Learning English online during the COVID -19 pandemic: benefits, challenges and suggestions

ABSTRACT

Measures to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic led physical teaching and learning activities to shift online. In Malaysia, this included the enforcement of online learning among tertiary institutions. The aim of this study is to explore learners' perceptions towards learning English in a fully online environment. This study investigated the benefits, challenges and suggestions related to online learning in an English language course at a public university in Malaysia. This qualitative study employed an open-ended questionnaire at the end of a 14-week semester. A total of 592 undergraduates responded to the questionnaire that was distributed using Google Form. The data were analysed using Leximancer software to generate concepts and themes out of words. The findings revealed that the benefits of online learning consisted of the themes "improve", "class" and "use"; the challenges of online learning included the themes "challenge", "class" and "lecturer"; and online learning suggestions had the themes "student", "online" and "English". The themes are discussed with support from the students' responses. This study contributes to a better understanding of students' online learning experience in the second language context.