faced difficulties in facing exams, assignments and quizzes as well due to this issue. I think it is a must to get the application to do the practical applications rather than just looking at the instructor to do all the things and giving just the explanation….".

(Participant 22, 4th year)

Most of the study participants highlighted internet connection issues, power outages and limited access to devices as critical challenges. This created a broader digital divide with socio-economic disparities by creating unequal opportunities for learners.

2.3. Negativity can be created through Self-Directed Learning: Lack of Self Discipline, Motivation

"If we do not complete the tasks on time, participate for the lecturers on time, do the quizzes on time then it will lead to accumulate the works and finally it will be a huge workload and stress for us. To be honest I faced that kind of situation in my 2nd year because I didn't get the things so seriously because of being the lectures online and the instructors also used to upload recorded videos for our convenience as a result I used to watch videos in my study leave by wasting an entire semester by doing nothing. Actually, I believe that there should be a self- monitoring mechanism to monitor we, to be properly engaged with the learning….."

(Participant 24, 4th year)

It proves that to execute proper self-directed learning there should be proper discipline within the learner. If not, it will create some negativity to the learning.

2.4. Isolation as a burden in creating a Positive Learning Environment: Loneliness, Less Interactions

Some learners prefer to work together so, they always commit to do work together rather than being alone in the learning process. They look at this Isolation factor as a negative factor. Isolation leads to create emotional disconnection, reduce peer support, limits instructor-student interaction, decrease engagement and so on which creates loneliness, decreased collaboration, weakened accountability as well as lower motivation.

"To be honest, when compared to the physical learning mode, in the online learning system, the interaction between my peers and the instructors are less, personally I am a person who would like to maintain interactions between them. So, turning into online educational mode from the physical system made a hard situation for me to adapt to the new situation. In online education, I felt isolated because there is no one to monitor or supervise me and there is no one to talk with, to share my emotions and feelings. So, personally I don't like to be isolated in the learning process…"

(Participant 11, 4th year)

Even though autonomy was stressed as a facilitator for some participants, some have mentioned it as a negative fact. According to self-determination theory it highlights that autonomy alone is not sufficient but there should be a feeling of competent and support. This fact points out the requirement of blended learning system where autonomy is supported by mentoring and helping systems.

2.5 Less Interpersonal Relationships as a roadblock to the learning process: Less Interactions, Inconsistent Feedback, Low Engagement

A strong sense of support, care, collaboration and most importantly emotional support among the students, peers, and instructors are crucial. There is a lack of trend in some learners when making relationships among friends and peers in the online learning platform.

"when it comes to online platforms sometimes, we are afraid on making friends since we haven't met them physically so those kinds of issues also there. So, sometimes we may not be eager to buildup friendships or any other relationship with friends since we hesitated to use online platforms to make relationship…."

(Participant 19, 1st year)

Participants reported that limited instructor-learner interactions and feedback create a burden for learning process. Additionally, weak communication affects both motivation and performance of the learner. As per the RRG theory, better communication should be there to improve themselves by the learners and to build trust between the learner and instructor. If not, it will create a risk of lower outcomes, higher dropout rates, in especially the online platform.

2.5.1. Inconsistent Feedback

"Obviously only few lecturers made meaningful changes based on our feedback not only in the attractiveness side but also when it comes to the other contents as well. Actually, it's not good for their reputation as well because among the friends we are talking about that instructor with a very bad image so, they must pay their concern about our thoughts, ideas, suggestions as well to be a good lecturer because we are the lead learners, right?....."

(Participant 22, 4th year)

To keep leaners engaged in the learning process the instructors have to respond to the feedback as much as possible for them. Because it will create a positive feeling in the mind of the learner.

2.5.2. Low Engagement

"actually sometimes we felt a high level of monotonous nature in the teaching styles from the instructors so, those things actually hinder our enthusiasm or the motivation for the learning especially with a platform like online learning, instructors have to pay their attention on our responses as well because we are in a far away from the lecturer so they have to keep us engaged with the learning…"

(Participant 2, 4th year)

This fact stresses the importance of two-way communication and learner and instructor engagement with each other in the learning process to create a positive learning environment in online learning platform.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

There are two main themes under the study that have been identified with sub- themes for each main theme as the factors that help to create a positive learning environment and factors that lead to damage to a positive learning environment. Especially, instead of looking at isolation and Self-Directed Learning as positive factors, some participants pointed out some negative things according to their perspective.

In conclusion, the study has contributed for practical insight to educators, administrators and especially for the platform developers in their future decision making and plans. The findings of this current study give some idea about the efforts that have been made by platform developers in achieving these

requirements of diverse learners since the participants of the study have given some experiences with those platforms as well.

As recommendations,

Implementing activities that help to enhance competence, relatedness, sense of community, emotional support by prioritizing emotional well-being and motivation. For that, mental health support services, methods to celebrate student achievements can be provided. Instructors can use a hybrid method by using modular content and multimedia resources to ensure the engagement and interest of learners towards learning process to design courses and methods of delivering.

Quizzes, polls, programs to give badges, leadership, foster active participation, hybrid learning can be used to improve student engagement. Instructors should use proper feedback mechanisms for the continuous improvement of the learning process.

Based on the study, it found that some factors such as Isolation and Self-Directed Learning are having both positive and negative effects towards the creation of positive learning environment in an emerging online learning platforms as well as some highlighted about the importance of hybrid learning approach. The impact can differ according to the perspective of the participant and lived experiences.

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