

## **First-year university students' psychological well-being through seven weeks of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic**

### **ABSTRACT**

University life is colourful, filled with a plethora of memorable moments both academic and non-academic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, first-year university students' academic experiences may have differed from their expectations due to being conducted fully online. The COVID-19 pandemic denied first-year students the opportunity to join in-person classes and become involved in university activities in a physical setting. All activities were moved to virtual settings, and students could only contact their classmates and lecturers via social media platforms. This derailment of expectations may dampen students' enthusiasm and impact their levels of motivation and happiness. To explore this phenomenon, a study was conducted with 143 first-year psychology students to examine their self-reported motivational and happiness levels before and after seven weeks of online classes. This study included 113 females (79%) and 30 males (21%) with a mean age of 20.68 (SD = 1.88). Data collected revealed that students' motivation and happiness levels declined significantly after their online classes. Based on the level of agreement with one item—'Overall, I am happy with my university life'—48 (33.60%) students agreed, 76 (53.10%) were neutral, and 19 (13.30%) indicated dissatisfaction. This study may assist the university and relevant authorities in understanding students' perceptions of dealing with academic and life challenges while learning online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, psychological strategies should be considered to enhance first-year students' motivation and happiness levels when faced with online classes in their new first semester.