

The Remote Learning Experience: A Blend of Challenges, Strategies, and Personal Growth

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For myself as an undergraduate student, I did not face any significant issues with the transition to remote learning. There was a feeling of liberation, almost all of my classes were asynchronous, and I was able to complete my school work at my own convenience. Professors would post all the pre-recorded lectures and have the assignments up, months before the due date. This permitted me to finish all the assignments weeks in advance. However, I did find that the difficulty of exams was much higher than the in-person exams, which I believe was due to professors recognizing that some students would just google answers and cheat during non-proctored exams. I could understand their rationale, as the stress of coming up with a solution with little time to devise a more streamlined format, their options were limited. As Jaggars (2021) notes, educational administrators and instructors had to quickly devise plans to support students from their homes, with some turning to asynchronous online learning, synchronous remote sessions, or a mix of these elements. The expectation was that these emergency distance education practices would be temporary, but they continued for an extended period, influencing future instructional practices (Jaggars, 2021). However, even with this in mind, one could notice that many questions on exams stopped referencing course content and started reaching out into domains that would be out of reach for the entire classes learning at the time.

The Role of Technology and the Digital Divide

Secondly, remote learning also pushed the limits of Learning Management Systems (LMS), as the framework was available. I was more fortunate to understand technology, while many others did not, whether that be the LMS's, navigating university websites, etc. I was able to hear the challenges other students faced during this change when I was a writing tutor at The Write Place at King's University college in late 2022. Some high school students had never worked with an LMS before, as did I. The reasoning for this was because their school boards never decided to use them or in the case of international students, their schools could not afford the technological upgrades to have them, thus exacerbating the digital divide. Moreover, I did have a year at Fanshawe College and my entire first year at King's to learn the basics of LMS's, an asset that newer students did not have and that they would have to learn with no guidance.

To continue, the digital divide became more pronounced during the pandemic, with disparities in access to technology and digital literacy affecting students' ability to engage in remote learning. As Jaggars's (2021) paper specifically explains the multitude of challenges related to the digital divide during the emergency transition to remote learning. Similarly, a study from Hong Kong emphasized the importance of meaningful cognitive activities in online learning and the need for educators to facilitate social interaction among students, combining the

advantages of both asynchronous and synchronous methods (Ng et al., 2020). This study also found that the rapid transition to blended learning brought about challenges to even data privacy (Ng et al., 2020).

Strategies Adopted to Ensure Continuity of Education

I may be a person who enjoys being given tasks to work on myself, especially when given a good portion of time to complete them. Which allowed me to genuinely enjoy the asynchronous learning. Although, many other students felt more disconnected than ever from the classroom as they were unable to create any rapport with their professors and they had limited options to ask questions about what they were studying. As a TA at King's currently, and learning about strategies to engage students from the professor that I am working under, I recognized that many students have come to terms with online synchronous learning, similarly to how the Master's is framed. The causation for this is because of the reduced boundaries of the classroom, thus permitting students to not miss lectures for distance or bad weather reasons and allowing the opportunity to maintain some form of connection with the professor. In connection with this, Ng et al. (2020) also found that the creation of meaningful cognitive activities in online learning rely on the leading role of teachers. Akhmetova et al. (2021), also adds that the impacts of remote learning have shifted the future of pedagogy, suggesting that new learning areas will emerge, including digital tools skills and team working skills in a digital environment.

Personal Reflection: How the Sudden Shift Impacted your Learning or Teaching Experience

The journey towards online teaching during the pandemic was filled with lessons and challenges. The findings of Sarfaraz et al. (2022) shares the experiences of faculty members transitioning to online teaching, emphasizing the challenges faced by educators accustomed to face-to-face interactions and the efforts required to adapt to the new online environment. Specifically, the study highlighted the importance of flexibility and adaptability in the face of unprecedented challenges (Sarfaraz et al., 2022).

In conclusion, over the years of constant self amelioration, I have focused on myself to make sure that I remain as open-minded and flexible as possible similar to the findings of Sarfaraz et al. (2022). Whether classes are to be in person, online synchronous, or online asynchronous, I ensure to be as happy as possible and appreciate all three forms of pedagogical environments. However, I believe that there should be a mix of the three when it comes to the classroom, as all of them have their benefits. To summarize these points, Asynchronous teaches students to be able to take initiative and be capable of working by themselves. Synchronous permits more students (quantity-wise) to be able to learn regardless of their environment. And

finally, In-person allows students to have the discipline to be somewhere at a time and place, and to be connected with their professor.

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