



OBC Research Book

Volume I

Edited

by

Sarwar Khawaja and Dr Fayyaz Hussain Qureshi

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INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH BOOK VOLUME I

Welcome to the first OBC book of research volume I!

The concept of publishing research has been a dominant credo in academia, especially in public higher education institutions. The role of research in higher education institutions is significant for sustainability, development and reputation, but unfortunately, it is lacking in private higher education institutions in the UK.

The Oxford Business College (OBC) took a research initiative in 2020. First, the college established the research department. The department became functional and second, established the Centre of Applied Research and Entrepreneurship (CARE), and followed by establishing Oxford Business Research And Innovation Network (OxBRAIN). The college wants to involve academic staff in research and motivate them by launching Annual Faculty Research Awards up to £5,000. This financial motivation has been successful, and some of the academic staff members published their research papers for the first time and also participated in internal conferences. All the research papers in this book are from OBC faculty, and a few are part of the Annual Faculty Research Awards 2021.

This book's primary purpose is to motivate OBC academic staff to engage in research-related activities actively. Presenting this book to all stakeholders will also demonstrate the commitment of the college to the research as one of the top priorities of the college.

Conducting research and publishing is one of the most challenging, creative, innovative, imaginative and intellectually enjoyable scholastic activities. We are hubristic in our research performance and delightedly announce that we have achieved remarkable research targets for the year 2021, and this book is one of these remarkable targets. In addition, we will periodically publish research books as a continuation of volumes.

On behalf of the entire team at OBC, we would like to express our sincere admiration for Dr Qureshi's outstanding performance, efforts, commitments, professionalism and

visionary leadership in the research department. We pride ourselves on his hard work and dedication to making a great success of the research department. As always, we are counting on him to go the extra mile.

Last, but not least, I am grateful to those researchers who have written research papers and published in this volume and expect them to continue or further enhance their research activities and hope that more academic staff from OBC will participate in research activities.

Sarwar Khawaja

Sarwar Khawaja



PROFILE OF SARWAR KHAWAJA

A Harvard, Cambridge, Oxford and City University alumnus, Mr Sarwar Khawaja, FRSA, is currently Chairman of Business Development at Oxford Business College (OBC). His mission is to help others achieve their goals through the power of learning. As a distinguished scholar, he recognises the vital role of education in helping shape and improves people's lives in the UK and around the world. Mr Khawaja has been actively involved in education, philanthropy and business throughout his illustrious career. His work inspires, encourages and motivates individuals to reach their full potential.

Mr Khawaja is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA), Life Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA) and Member of the British Educational Leadership Management and Administration Society (BELMAS). He seeks to raise awareness about key education, society and business issues.

At Oxford Business College, Mr Khawaja presides over a growing organisation with a burgeoning research department and new campuses in West London, Slough, Coventry and Nottingham. As a result, the college will now be able to deliver an exceptional learning experience to even more students in different parts of the country, strengthening relationships with local communities and widening participation. These are issues close to Mr Khawaja's heart.

Mr Khawaja is also chairman of Oxford Education Group, an organisation dedicated to improving the quality of higher education, learning technologies and the academic ecosystem. He is an Honorary Professor of Business Management at the University of Józef Dietl (Małopolska) in Krakow, Poland – a modern private university that has been offering undergraduate and postgraduate studies for over 15 years. In addition, he is co-author of the critically acclaimed book *The Teacher*, along with Noble Prize nominee Tony Buzan. He regularly contributes to world-class magazines and academic journals on topics related to learning, peace-building initiatives and emerging areas of education research, specialising in private higher education.

As a noted philanthropist, Mr Khawaja is Chairman of the Akhuwat UK Trust – the world’s largest interest-free microfinance organisation. Since 2001, this Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) has helped more than four million people in Pakistan lift themselves out of poverty by providing more than \$500 million in interest-free loans. The Trust is also building the world’s first no-fee residential university – Akhuwat University in Lahore – in a bid to fulfil its dream of creating a poverty-free society through education.

Mr Khawaja is a highly well-respected and influential business partner. He is Chairman of the European Council on Global Relations, and, in 2018, his professional expertise was recognised when he was specially selected to join his illustrious peers as a Senator in the European Economic Senate (EES). In the same year, the British Publishing Company’s *Muslim 100 Power List* recognised Mr Khawaja as one of the top 100 most influential Muslims in Europe. He seeks to leverage his influence to help make a real difference, especially in terms of education, to encourage positive action and ensure that learning remains at the forefront of social and political agendas worldwide.

“Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family.” (Former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan).

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	For
AM	Academic Manager
APs	Alternator Providers
BAME	Black, Asian and minority ethnic
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBP	Brierley, Price and Prior (Surnames initials of founders)
BELMAS	British Educational Leadership Management and Administration Society
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BIS	The department for Business, Innovation and Skills
CARE	Centre of Applied Research and Entrepreneurship
CoDE	Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity
EEA	European Economic Area
EES	European Economic Senate (EES).
FHEA	Fellow of the Higher Education Academy
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
FRSA	Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts
GDP	Gross Domestic Produce
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institute
HEIs	Higher Education Institutes
HERA	Higher Education and Research Act
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HM	Her Majesty
ICEF	International Consultants for Education and Fairs
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPA	Importance Performance Analysis
IRCC	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
IT	Information Technology
LSC	London School of Commerce
LUMS	Lahore University of Management Sciences
MAC	Migration Advisory Committee
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
NAO	National Audit Office
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NUS	National Union of Students
OBC	Oxford Business College

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFFA	Office for Fair Access
OfS	Office for Students
OSN	Online Social Networks
OxBRAIN	Oxford Business Research And Innovation Network
PrHE	Private Higher Education
PrHEIs	Private Higher Education Institutes
PROPHE	The Program for Research on Private Higher Education
PuHEIs	Public Higher Education Institutes/Institutes
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
RDI	Resource Development International
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SMM	Social Media Marketing
TUC	Trade Union Congress
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Applications Service
UCEA	Universities and Colleges Employers Associations
UCU	University and College Union
UG	Under Graduate
UK	United Kingdom
UKCISA	UK Council for International Student Affairs
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US	United States
USA	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organization
Wi-Fi	Wireless Fidelity

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MATURE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' SATISFACTION WITH ONLINE TEACHING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Authors: Dr Fayyaz Hussain Qureshi, Sarwar Khawaja and Tayyaba Zia

Abstract

Online teaching accelerated at an unprecedented pace in the wake of the physical closure of educational institutions in the United Kingdom on 23 March 2020 due to the Covid-19 crisis. This study is based on a survey of mature undergraduate students in private higher education institutes in the south of England and their experience with online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic. The questionnaire was sent out to mature undergraduate students studying in three private higher education institutes, and we received 225 responses. A quantitative approach was used to analyse the results. The majority of students (95%) were using online teaching for the first time, and they were novices with the online teaching software (Zoom and Microsoft Teams, etc.). They were provided with training for online teaching, especially how to use the software, and they were satisfied with the training. The study also identified challenges students faced during the online teaching such as weak Internet connection, old devices (computer and laptop etc.), low level of digital competency, especially among older students, lack of technical support from the institute and stressful transition period. The final findings from the study indicated that the quick decision of switching to online teaching was right, and the majority of students found online teaching exciting. Consequently, most students wanted to continue online teaching after the Covid-19 because it provides ease and convenience, no travelling time or cost, freedom and autonomy. However, the online teaching training for students could be more effective, and private higher education institutions could also address challenges such as weak Internet connection and old devices (computer, laptop, etc.).

Keywords: Covid-19, Mature Undergraduate Students, Online Teaching, Student Satisfaction and Private Higher Education Institutions

1. Introduction

This study's aims are twofold: to assess the level of mature undergraduate students' satisfaction with online teaching support (training) and determine which teaching method they prefer, online or traditional classroom teaching. How was the experience of mature undergraduate students' online teaching and support during the Covid-19 pandemic?

The widespread Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19), first discovered in Wuhan City, China, in December 2019, and then in Europe and the United States of America in the early 2020s, has created significant challenges for all industries, including the higher education industry worldwide. A particular challenge faced by higher education was the urgent request for suspension of face-to-face teaching and replacement with online teaching.

The Covid-19 outbreak continued spreading rapidly and hit 114 countries and was declared a pandemic on 11 March 2020 by World Health Organization (WHO, 2020). Covid-19 started to spread in February 2020 in the UK. The UK government was considering a lockdown to control the outbreak of the disease. Since the lockdown started in the UK on 23 March 2020, the UK higher education institutions have been experiencing an unprecedented massive migration from traditional in-class face-to-face teaching to online teaching. According to UNESCO (2020), 1.5 billion students were engaged in remote learning at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020.

The UK government decided to close educational institutions but wanted to continue teaching online. In a short period of time, higher education institutions started to teach online, comparing private higher education institutions (PrHEIs) to public higher education institutions in the UK, the former are smaller and with limited resources. Therefore, these institutions started to offer online teaching to students by using easily available online teaching software such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, FaceTime etc. However, academic staff and students were not ready for this sudden change; within a short time, the academic staff had to plan and deliver their lectures from

home with all the practical and technological challenges this involves, and often without proper technical support (Hodges et al., 2020). On the other side, students needed to be trained on the online software (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc.). The private higher education institutes were required to arrange online training sessions for students and provide training manuals to ensure the smooth running of online courses. A recent study by Chen et al. (2020) finds that online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic was not without many problems. The big challenge for private higher education institutes was to make sure the online software could meet the needs of academic staff and students and ultimately delivers effective online teaching without difficulties. Therefore, it was essential to see the experience of mature undergraduate students with online teaching during the lockdown period to help the private higher education institutions to take appropriate actions on the outcomes of this study.

2. Literature Review

Levy (1986) defines private higher education institutes as those defined by national authorities. For example, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) defines private institutes as:

Any provider of higher education courses which is not in direct receipt of recurrent funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) or from equivalent funding bodies in the Devolved Administrations; or does not receive direct recurrent public funding (for example, from a local authority, or from the Secretary of State for Education); and is not a Further Education College. (Applying student number controls to alternative providers with designated courses, 2012, p. 6)

The UK private higher education institutes, also called fully autonomous alternative providers that operate for profit, do not receive any grant from the government and are “responsible for their own funding” (Altbach, 1999: 2). Another definition conveys a similar meaning: “Education can be privatized if students enroll at private schools or if higher education is privately funded” (Belfield and Levin 2002: 19). To sum up, private higher education institutes are independent, do not receive government funding and operate for profit.

The term “mature student” refers to anyone going to college or university after some time out of full-time education. Typically, this will mean students who are over 21 years of age at the beginning of their undergraduate studies or over 25 years of age at the beginning of their postgraduate studies (UCAS, 2020) and up to pensionable age (NUS, 2012).

Table 1: Private Higher Education Institutes (Alternative Providers) Mature Students’ Enrolment Academic Years 2015/16 to 2018/19 in the UK

Age	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
21-24	11,680	14,400	19,995	20,615
25-29	6,870	8,110	10,420	10,840
	21,995	23,360	27,200	26,225

Source: HESA, (2020)

The above table shows the largest group of mature students belongs to the age group 30 and over, and the smallest group belongs to the age group 25-29. The UK higher education institutes provide opportunities to mature students to boost their employment prospects for themselves and their families. The UK higher education institutions are at the forefront of advanced learning, offering students of all ages and backgrounds meaningful and engaging learning opportunities and promoting social mobility.

For our superficial understanding, online teaching is a type of instruction in which (1) the learner is at a distance from the educator, (2) the learner uses some form of technology (internet and a device-computer, laptop, tablet or smartphone etc.) to access the learning materials or interact with an educator and other learners, (3) some kind of support is provided to learners (Anderson, 2011a).

Online teaching is an integral part of the new millennium learning. A growing number of students are now opting for online classes. The ‘Z’ generation especially finds traditional classroom modality restrictive, inflexible and impractical. The ‘Z’ generation has already joined higher education for their studies. In comparison, the other two generations, ‘X’ and ‘Y’ (Y is also known as a millennial generation) are also in higher education for study purposes. Please see Table 2 for an overview of the generations. Generational classification varies; for example, Howe (2014) classified

the ‘X’ generation (1961 to 1981) while Bresman and Rao (2017) consider the ‘X’ generation as those who were born before 1980. Similarly, other negligible variations, Bresman and Rao (2017) consider ‘Y’ generation (1984 to 1996) while Gurau (2012) refers to those who were born between 1984 and 1996; we have just ignored small variations of generations. All three types of generations are in higher education; the ‘Z’ generation is the first generation, which has recently joined higher education. In contrast, the ‘X’ generation is the last generation, and the ‘Y’ generation is the majority student group in higher education. Y Generation is considered the first high-tech generation (Norum, 2003).

Table 2: X, Y and Z generations

Generation	Years (Born Between)	Notable Occurrence
X	1965-85	Vietnam War, Cold War, Rise of Mass Media, Analogue childhood and digital adulthood
Y	1986-1996	End of Cold War, Disintegration of USSR, Rise of the information age/internet, Novel modes of communication
Z	1997-2012	Dot com bubble, Digital globalisation, Emergence of social media

Source: Adopted from: Howe, 2014; Stankorb & Oelbaum, 2014; Sterbenz, 2015; Jenkins, 2017; Bresman and Rao, 2017 and Swanzen 2018.

The millennial (Y) generation grew up with the Internet and Information Communication Technology (ICT), perceiving living in a global village. The millennial generation is fascinated with new technologies, loves to use communication and information technology in studies, desires group activities and interaction, emphasises extracurricular activities and is motivated by grades and achievement. Most mature students belong to the ‘Y’ generation (see Table 2), while a few belong to the ‘X’ generation.

In this age of technological advancement, and especially during the Covid-19 lockdown, educational institutions have already started to provide online teaching. However, this shift due to Covid-19 in pedagogical and andragogical media is forcing academic institutions to rethink how they want to continue to deliver their courses in the future, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Part of the disconnect between teaching online and face-to-face is that digital learning has become much more student-centric, at least in most asynchronous or semi-asynchronous online courses (Barbosa, Barbosa & Rabello, 2016). Online teaching

has its critics. Brooks (1997) is quite blunt and, to some extent, right in saying that the support for multimedia learning styles is much weaker than many think it. Jagers (2014) is quite right in saying that students must teach themselves and other researchers agree to limited support for more vulnerable students. Although opinions may have changed during the past few years, there still may be a prevalence of negative stereotypes or labels about online teaching (see Heines, 2005, pp.145-150). Shank and Sitze (2004) state, “online learning lacks physical cues, has technology and access hurdles, and favours those who communicate well in writing” (p. 11). Several researchers also mentioned technology and access hurdles such as weak Internet connectivity and low technology competency of some students, especially mature students who belong to the “X” generation. On the other hand, several researchers strongly support online teaching for several reasons such as accessibility, affordability, flexibility, availability, convenience, cost-effectiveness, time-effectiveness, emerging trends, learning pedagogy, life-long learning and policy, are some of the strong arguments for online teaching (Shivani, 2020). It is evident from the lockdown that online teaching is not an option, rather a necessity.

Zoom and Microsoft Teams are online digital platforms easily available for educational institutions to create vibrant learning environments for students. These platforms improve student outcomes with secure video communication services. The majority of private higher education institutes in the UK use these platforms for online teaching, and they have created training manuals for staff and students. They also organised training for both the teachers and students before moving to online teaching in March 2020.

Satisfaction may have varying interpretations, but it is frequently encountered in literature as well as in daily life. Job satisfaction, customer satisfaction and patient satisfaction are the terms one frequently comes across. This presence, particularly in business literature, makes the significance of satisfaction doubtless. For example, customer satisfaction seems to occur as a mental state or a feeling about a particular experience – in the customer’s case; it is the consumption of a product or service (Rust and Oliver, 1994).

Customer satisfaction is a well-recognised concept in marketing, and student satisfaction has derived from marketing. However, we also acknowledge that higher

education is a service. Customer satisfaction's classic definition was given by Oliver (1980); according to his definition, satisfaction is the difference between expectation and actual experience that a customer has with a service encounter about what was expected. Customer satisfaction is an overall evaluation based on the customer's total purchase and consumption experience with a good or service over time (Anderson, Fornell, & Rust, 1997). Therefore, satisfaction is the process of meeting expectations (Oliver, 1980; Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2009).

Satisfaction can be viewed as the difference between expected and perceived product performance, expectations as predictions of future performance. Customer satisfaction is based on the "critical service attributes" of the organisation. Especially on service organisations pre-, during and post-service delivery, these attributes are encountered by customers and conclude the satisfaction levels of the service obtained. Moreover, it is important to understand and practice excellent service strategically for customer satisfaction, and this contributes to the 'bottom line' of the organisation (Lonial & Raju, 2015).

Marketers strongly believe that monitoring customer satisfaction helps them to manage their business more effectively (Farris; Bendle; Pfeifer and Reibstein, 2010). It is therefore vital that businesses are capable of assessing customer satisfaction so that it can be leveraged to achieve the business objectives.

Researchers have suggested that higher education is essentially a service industry that endeavours to satisfy its customer (Oldfield and Baron 2000, Elliott & Shin, 2002). Therefore, it should be considered a service (Ng and Forbes, 2009).

It is widely believed that students in the higher education industry are just like customers and that any marketing context and framework used to attract and retain business customers is applicable to students as well.

Further researchers have used standard marketing vocabulary in the context of higher education, such as 'customer', 'relationship', 'satisfaction', 'customer-centric' and 'competitive-advantage'. For instance, Grönroos (1994) suggested that the marketing aim should be the development of long-term 'customer' relationships with students because they are a university's most valuable resource. Similarly, it has been argued

that relationships between institutes of higher education and students are important and that organisations should develop a ‘market-oriented’ approach to improve these relationships (Helfert, Ritter & Walter, 2002, p. 1119). D’Uggento and Romanazzi (2006) also suggested that universities need a ‘customer-centric’ approach when it comes to students. DeShields, Kara, and Kaynak (2005) recommended that the management of higher education should apply a market-oriented approach to sustain competitive advantage. Talking specifically about private higher education, the ‘customer-centric’ approach is even more important, relative to public sector higher education. In the UK, public sector higher education students pay tuition fees of up to £9,000 per year for undergraduate level study and gradually pay this back after the completion of their studies when they are earning. In the tuition-based model, students are the primary source of revenue, which forces institutions to think differently about the role of student satisfaction for their own sustainability and success (Kotler and Fox, 1995). The above references strongly suggest that a standard marketing framework should be deployed to manage student relationships with the institute of higher education.

For instance, Tonks and Farr (1995) suggested that students absolutely should be seen as customers. Hill (1995) shares this view with D’Uggento, Petruzzellis and Romanazzi (2006), also regarding students as university customers and concluded that these establishments need to adopt a customer-centric approach. Higher education is like a service industry. Therefore, students should be considered customers, but unfortunately, in literature, there have been two schools of thought; one considers the student, as a customer while the other does not. This controversial debate should be finished, and students should be considered customers, especially those who pay a fee for their education.

3. Methodology

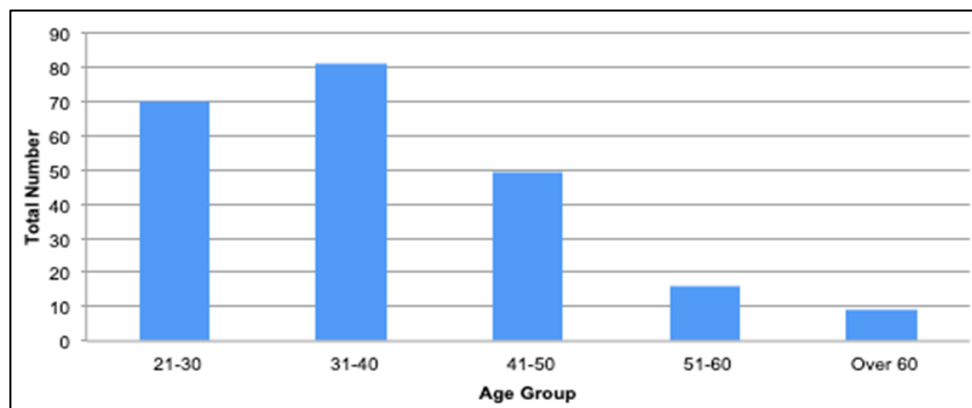
Following a brief review of the literature on customer satisfaction in general and specifically on student satisfaction with online learning, we decided to focus on the online learning experience of students and the support provided to them during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study aimed to examine the relationship between online teaching and mature student satisfaction. As such, it employed a quantitative design (Creswell, 2012; Saunders et al., 2009).

The study used quantitative methods as the researchers consider quantitative research to be more appropriate than qualitative research, especially during the lockdown period. It is difficult, rather impossible, to conduct face-to-face interviews. However, there was the option of conducting online interviews, but those are time-consuming. The study applied a proportionate stratified sampling technique in selecting the sample from three private higher education institutes in the south of England.

As for data collection, a self-administered questionnaire was developed by using Google Forms and sent to mature undergraduate students studying in three institutions. The faculty member of the institutions briefed the respondents about the survey. The total of 225 questionnaires included 75 from each institution; the error rate has been less than two per cent. The survey comprised the 15 items on the two dimensions excluding demographic, training (type, material and overall satisfaction) and online learning experience. The questionnaire was pilot tested before actual distribution to ensure the questions were easily understandable and answerable and were, if necessary, correctly rephrased. The final 225 questionnaires were downloaded from Google Forms into Microsoft Excel to perform descriptive statistical analysis.

4. Data Analysis and Results

As previously mentioned, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on Microsoft Excel. A simple and straightforward questionnaire was designed using Google Forms comprising 15 questions, including demographic questions. The questionnaire focused on type of training provided to students, challenges faced by students, overall learning experience and their future preference for online or traditional face-to-face teaching after the Covid-19 pandemic. In this analysis, we have not analysed all 15 questions one by one but rather focus on the study's main purpose.

Figure 1: Age group observations**Table 3:** Age group and their participation

Age Group	Total
24-30	70
31-40	81
41-50	49
51-60	16
Over 60	9
Observations	225
Average	45
Median	49

We categorised five age groups in the questionnaire and found the largest age group was age group 31-40 and the second largest was age group 21-30, and the smallest age group was over 60.

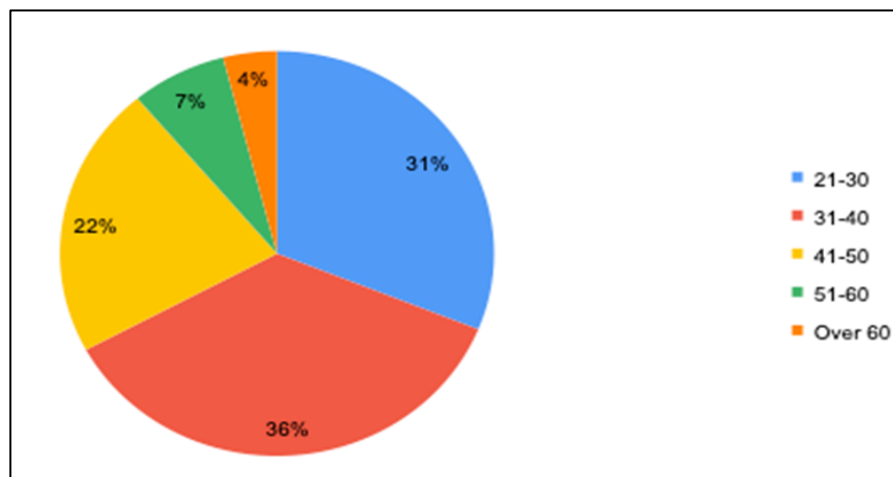
Figure 2: Age group observations

Figure 2 represents all the five age groups and their percentage. This figure also confirms that 'X' and 'Y' generations (students) are also studying and known as mature students.

Table 4: Descriptive statistical analysis

5. How would you rate your online learning competency with Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype and any other software?		10. The overall training was useful		14. Your overall experience with online teaching and learning during Covid-19	
Mean	1.96	Mean	6.86	Mean	2.32
Standard Error	0.06	Standard Error	0.22	Standard Error	0.04
Median	2	Median	7	Median	2
Mode	1	Mode	10	Mode	2
Standard Deviation	0.90	Standard Deviation	2.57	Standard Deviation	0.62
Sample Variance	0.80	Sample Variance	6.61	Sample Variance	0.38
Kurtosis	-0.75	Kurtosis	-1.19	Kurtosis	-0.65
Skewness	0.48	Skewness	-0.23	Skewness	-0.33
Range	3	Range	9	Range	2
Minimum	1	Minimum	1	Minimum	1
Maximum	4	Maximum	10	Maximum	3
Sum	442	Sum	967	Sum	522
Count	225	Count	225	Count	225

Question 5: How would you rate your online learning competency with Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype and any other software?

Assigned ratings are shown in Table 4. Key: (1 Novice being the lowest, 2 1=Novice (First time user) 2=Beginner (with some introductory knowledge) 3=Competent (previous experience and sufficient knowledge) 4=Expert (advanced knowledge and extraordinarily capable). Since the data was non-numeric there was need to assign values so as to analyse it quantitatively.

Mean of 1.96 shows that most of our observations were novice (first time user) of online learning.

Standard Deviation is at 0.90 showing how our ratings revolve around the mean.

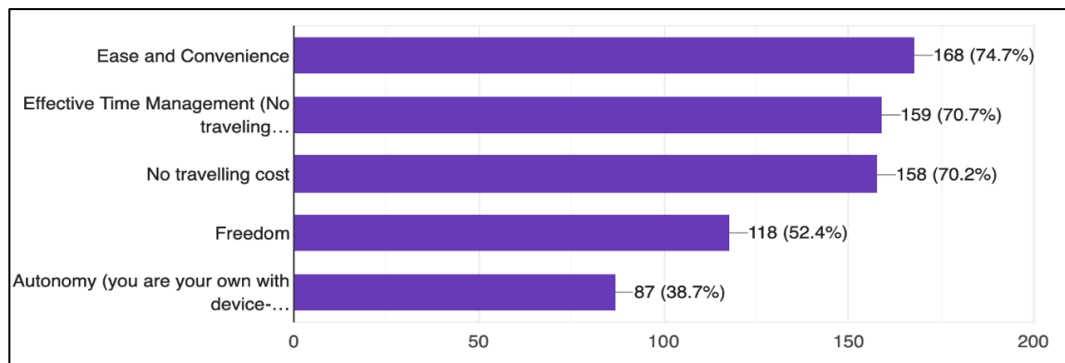
Question 10: The overall training was useful

Out of the score of 10, our respondents' mean came out at 6.86. This is our measure of the centre of our scores given in question 10. Since our mean is above 50%, over 50% found it beneficial to have the training.

Mode is 10, which means most respondents gave a score 10, that shows the overall training was useful.

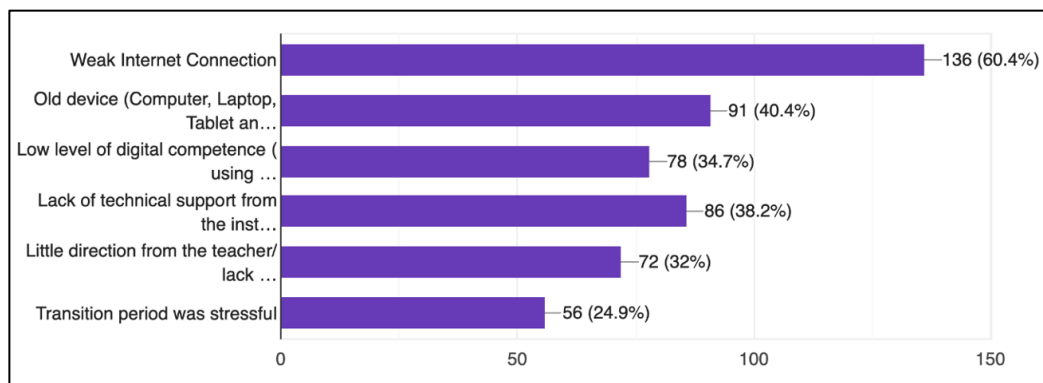
Standard 2.57 shows variation in our data around the mean.

Figure 3: As a student, what makes you happy with the online learning?



As we know, there are plenty of benefits of online learning. So this particular question focused on the main benefits of online learning. The results indicate that 168 students (74.7%) considered online learning provides ease and convenience as a result of no travelling time (159 students, 70.7%) and cost involved (158 students, 70.2%) in the online learning. Last, but not least, it provides freedom and autonomy.

Figure 4: Challenges with online teaching and learning



The respondents have reported a range of challenges with online teaching and learning. The results indicate that 136 (60.4%) respondents confirmed weak Internet

connection. This may be due to the high volume of Internet usage during the lockdown, and all students in the country switched to online learning. Furthermore, 91 (40.4%) respondents were using old devices, 78 (34.7%) respondents had a low level of digital competency, and 86 (38.2%) respondents confirmed that they did not have technical support from the college. Furthermore, 72 (32%) respondents confirmed that they did not have any direction from the teacher related to technical problems, and lastly, 56 (24.9%) respondents found the transition period stressful. The stress may be due to the issues such as weak Internet connection, old devices, lack of technical support from the institute etc.

Question 14: Your overall experience with online teaching and learning.

Figure 5: Your overall experience with online teaching and learning

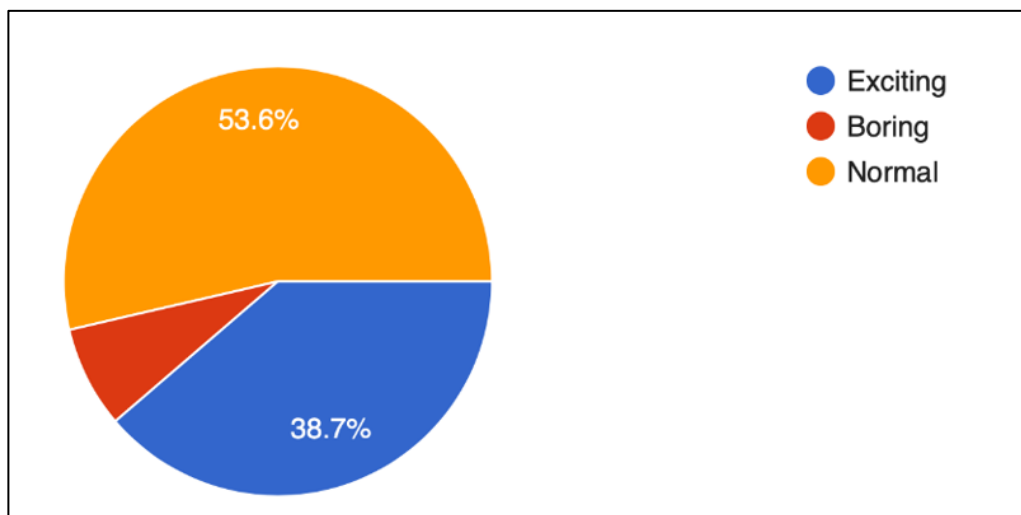


Figure 5 shows that 53.6% of respondents find overall teaching experience average and 38.7% find it exciting, and only 7.7% find it boring.

A mean of 2.32 shows acceptance close to the participants' excitement in online learning and teaching (see Table 4). Modal rating is 2, which heavily supports the result shown by our mean. Most respondents feel normal about online learning and teaching.

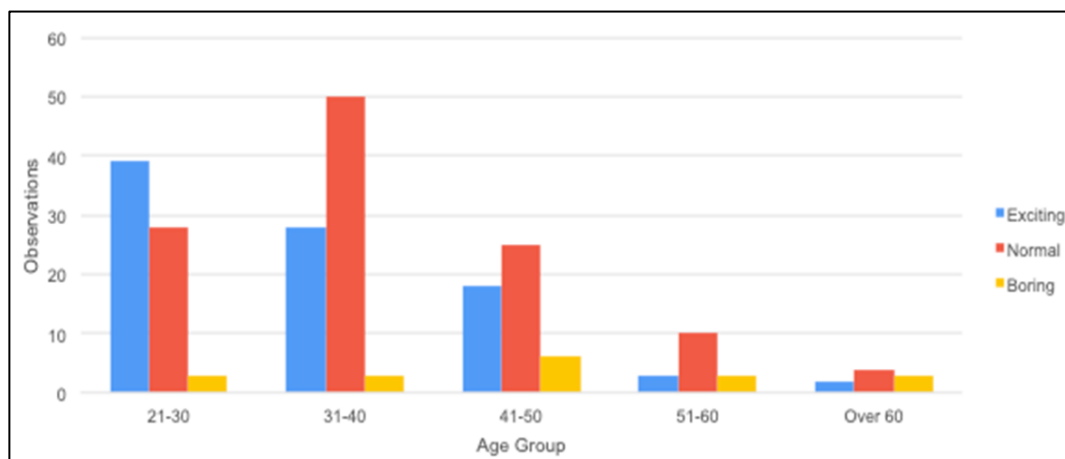
4.1 Two way analysis

Table 5: Two Way Analysis

Age Group	Exciting	Normal	Boring
21-30	39	28	3
31-40	28	50	3
41-50	18	25	6
51-60	3	10	3
Over 60	2	4	3

Table 5 show a regression that the youngest age group (21-30) find the online experience exciting, and the second age group 31-40 also find it exciting. However, but the last age group find it least exciting, with only two respondents find it exciting.

Figure 6: Age group vs. overall rating



The graph in Figure 6 depicts that 39 respondents in the age group 21-30 are excited about online learning, 28 feel it is normal and 3 feel it is boring. This age group is highly represented.

The majority (50) in the age group 31-40 feel that online learning is normal, mainly because they have done it several times before and it is cost-effective, easy and convenient and saves time and travelling cost. 28 are excited, and most likely these are first timers. Only 3 feel it is boring.

Age group 51-60 and over is also represented but with few respondents in terms of numbers.

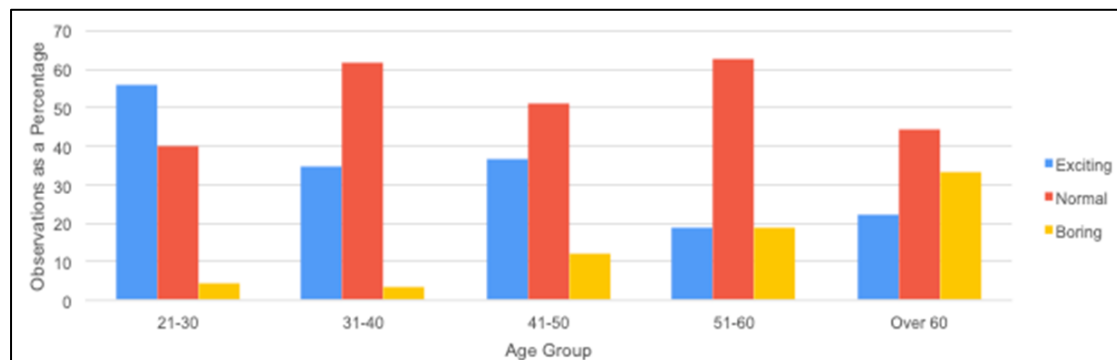
The representation from above does help, but not everyone participated in those age groups. Therefore, we need to use the weighted figures, which are percentages, as shown in Figure 7.

Table 6: Normal data converted as percentage

Total (225)	Age Group	Exciting	Normal	Boring	Percentage %
70	21-30	56%	40%	4%	100%
81	31-40	35%	61%	4%	100%
49	41-50	37%	51%	12%	100%
16	51-60	19%	63%	18%	100%
9	Over 60	22%	44%	34%	100%

In terms of percentage, the younger age groups of 21-30 (56%) and 31-40 (35%) find online teaching exciting while the older age groups of 51-60 (18%) and over 60 (34%) find the online teaching experience boring.

Figure 7: Age group vs. overall rating in percentage form



The Graph in Figure 7 depicts that 56% of respondents in the age group 21-30 are excited about online learning. 40% feel it is normal and 4% feel it is boring. This age group is highly represented.

Age Group 31-40 is the most represented group. 62% feel that online learning is normal, mainly because they have done it several times before and it is cost-effective, easy and convenient and saves time. 35% are excited, and most likely, these are first timers. Only 4% feel it is boring.

63% in the age group 51-60 feel it is normal, 19% are excited and 19% feel it is boring.

44% of those who represented the Over 60 age group feel normal about online learning, 22% feel it is exciting and 33% feel it is boring.

The information in Figure 5 represents all age groups fairly because of weighting.

Table 7: Age groups' preference

Age Group	Continue online teaching	Offer blended learning	Return to original face-to-face teaching
21-30	47	12	11
31-40	39	26	16
41-50	19	17	13
51-60	4	3	9
Over 60	1	1	7

The majority of younger age groups (21-30 and 31-40) prefer to continue online teaching after Covid-19. A few among these groups prefer blended learning and a small number (11) of respondents want face-to-face teaching after Covid-19. Among older age groups (51-60 and over 60), the majority prefer traditional face-to-face teaching after Covid-19 and a small number prefer online and blended learning.

Figure 8: Age group vs after Covid-19 in percentage form

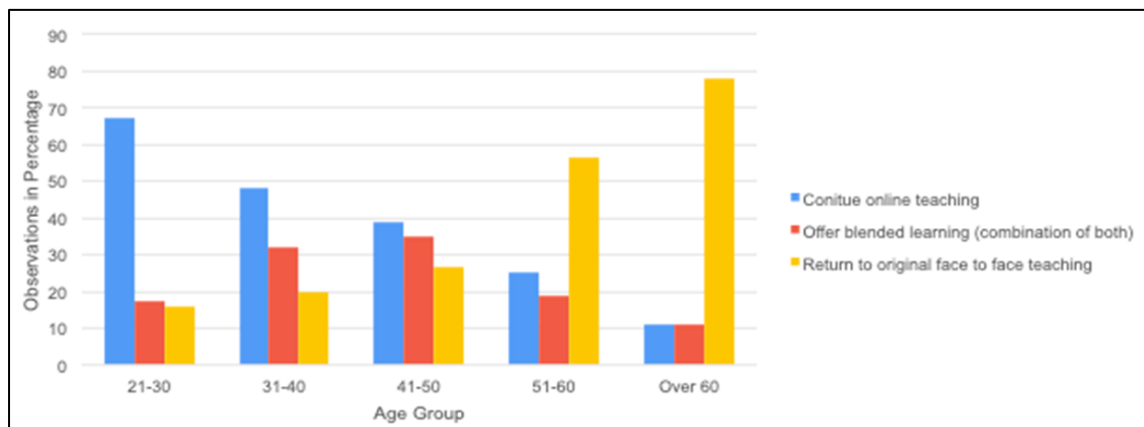


Figure 8 shows respondents' preferences post-Covid-19.

67% in the age group 21-30 would love to continue online learning post-Covid-19 and lockdowns. In addition, 17% prefer blended learning and 16% would love to return to original face-to-face teaching.

48% in the age group 31-40 want to continue online learning, 32% want blended learning and 20% want to return to original face-to-face teaching.

39% of the age group 41-50 prefer to continue online learning, 35% prefer blended learning and 27% prefer to return to original face-to-face teaching. The distribution in this group is relatively normal.

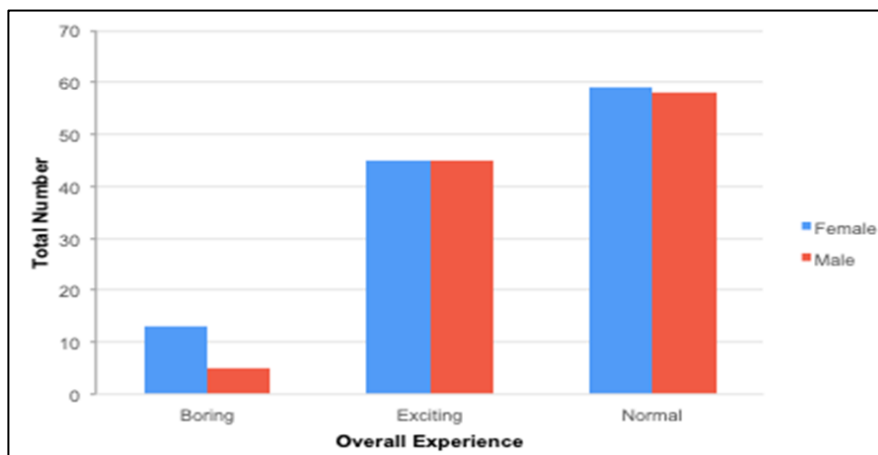
25% of 51-60 age group prefer to continue online teaching, 19% want blended and 56% want to return to original face-to-face teaching. This was very much expected given the age of the people involved.

Those over 60 strongly prefer to return to original face-to-face teaching. This is not an anomaly since it was expected they would respond that way.

Table 8: Classification by gender

Online Teaching	Female	Male	Total
Boring	13	5	18
Exciting	45	45	90
Normal	59	58	117
Total	117	108	225

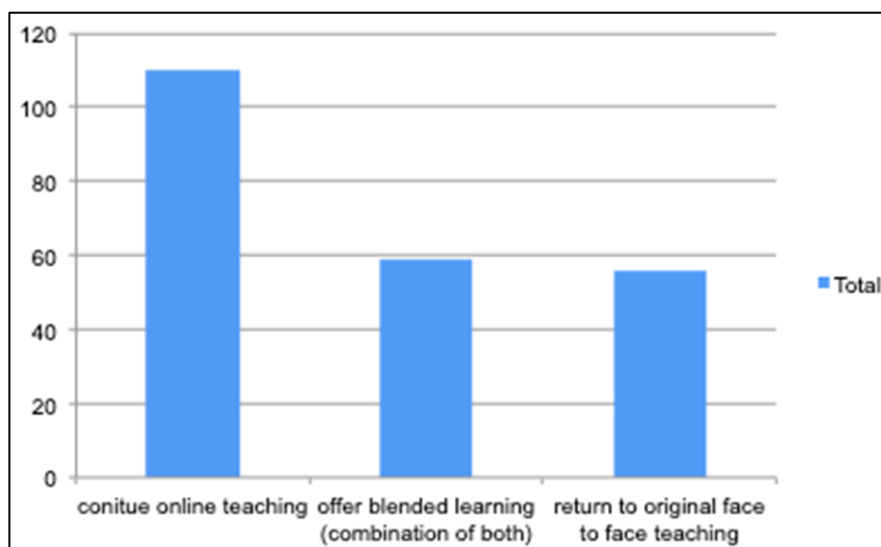
In terms of analysis from a gender perspective, the results show that most females find online teaching boring compared to males. However, there were interesting results in terms of online teaching excitement; both males and females equally find it exciting.

Figure 9: Gender vs overall experience

There is only variation among males and females on the boring aspect of online teaching. There is an agreement between the two on exciting and normal online teaching. This can be seen in Figure 9.

Table 9: Overall students' preference

Preference	Total Number of Students
Continue online teaching	110
Offer blended learning	59
Return to original face-to-face teaching	56
Grand Total	225

Figure 10: Preference for different options

Overall, from our observations, we conclude that at least 110 respondents want to continue online learning, which constitutes the largest portion of our observed data. The ones who want blended and those who want to return to original face-to-face teaching are evenly balanced. 59% want blended, and 56% want to return to the original face-to-face.

5. Conclusion

The study's main purpose was to explore the level of student satisfaction with online teaching during the lockdown period of Covid-19. As the survey sample size was small (225), the findings cannot be generalised for all the sectors of higher education. However, the results indicate that most students below age group 50 prefer online teaching or blended and want to continue after Covid-19. The most common challenges students faced were weak internet connection, old devices (computers, laptops etc.), low levels of digital competency and lack of technical support. Lastly, the abrupt transition to online teaching had been a stressful experience for some students.

6. Recommendations

Based on the results derived from this research, the following specific recommendations are presented to the senior management and the policymakers of the private higher education institutions.

It was not easy to suddenly switch from face-to-face in-class learning to remote online learning. It was noted that higher education institutions had to do this quickly due to Covid-19 and lockdown in the country. But, in post-Covid-19, if private higher education institutes want to continue online teaching, they should be required to train students, especially mature students, from age groups 41-50, 51-60 and over 60. These age groups of students lack a certain degree of technological proficiency. Therefore, higher education institutions need to create training manuals, videos and online technical support.

The private higher education institutions need to provide the latest computers or laptops to students; this provision could be on subsidised prices, or on easy and affordable instalments or provision of borrowing these devices and returning after the completion of the course.

Millions of students worldwide are experiencing technical difficulties because of the high usage rate of online learning systems, video streaming software and other digital tools. The platforms are overloaded resulting in poor quality video and audio and internet problems. Internet connection is either unstable or the current data plan is insufficient to cover the progressive e-learning needs.

It is recommended that HEIs need to provide broadband speed guidance to students. The students should know the minimum speed at which the broadband can download data easily. Therefore, students need realistic information about the top broadband companies and their broadband packages with speed.

It is not easy for students, especially mature, to start using online learning software (Zoom, Microsoft Teams etc.) without additional training. Therefore, additional basic computer literacy training for mature students is always a good idea. Besides this, PrHEIs can provide them with online support as well as tutorials.

It is recommended to get regular feedback from the students on how they experience online teaching and what should be improved.

Mature students are at the forefront of the education process. When education becomes a commercial transaction, especially at private higher education institutions, students should be treated as customers and private higher education institutions need to meet their needs.

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IS COVID-19 TRANSITIONING CASH COW INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS INTO CATS?

Authors: Dr Fayyaz Hussain Qureshi and Sarwar Khawaja

Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted every aspect of human life. It has disrupted people's lifestyles around the world and international students are no exception. Every industry has been affected, including higher education (HE). For the first time ever in the HE sector, learning and teaching adopted online platforms to deliver the curriculum. At the same time, there has been growing interest in the business of international students across the globe. More than five million international students are currently studying in higher education institutions (HEIs) outside their home countries. It is often assumed that HEIs consider international students a source of revenue and, therefore, seek to recruit as many as possible. The United Kingdom is the second largest and most popular global destination for international students after the United States. The primary purpose of this study is to assess the impact of Covid-19 on international student enrolment around the world in general and in the UK in particular. Our findings show that international students are cash cows, and Covid-19 had a significant impact on the recruitment of international students.

Keywords: Covid-19, International Students, Cash Cows, Cats

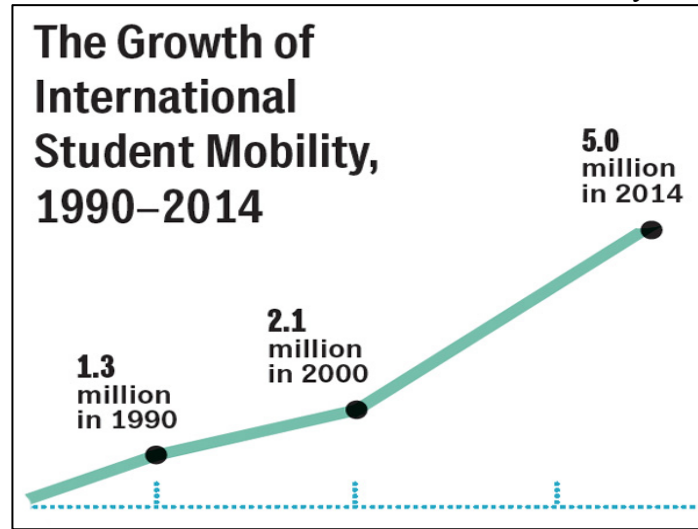
1. Introduction

An internationally mobile student is an individual who has physically crossed an international border and is now in a foreign country for education purpose (UNESCO, 2015). The OECD (2019) defines international students as those who have left their native country for the sole purpose of studying. More specifically, international students in higher education are those who received their prior education in another country (usually in their country of origin) and are not residents of their current country of study.

Based on these definitions, an international student within the UK context is a person who is not a UK resident and comes from outside of the European Economic Area (EEA) to the UK for study purposes only. International students from outside the EEA require a Tier 4 visa (student visa), and the student must be sponsored by a Tier 4 licensed institution and meet the student visa requirements (MAC Report, September 2018). The UK officially left the European Union (EU) on 31 January 2020. Since Brexit, EU students require a student visa if they come to the UK to study for more than six months.

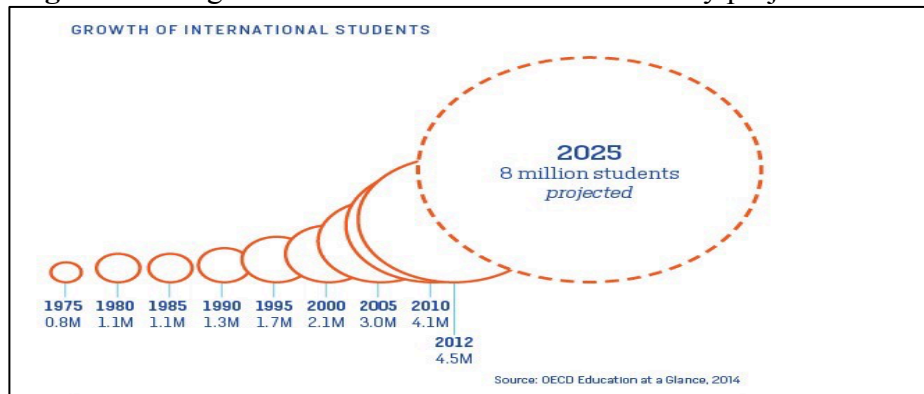
The number of international students has increased tremendously over the past four decades from 1.3 million in 1990 to 5.0 million in 2014 (see Fig. 1).

According to ICEF Monitor (2015), nearly five million students were studying outside their countries of origin in 2014. This number had more than doubled since 2000 when 2.1 million people were classed as international students. In 2013, almost 4.5 million international students were studying at a higher education level outside of their country of citizenship (UNESCO, 2016).

Figure 1: The Growth of International Student Mobility 1999-2014

Source: ICEF Monitor (2015)

The OECD (2014) forecasts that the number of international students will rise to eight million by 2025 and Altbach and Bassett (2004) predict a similar trend. This indicates a very inspiring projected growth rate of 60% in the overall global mobility of students over the subsequent decade.

Figure 2: The growth of international student mobility projection 2025

Source: OECD Education at a Glance (2014), figure retrieved from Institute of International Education, Project Atlas, (2015)

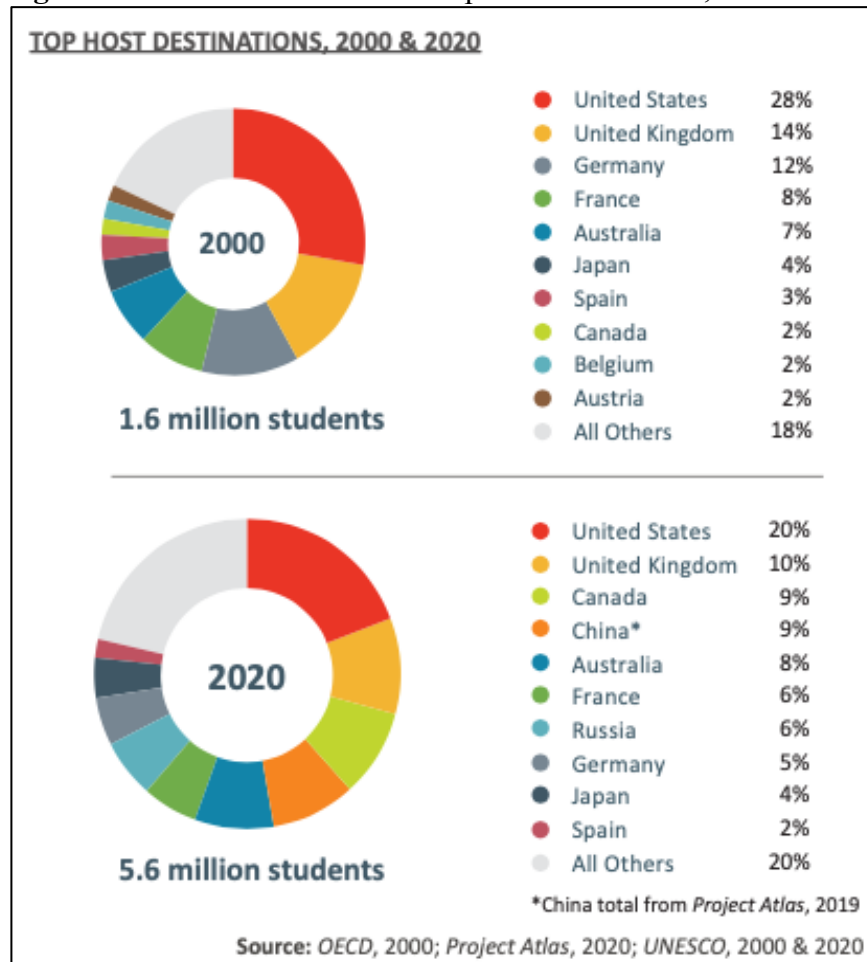
The number of international students increased quite consistently in the 1980s. Then the number was just over one million, and by 2000 that number had increased to more than two million. The figure doubled between 2000 and 2017 to reach 5.3 million (UNESCO 2018) and rose again to 5.6 million in 2018 (OECD, 2020).

2. Global Competition

The percentage of international students in higher education has grown dramatically over the past century (OECD, 2017) and between 1998 and 2018 increased on average by 4.8% and reached 5.6 million by 2018 (OECD, 2020). As a result global competition in international education markets is becoming intense. International students are attracted and recruited for economic reasons, although this is by no means the universal motivation (Lee, Maldonado-Maldonado & Rhoades, 2006). Other reasons may include a skilled labour force, talent and cross-culture diversity (Bhandari, Robles and Farrugia, 2018).

As more countries recognise that international students represent an important source of revenue and human capital, and as more significant numbers of people worldwide can afford to study abroad, the sector has become increasingly competitive. The increasing global flows of international students are concentrated towards a handful of countries. Recently, however, a few more countries have also recognised the importance of international students as a key source of revenue and human capital. Consequently, new destinations have emerged, such as China, Russia and Malaysia, in addition to traditional destinations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, France, Germany and New Zealand, making competition even fiercer.

In 2020, the US was the most crucial destination, receiving more than one million international students, 20% of the whole population. For many decades, the US has been the top choice for international students primarily because it is home to a large number of universities and colleges (5500) and US institutions dominate the world's highest ranked universities and colleges. Stanford University, Harvard University, California Institute of Technology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of California, Berkeley, Yale University, Princeton University and the University of Chicago all feature in the top ten global rankings (The Times Higher Education World University Rankings, 2021). These prestigious institutions attract international students from across the globe with an appetite for a first-class education and a bright future through academic excellence.

Figure 3: Global market share of top host destinations, 2000 to 2020

English is the lingua franca of the globalised world, with one in four people using it worldwide (Sharifian, 2013). Unsurprisingly, then, English-speaking countries are the most attractive student destinations overall, with four countries (the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia) receiving 47% of all internationally mobile students in 2020. In 2000, these four countries alone received 51% of the entire population of international students. Conversely, the United States lost its share by 8% from 28% in 2000 to 20% in 2020. Similarly, the United Kingdom lost 4% of its share from 14% in 2000 to 10% in 2020.

The growth in international students is not *just* a US-centric phenomenon. Universities and colleges in the UK, Australia, Canada, Germany, France and China also experienced a rapid increase in international enrolments. The UK is the second largest market after the US and the preferred choice for higher education by international students (OECD 2017). The UK has a world-class education system and globally reputed universities with a strong presence in international markets.

The universities of Cambridge and Oxford have always retained their positions in the top ten rankings; for example, in 2021 the University of Oxford topped the World University Rankings and the University of Cambridge was ranked sixth in the same year (The Times Higher Education World University Rankings, 2021).

In percentage terms, the US received 20%, the UK 10% and Canada 9% of the entire international student population in 2020. The top three countries, therefore, accounted for 39% of the whole population. By adding the fourth and fifth countries, China (9%) and Australia (8%), more than half of the international student population is represented (56%). France, which is roughly tied with Russia, another emerging destination in terms of market share of international students (around 6% as of 2020), has a new international recruitment programme designed to dramatically expand international student enrolments at its HEIs: 470,000 students by 2025. Adding an additional five countries (France, Russia, Germany, Japan and Spain) gives a share of 80%. Therefore, the top ten countries account for 80% and the rest of the world 20%. Among the six most notable destinations, European countries represent 39% of all international students, North America 29%, Asia 13%, Australia 8% and the rest of the world, including Africa, 11%.

Elsewhere, the global education market is developing and changing rapidly. We can see in the table below the emergence of new markets, such as China and Russia, which did not feature among the top ten destinations for international students in 2000.

Table 1: The top ten destinations for international students, 2019 and 2020

Country Of Study	Number of International Students 2019	Number of International Students 2020	% Change
1. United States	1,095,299	1,075,496	- 1.8%
2. United Kingdom	542,250	551,495	+ 5.2%
3. Canada	435,415	503,270	+15.6%
4. China	492,352	*	*
5. Australia	420,501	463,643	+ 10.3%
6. France	343,400	358,000	+4.3%
7. Russia	334,497	353,331	+ 5.6%
8. Germany	280,002	302,157	+ 7.1%
9. Japan	208,901	228,403	+9.3%
10. Spain	120,991	125,675	+3.9%

Source: Project Atlas, 2019 & 2020

*Data was not available

Several governments from different countries have devised strategies to recruit international students and boost their HE balance sheets (Douglass & Edelstein, 2009; Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012). For example, Australia, Canada, Germany, France and

the UK have already formulated strategies for internationalising their higher education sectors by sending strong, positive messages to the world that international students are welcome and needed. For example, Australia launched a strategy in 2015 to increase the number of international student numbers to 720,000 by 2025 as well as improve the quality of education, enhance the student experience, improve complex visa application procedures and develop and strengthen international partnerships. Canada's international education strategy was formulated in 2013 and clearly recognised the importance of international students by setting a target to attract 450,000 international students and researchers by 2022. Canada also formulated another international education strategy (2019-2024) entitled 'Building on Success' (Government of Canada, 2019) and the Canadian government has plans to welcome 1,233,000 international students (The Pie News, 2020).

Germany and France have similar strategies and targets, as shown in the table below.

Table 2: National strategy for international students

Country	National Strategy	Recruitment Targets
Australia	National strategy for international education 2025	Aims to forecast to grow from 650,000 enrolments to 940,000 by 2025
Canada	International education strategy	Aims to attract 450,000 international students and researchers by 2022
Germany	International cooperation action plan and strategy of the federal government for the internationalisation of education, science and research	Aims to increase the proportion of international students and researchers at campuses to 15% by 2025. The country already achieved a target of 350,000 internationally mobile students before 2020
France	Aims to increase the number of international students	Aims to increase the numbers of international students by 20% by 2025
UK	The United Kingdom has a new International Education Strategy to attract international students and allowing them to work after graduating	The UK government aims to attract 600,000 international students by 2030

Source: Adopted and modified from: MAC report, (September 2018) and Daad Strategie 2025

In March 2019, the UK Education Secretary and the International Trade Secretary announced a new ambitious strategy to strengthen Britain's leading role in the global higher education market. The strategy aims to increase the number of international students studying in the country by more than 30% – helping to boost income from educational exports to £35 billion by 2030 (UK government, 2019).

The United Kingdom currently provides a world-class education with a positive global reputation and has a strong presence in the international market (HM Government, 2019). The number of international students in the UK reached 430,833 in 2017 (OECD, 2017) and 458,520 in 2018, and it is also worth noting that there is no cap on the number of international students permitted to study within the country (MAC report, Sep 2018).

3. International Students as Cash Cows

The budget cuts faced by many American and British higher education institutions have compelled their policymakers to seek alternative sources of revenue to ensure the financial sustainability of their institutions. In search of solutions, many saw an opportunity to increase tuition fees, especially for international students, and recruit more as a new source of cash flow to fund operations and plug budget deficits (Choudaha, 2017). Thus, international student recruitment has become a vital revenue source for host HEIs and the growing export industry for host countries.

A decade ago, there were no tuition fees for home students in UK higher education. However, the UK government designed and increased the tuition fees in order to share the cost of providing higher education between the state and the students (and their families) who consume education (Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010).

However, some tuition fee schemes have extended beyond cost-sharing for international students. The Anglo-Saxon countries have become increasingly entrepreneurial and seek revenue through market-like competition (Bok, 2003; Marginson & Considine, 2000; Morphew & Eckel, 2009; Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012). They charge up to four times the tuition fees for home students; for example, some undergraduate international students pay £35,000 a year compared to a maximum of £9,000 paid by the UK students (BBC, 2013). Attracting higher fee-paying international students is one prominent way in which HEIs compete for additional income (Brown, 2010; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2003; Marginson, 2007; Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012). International students pay full tuition fees and bear the associated costs of study. The UK's national policy of high-cost tuition fees for international students generates immediate income necessary for the financial health

of HEIs and provides economic benefits for the country and the economy (Lomer, Papatsiba and Naidoo, 2018). The contribution from international students to the economy has been well documented (Hamzah and Abdullah, 2017). For example, the University of Luton (now the University of Bedfordshire) earned 17.7% of its total income from fees paid by international students, whilst the universities of Hertfordshire, Middlesex and Westminster all earned more than 20% of their total income from international students in the academic year 2003-04 (MacLeod, 2006).

International students provide invaluable economic, societal and cultural benefits (Foster, 2014) and can be a driver of campus internationalisation (Forbes-Mewett, 2016). According to ICEF Monitor (2019), international students generate an economic impact of US\$300 billion globally and the largest share is that of the US – US\$57.3 billion – followed by the UK, which had a share of US\$25.5 billion in 2016. According to Universities UK (2017), international students and their visitors generated £25.8 billion for the UK economy in the 2014-15 academic year. In 2019, international students contributed nearly \$44 billion to the US economy (Bureau of Economic Analysis 2020).

The Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC, 2021) report that international students contribute more than \$21.6 billion annually to the Canadian economy and support the vitality of communities. The enormous contributions international students make to the Canadian economy have resulted in the Canadian government developing policies to attract more international students.

In Australia, the estimated revenue from international student tuition fees exceeds one-quarter of the total expenditure on tertiary educational institutions (OECD, 2017).

Attracting prospective international students remains important for economic reasons as well as for the diversity of experience (Soo and Elliott, 2010). Furthermore, international students are also beneficial to higher education institutions as they pay higher tuition fees than home students, creating an important source of revenue in the face of budget cutbacks (Riaño, Mol & Raghuram 2018). For instance, in the 2014-15 academic year, it was estimated that 14% of the total university revenue in the UK was generated by tuition fees paid by international students (Universities UK 2017).

For many UK universities, international students can finance their operations (Ziguras, 2011). Without revenue from international student tuition fees, many UK universities would experience a shortfall in financing and would struggle to grow and invest in the future. In this context, some experts argue that without tuition fee income derived from international students, some UK universities might not survive (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011).

Many international students at the undergraduate level for three years in the UK and four years in the US have been attractive sources of revenue for HEIs. In addition, some countries with no tuition fees for home students also charge international students tuition fees, such as Sweden. Another example is Finland, which has a robust egalitarian tradition and expectations about the social provision of higher education, where HEIs can charge fees to non-European Union (EU) students in some programmes (Kauppinen & Kaidesoja, 2014).

In countries where home students share some of the costs but also enjoy a state subsidy, international students have often been charged fee premiums (Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010), such as the UK and Australia.

While cost-sharing has unquestionably been a consideration, the implementation of international tuition fees has also been part of a general policy shift in many Anglo-Saxon countries towards a more market-based and entrepreneurial higher education system (Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012).

As we previously mentioned, a number of countries, including Australia, Canada, France (Marshall, 2013) and the United Kingdom (Buchanan, 2013) have recently announced plans to attract more international students, especially at the undergraduate level. This categorically indicates that these countries consider international students to be cash cows, even in national strategies, and prioritise increasing international student enrolment. As discussed, some countries have successfully achieved set targets ahead of time, such as Germany.

As cost-sharing schemes have extended to profit motives, HEIs have made more efforts to attract international students. As a result some countries have reformulated

their strategies; for example, China (McCafferty, 2013) and Russia are rapidly attracting international students.

It is well known that exporting education services has become an important economic activity in some countries, including Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. Fee-paying international students generate a considerable revenue stream for higher education institutions; they also consume other goods and services and thus contribute to the host country's economy.

However, many HEIs have realised that increasing international student enrolment is no easy task. Especially in the knowledge economy and era of globalisation, students are well informed and have a much wider choice; therefore, they prefer to study at a reputed institution or in their ideal location. In order to attract more international students, HEIs are establishing their campuses in large cities; for example, London is the best capital city for international students in the world. The city attracts a large number of international students, and every year more than 100,000 international students come to study in London (Study London, 2019). International students prefer to study in the UK capital, and British universities also like to offer courses at their campuses in London. According to Study London (2019), there are nearly 50 universities in London with more than 10,000 courses on offer. This list also includes five of the 24 prestigious Russell Group universities. For example, Coventry University has had a London Campus since 2010 and the University of Sunderland established a London Campus in the late 2000s. Other universities with a presence in London include Cumbria, Glasgow Caledonia, Ulster and Liverpool. This trend started in the 2000s and has clear benefits in attracting potential international students. Obviously, international students are potentially more attracted to London. According to the Trade Union Congress (TUC 2017), the UK economy is disproportionately concentrated in London and the South-East. This prosperous region is projected to account for 40% of national output by the end of 2022. London's rapid growth has been particularly evident in the last two decades, during which period the city climbed from 18.7% of GDP to 22.7% of GDP, and this figure is expected to reach 24.8% by the end of 2022.

It is a common presumption that international students prefer to study in big cities. Both home and international students are keen to study in London because of the availability of job opportunities and proximity to potential employers. It is a global business and financial hub, a centre for entertainment and nightlife and home to a wealth of academic resources, for example, one of the largest libraries in the world is the British Library.

4. Impact of Covid-19 on International Students and HEIs

The global spread of the coronavirus pandemic has created significant challenges for industries around the world, including higher education (Qureshi et al., 2020). Many countries went into lockdown, borders were closed and face-to-face classes at higher education institutions were cancelled. The crisis has not only affected home students, but international students as well.

In 2020, higher education institutions worldwide closed down to control the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, possibly affecting more than 3.9 million international students (UNESCO, 2020). International students were particularly badly hit at the start of the lockdown. They have had to deal with the implications of university closures and switch to online classes in their host country. Students have had to decide whether to return home with limited information about their return to the host country or continue online classes and remain in their host country with restricted employment or without employment and unable to resolve their student visa status. Obviously, due to their immigration status, international students have been more vulnerable during the pandemic. Some countries have offered leniency on student visas, such as the United Kingdom which implemented temporary policy concessions for international students, introducing a number of measures, such as assuring no adverse immigration consequences on overstays between 24 January 2020 and 31 August 2020 (UKCISA, 2020). Canada has offered similar leniency to international students (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2020). A fall in the number of international students during the academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21 may have severe consequences on the revenue of some HEIs, as international students often pay higher tuition fees than domestic ones. The Anglo-Saxon countries, such as Australia,

Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States that rely heavily on international students with differentiated fees will suffer huge losses. International students' investment in higher education abroad will still pay off over the course of their lifetime. However, students may begin to challenge the value of paying high fees to study online during the pandemic when they can no longer benefit from networking and access to foreign labour markets. International students are already demanding compensation from their universities as the pandemic has seriously affected their university experience. Tuition fees for undergraduate programmes in the UK are capped at £9,250 for home students for the 2021-22 academic year, but international students often pay double or more than this figure (Study International 2021). Several hundred international students at three major London universities refused to pay their tuition fees because they argued that learning primarily from their bedrooms did not justify prices of up to £29,000 a year. Hundreds of students at the Royal College of Art launched a tuition fee strike in January 2021, potentially withholding around £3.4m in tuition fee payments to force the university to issue refunds for the past academic year, despite fearing their visas may be revoked (The Guardian March 2021).

The Covid-19 pandemic has made it more challenging for international students to complete the regulatory procedures essential to enrol in a higher education institution (HEI) abroad and travel to that country to study. International students help colleges and universities, providing millions of pounds annually by paying premium tuition fees.

A recent study conducted by a London Economics consultant for the University and College Union (UCU) revealed a massive reduction in the number of international students in the UK. An estimated 47% drop in international student numbers will cost the HE sector £1.5 billion. This, coupled with a fall in domestic intake, could jeopardise 60,000 jobs across the UK.

As the impact of the pandemic has been felt across the globe, similar situations have emerged in other countries. For example, Ireland's seven universities are currently facing a significant financial crisis, such as the collapse of international student tuition fee income, rental of on-campus accommodation and associated sources of revenues,

which will cost the universities €374 million in the academic year 2020-21 (Consultancy.UK, 2020). Furthermore, the Irish Universities Association predicts that the decline in fee income from international students alone will be €181 million in the academic year 2020-21 (The Times, November 2020).

In a nutshell, cash flow challenges are a reality for many HEIs, especially those heavily dependent on international students as a genuine source of revenue at a time when public funding is insufficient to cover costs. It is unethical to consider international students as cash cows (Choudaha, 2017); rather, they should be considered pedagogic partners (Lomer, Mittelmeier, Carmichael-Murphy, 2021) or customers (Guilbalt, 2018, Safdar et al., 2020) and HEIs must endeavour to go the extra mile not just to meet their expectations but exceed them.

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THE GROWTH OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW IN THE CONTEXT OF LIBERALISATION, PRIVATISATION AND MARKETISATION

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Abstract

Economic policies encouraging private ownership (liberalisation, privatisation and marketisation) have allowed private higher education institutions (PrHEIs) to proliferate in most parts of the world, particularly since the 1990s. The number of private colleges and universities continues to grow in most countries at a remarkable rate, partly reflecting the demand for greater choice and more flexibility, which PrHEIs are able to offer. In some countries, PrHEIs even outnumber public higher education institutions (PuHEIs) or are at least expected to do so within the next decade. This is particularly the case in emerging and developing countries. The worldwide expansion of private higher education can be illustrated by the fact that one in three students globally is now enrolled in PrHEIs, and there are very few places in the world where public monopolies continue to prevent the emergence of alternative providers from the private sector. In the UK, the government recognises that private, for-profit, higher education institutions, the majority of which award degrees in conjunction with state universities, typically function more efficiently and work harder to improve the student experience. Their appeal among non-traditional students dovetails perfectly with government rhetoric to make higher education more accessible and widen participation. A legal framework has been created that makes it easier for challenger institutions to enter the market and compete with the public higher education sector. A more streamlined, student-focused approach to the regulation of higher education in the UK is also designed to stimulate further growth and competition in the HE sector ensuring that private colleges and universities remain a viable alternative to the public sector.

Keywords: Higher Education (HE), Public Higher Education Institutions (PuHEIs), Private Higher Education Institutions (PrHEIs), Liberalisation, Privatisation, Marketisation

1. Introduction

The demand for higher education (HE) worldwide is growing at a phenomenal rate. As a result, HE markets have expanded exponentially (Komljenovic and Robertson, 2017). In 2000, the number of enrolled students was 97 million, and it is predicted to reach over 262 million students by 2025 (Bjarnason, 2009). As the demand for higher education has grown, what has become even more apparent is the public sector's lack of financial resources and inability to rapidly expand their provision to meet demand. As a result of the massification of higher education, PrHEIs have grown in popularity.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are classified as either public or private. An HEI is classified as public if it is controlled and managed by a public education authority or government agency directly or by a governing body appointed by a public authority or elected by a public franchise (UNESCO, 2014). On the other hand, an HEI is classified as private if it is controlled and managed by a non-governmental organisation (e.g. a church, trade union or business enterprise). Its governing board consists mainly of members not selected by a public agency. In general, the ultimate management control over an institution rests with who can determine its general activity and appoint the managing officers (UNESCO, 2014).

Levy (1986) describes private higher education institutes (PrHEIs) as those defined by national authorities. For example, the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) defines PrHEIs in England as:

Any provider of higher education courses which is not in direct receipt of recurrent funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) or from equivalent funding bodies in the Devolved Administrations; or does not receive direct recurrent public funding (for example, from a local authority, or from the Secretary of State for Education); and is not a Further Education College. (Applying student number controls to alternative providers with designated courses, 2012, p. 3.)

UK private higher education institutes are also referred to as fully autonomous alternative providers, which operate for profit, do not receive any grant from the government and are 'responsible for their own funding' (Altbach, 1999, p. 2). The most straightforward understanding of a private higher education institution is that of an organisation with private ownership and funding, while public higher education institution is an organisation with state ownership and funding. In terms of

functionality, both public and private higher education institutions are equivalent, differing only in terms of ownership or funding (Duczmal, 2006).

2. Global Growth of Private Higher Education

In many countries, the private higher education sector is expanding much faster than its public sector counterpart. For example, in East Asian countries, such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines, PrHEIs are more dominant than public higher education institutions and even compete in terms of quality with top PuHEIs (Goodman and Yonezawa, 2007).

More private higher education institutions have been established in the last few years than state ones in developing and emerging economies worldwide (Agarwal, 2007). For example, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand have all seen rapid growth in the number of PrHEIs. India and Pakistan have also experienced remarkable growth: PrHEIs in India now account for 64% of the total number of higher education institutions in the country and 59% of total enrolment, compared to 43% and 33% respectively, a decade ago (Ernst & Young, 2012). In India, the privatisation of the higher education sector began in the late 1990s on the advice of The World Bank to relieve pressure on public spending (Kumar, 2014). A couple of decades ago, there were only a few PrHEIs in Pakistan; there are now 69, including a few prominent institutions, such as Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) and Agha Khan University (UniRank, 2021). China and Vietnam have also followed the trend of private higher education.

Within the realm of higher education (HE), private higher education is becoming increasingly significant and currently accounts for a third of total global enrolment (Levy, 2018); therefore, more than 30% of the global population of higher education students is enrolled in private higher education (Altbach et al., 2009; Levy, 2018). Indeed, the rise and growth of private higher education is one of the most remarkable developments in higher education in recent decades (Brown, 2010; Duczmal 2006).

This growth has been observed in many parts of the world, including Europe; North America (the USA and Canada); South America (Brazil); Asia (Japan, Indonesia,

India, China and the Philippines); Africa (South Africa and Kenya), and Australia and New Zealand (Gupta, 2008). The US private higher education sector is a well-established industry with a long, proud history that attracts global interest (Zumeta, 2011). It includes some of the world's top-ranked universities, such as Harvard, Stanford, Yale and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

The private higher education sector in Canada has also started to grow since the Post-Secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act of 2000. The Canadian private higher education sector has adopted the differentiation strategy, i.e., programmatic diversity through specialized graduate-level programmes with institutional differentiation (Buckner and Gong, 2021), which is becoming increasingly popular.

The private higher education sector is more dominant than the public higher education sector in Asia and caters for more than 70% of students in India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines and South Korea. The second largest segment in Asia belongs to China with more than 30% and, last but not least, Thailand and Vietnam with 15% (Gupta, 2008). The growth of the private higher education sector in Australia and New Zealand has also been remarkable: Australia's market share increased from 0.3% in 2000 to more than five per cent in 2007. In line with this growth trend, it reached 30% in 2020 (Shah and Brown, 2009). In the case of New Zealand, the private higher education sector did not exist before 1989: legal authorisation was granted in that year and, since then, the sector has experienced steady growth, achieving a market share of 9.3% by 2004 (Xiaoying and Abbott, 2008). Moreover, the private higher education sector experienced impressive growth in the six years from 1999 to 2004 when the number of international students increased from around 31,000 in 1999 to 113,000 in 2004 (OECD, 2006).

Private higher education is also expanding in the Middle East. According to Al-Atiqi and Alharbi (2009), one of the fastest developing sectors in the region is private higher education, and it is expected to overtake the public sector by 2025. In Europe, PrHE has a share of 15% of the total HE (PROPHE 2011b) and in Western Europe, the market share is 15%. Surprisingly, the sector has also witnessed expansion in France, with a market share of 19% in 2013 (Casta and Levy, 2016), and the number of private higher education institutions is expected to continue to grow exponentially

in the future. This rapid expansion in France can be illustrated by the fact that only one of the top five educational groups is public, while the other four are private, including Laureate (the world's largest for-profit higher education chain). The remaining three are French and British multinational private equity firms: Apax, Bregal, and Duke Street (Casta and Levy, 2016).

3. The Growth of Private Higher Education in the UK

The growth of the private higher education sector in the UK is related to the broader processes of privatisation occurring in HE systems (Johnstone and Marcucci, 2010) and is also part of a global trend (Middlehurst and Fielden, 2014). An indicator of this growth is the number of private higher education institutions with degree-awarding powers, which increased from only one private university (University of Buckingham) in 1983 to more than ten in less than a decade.

In recent years, the UK government has cemented its commitment to encouraging growth in the PrHE sector in a competitive market. In a White Paper presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) in May 2016, entitled “Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice”, the government recognised that “if we are to continue as a knowledge economy we must have an open and diverse higher education sector which embraces innovation and in which the excellence of the teaching matches the excellence of the research” (p.5). The White Paper set forth the government's plans to “make it easier and quicker for new high-quality challenger institutions to enter the market and award their own degrees” (p.6). Crucially, it also expressed concerns that “access to higher education remains uneven” and pointed to the fact that “courses are inflexible”, resulting in many students being “dissatisfied with the provision they receive” (pp.7-8). To address these concerns, the White Paper argued that “by introducing more competition and informed choice into higher education, we will deliver better outcomes and value for students [and] employers” (p.8).

Following the publication of the UK government's White Paper in 2016, the Higher Education and Research Act (HERA) 2017 brought marked changes to the HE sector. The reforms included significant changes to the structure of HE and expectations to develop a stronger HE, rich with the competition. Deregulation will aid PrHE, and it

is therefore fair to suggest that more private higher education institutions will emerge in the future. The act also empowers students due to its emphasis on the quality of teaching and satisfying students' needs.

HERA 2017 established the Office for Students (OfS). With the rapid growth of new types of providers in HE, including alternative (private) providers and further education (FE) colleges, regulation had become fragmented with responsibilities distributed among several different bodies. The government wanted to create a simplified framework that would bring many of the functions of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Office for Fair Access (OFFA), and the Department for Education and the Privy Council, together into a single organisation. The OfS is a nascent regulator of the English HE marketplace designed to promote the growth of a competitive HE market that informs student choice and protects the interests of its stakeholders (students, government and society at large). The Office for Students is so-called in order to prominently and visibly place students at the heart of the system and ensure that it functions primarily for students.

After a brief introduction to the new HE structure and OfS, the focus will now shift back to UK PrHE – a sector that remains relatively small in comparison to the rest of the world. According to Hunt and Boliver (2019), there has been growth in this sector over the last few years. In 2017, the total number of private higher education institutions in the UK was 813, compared to 732 in 2014 and 674 in 2011 (Shury et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2013). Therefore, the government has continued to support the growth of the private higher education sector, and the main aim of the policy (HERA, 2017) is to increase choice and competition in the HE market (Crosskick, 2010). A positive outcome of this policy is that, as mentioned above, there are currently more than ten reputable PrHEIs in the UK (listed below), whereas a decade ago, only a sole private university (University of Buckingham) was in existence in the country.

1. Arden University
2. Ashridge Business School
3. BPP University
4. Ifs University,
5. New College for the Humanities,

6. Regent's University,
7. London Institute of Banking & Finance,
8. The Richmond University,
9. The University of Law,
10. University of Buckingham
11. University College of Estate Management,
12. University College of Osteopathy

In July 2010, the Conservative government created the first private university by conferring university college status upon BPP University. The Resource Development International (RDI), also known as Arden University, was awarded university status on 5 August 2015 (Times Higher Education, 2015). Kaplan and Pearson, two large international companies, have already joined the private sector in the UK.

As a result of the UK government's initiatives for the development of private higher education, The College of Law was the first PrHEI sold to a private equity firm in April 2012. In November 2012, the college was granted the title of University of Law and it has since expanded to 19 campuses – 17 in the UK and two international campuses in Hong Kong and Berlin.

Source: <https://www.law.ac.uk/locations/>

Another independent higher education provider – the London School of Commerce (LSC) – has been growing rapidly not only in the UK (with campuses in London and Birmingham) but also in Europe and Asia. Well-respected campuses include those located in Malta, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Bangladesh.

Source: <https://www.lsc london.co.uk/international-campus-of-lsc/>

4. Vanishing Public Monopolies

The 21st century is the era of liberalisation, privatisation and marketisation. “Liberalisation” refers to “the opening up of any industry to competitive pressures” (Starr, 1987, p. 125). Its purpose is to create competitive market structures in which many providers can compete in an integrated and easily-accessible market (Hermann et al., 2007). In other words, liberalisation allows different providers to compete with

each other. Privatisation entails the transfer of activities, assets and responsibilities from public to private ownership (Belfield and Levin, 2002 and Hermann, 2010).

Privatisation has primarily come to mean two things: (1) any transfer of state operations or functions to the private sector and, more particularly, (2) any transfer of the production of products and services from the public to the private sector. Governments, in addition to directly creating services, build the legal framework of communities, control social and economic activity, and finance privately produced and consumed services (Starr, 1989).

The marketisation of HE is the process of applying the economic theory of the market to the provision of higher education (Hall, 2018). Brown and Scot (2009) state:

The 'marketisation' of higher education – the application of the economic theory of the market to the provision of higher education – seems unstoppable. Market entry is being liberalised. Tuition fees are being introduced or raised. Grants for student support are being supplemented by loans. Institutional rankings and 'league tables' to guide student choice are proliferating. Institutions are devoting increasing energy and resources to marketing, branding and customer service. Nor is this phenomenon confined to student education (P. 2).

The marketisation process does not rule out a continued role for the government, as “[m]arkets in all sectors, especially state-regulated higher education, are partly formed by government action and always conditioned by social interests (Marginson, 2004, p. 177).” In other words, the government still sets the rules that govern competition. For example, the UK Competition and Market Authority (CMA) promotes competition for the benefit of consumers. The OfS sets regulations for higher education institutions in the UK. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for higher education is the independent body that checks on standards and quality in UK higher education.

Thus, it is evident and noteworthy that privatisation does not necessarily mean the absolute removal of the government’s role or responsibility but minimises the government’s involvement. The shift towards liberalisation, privatisation and marketisation reduces the public monopoly. Liberalisation, privatisation and marketisation have become familiar components of higher education in many, if not all, European countries (de Boer et al., 2009).

It is generally believed that the private sector is much more efficient and productive than the public sector. This perception prevailed and was accepted when the ideas derived from the “Chicago School” of economics emphasised deregulation, privatisation and marketisation (Lane, 1997, pp. 1–2).

The German Monopolies Commission published a report in June 2000, arguing that competition should be the driving force behind higher education reforms. According to the report, a functioning market promotes effective communication between consumers and sellers, providing a knowledge base superior to any amount of government planning. Universities will deliver the appropriate product for the market (i.e., become more effective) at the right time and at the right price (i.e., become more efficient) as a result of their market demand orientation (Monopolkom-mission 2000, *passim*). As a result, out of a total of 396 German HEIs, 21 universities are private, and 13 are run by churches (Berghaeuser and Hoelscher, 2020). Consequently, the German higher education market will be more competitive in the future (Orr, 2007).

Public monopoly was common in the era of communism (before the disintegration of the former Soviet Union after 1989), and by the mid-twentieth century, many countries had started to nationalise private sectors; Pakistan adopted a policy of nationalisation in the early 1970s, for example. Public monopoly, especially in the education sector, was the norm in many countries: as late as 1989 and beyond, it controlled Africa, the Arab world, Eastern Europe and many parts of Asia and Scandinavia (Levy, 2018). To be sure, it had ended in Latin America earlier, and many developed countries had long had near-public monopolies to support dual sectors.

Following the fall of communism in 1989, many countries enacted liberalisation, marketisation and privatisation strategies. For example, in line with other sectors of the country’s economy, higher education in Poland underwent a rapid period of transition that could be summarised as liberalisation, marketisation and privatisation (Johnstone, 2002).

The five Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – also adopted liberalisation, privatisation and marketisation in higher education (Dovemark et al., 2018). As a result, there are now nine private universities in Sweden and two in both Denmark (UniRank, 2021) and Finland (UniRank, 2021). In Iceland, there are a total of seven HEIs, four of which are public and three private (UNIPAGE, 2021), which account for 42% of all HEIs. We have seen that public monopolies are fast disappearing around the world; the process has accelerated over the last two decades to such an extent that public monopolies, especially in higher education, are now confined to just ten countries out of a total of 179: Algeria, Bhutan, Cuba, Djibouti, Eritrea, Greece, Luxembourg, Myanmar, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (Levy, 2018).

Because of the disparities in demands between industrialised and developing countries, reasons for privatisation therefore vary; some countries want to assess the impact of privatisation before fully relinquishing control. Usually, the kind of privatisation adopted is tailored to the country's economic and demographic circumstances. These are small countries that will sooner or later adopt a policy of privatisation. If privatisation is not beneficial, then the de-privatisation process will start in countries where privatisation prevails.

5. Private Higher Education Institutions, Fair Access and Widening Participation

The public and private division is a fundamental distinction in higher education. There are different views and opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of public and private higher education; supporters of each sector provide their arguments and support them with evidence. We do not want to indulge in this controversial debate; instead, we will analyse it from the student's perspective.

The most prominent driver of the recent growth in private higher education is absorbed demand that public HEIs have been unable to meet. A widespread belief, which has partly fuelled the expanding demand for and supply of higher education in many countries, is that greater access to higher education would allow formerly marginalised groups to participate. Despite this, many public HEIs are still far from achieving open and fair access. Private HEIs serve these marginalised groups in society that are often excluded from public higher education.

In the UK government's White Paper on Higher Education (DFES, 2003) – “The Future of Higher Education” – fair access is described as a high priority:

Fair access: Universities are a vital gateway to opportunity and fulfilment for young people, so it is crucial that they continue to make real and sustained improvements in access. The social class gap among those entering higher education is unacceptably wide. Those from the top three social classes are almost three times as likely to enter higher education as those from the bottom three...Young people from professional backgrounds are over. (DfES, 2003, p. 17.)

According to Lee (2008), the government's support for the growth of private HE stems from factors such as widening access and enrolments in the face of tightening government budgets, meeting social demand for higher education by allowing students (customers) to pay for tuition, and self-funding by private providers (Shah and Lewis, 2010).

Over the next five years, the Office for Students has committed to halving the access gap in high-tariff universities, bringing 6,500 additional students from low-income neighbourhoods into these institutions each year (OfS News blog, 2021).

There is no doubt that fair access and widening participation to high-quality higher education benefits students significantly while also benefiting the community as a whole. Thus, for much of the previous three decades, widening participation in higher education has been a governmental policy in the United Kingdom (Archer, 2007; Bathmaker, 2016; BIS, 2016; Burke, 2013; Graham, 2013; Mavelli, 2014; Stevenson et al., 2010).

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have sought to understand the growth of private higher education throughout the world in the context of the global trend towards private ownership, with particular emphasis on the UK.

In higher education, government policy around the world has shifted from nationalisation to liberalisation, privatisation and marketisation, which has provided fertile ground for the growth and expansion of private higher education institutions in most countries. Where the capacity of public higher education is insufficient to satisfy

the demands of a rising population, private higher education appears to fill the ever-increasing gap between demand and supply. It is therefore evident that the private higher education sector is expanding globally. It is now in fact dominant in many parts of the world (e.g. Asia) and is set to overtake the public sector in other regions in the not-too-distant future (e.g. the Middle East).

One of the reasons for the expansion of the sector relates to its ability to meet the different needs of students. For example, public higher education institutions only offer two intakes a year, while PrHEIs offer up to six. The sector also tends to offer more specialised, vocational subjects compared to traditional universities and provides more opportunities for students to study during weekends and weekday evenings, making PrHEIs a more viable choice for students wishing to combine learning with work or other personal commitments. By offering such flexibility, PrHEIs have been able to attract large numbers of mature students. In the UK, the ability of PrHEIs to meet this particular demand ties in perfectly with the government's ongoing commitment to increase choice and widen participation, which will continue to act as a catalyst for growth in the sector.

The partial privatisation of the PuHEIs has, in fact, already begun. It refers to a process in which publicly-owned parts of higher education are withdrawn, such as institutions forming private firms, outsourcing research, teaching and support services, and the emergence of public-private partnerships or new private organisations.

To sum up, government economic policies supporting the free market have allowed private higher education institutions to thrive in most countries. In recent years, the UK government has fostered the growth of private higher education and encouraged competition in the sector in general, as it recognises that privately-owned, for-profit institutions bring greater choice, effectiveness, efficiency and value-for-money to the HE sector. Private institutions also offer greater flexibility in terms of admission intakes and opportunities for weekend and weekday evening learning. Moreover, many private colleges and universities offer vocational subjects that lie outside of the traditional universities' remit. These factors, which seem to contribute to increased

student satisfaction and help to attract more students from diverse backgrounds, provide a solid foundation for the continued growth of the private higher education sector in the UK and internationally.

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THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON ETHNIC MINORITIES – THE CASE OF LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyse the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on ethnic minorities. The focus is on ethnic minorities in London, particularly before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. We investigated the discriminatory practices towards ethnic minorities in the economic downturn caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. These are primarily related to the labour market and the sectors and occupations most affected by the pandemic. We used government data on the UK's different ethnic groups and the London Datastore, an open data-sharing portal. We also reviewed the empirical literature in economics on discrimination in the labour market before and during the pandemic. The adverse effects of the pandemic have been much more severe in economic downturns than during more stable economic times. We found that before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, there have been persistent differences in particular economic aspects between ethnic minorities and white men and women. Over the past decade, ethnic minorities in the UK have made progress in the median pay gap, employment gap and unemployment rates. However, ethnic minorities in London have faced more challenges than those in other parts of the UK. In addition, during the Covid-19 pandemic, unemployment rates were much higher for ethnic minorities than they were for whites.

Keywords: Ethnic Minorities, Covid-19, Economic Downturn, Racial Discrimination, Unfairness, Equal Opportunities

1. Introduction

Our study seeks to analyse the position of ethnic minorities in London, UK, during the Covid-19 pandemic from an economic standpoint. Accordingly, the study also addresses the broader economic situation of ethnic minorities, particularly those residing in London, previously known more colloquially as “BAME Londoners”.¹ Our observations are based on a comprehensive analysis of statistical data and reports by government agencies and non-governmental organisations.² Firstly, we pose the following questions: are there significant economic differences between ethnic minorities and white groups and what is the position of ethnic minorities in London from an economic perspective? If the answer to the former question is affirmative, the remedies for fostering equality and reducing discrimination should be more accentuated at the local level than at the national level. Finally, we also outline the available remedies to mitigate economic discrimination.

The underlying reasons for this paper are threefold. Firstly, ethnic minorities represent a large proportion of the UK, accounting for approximately 14% of the UK population. According to the (last available) 2011 Census data, the most ethnically diverse region in England and Wales was London, where 40.2% of residents identified with either the Asian, Black, Mixed or Other ethnic groups.³

¹ Based on Government data about the UK's different ethnic groups, in writing about ethnicity, we use “ethnic minorities” to refer to all ethnic groups except the White British group. Ethnic minorities include White minorities, such as Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller groups (<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity>). The acronym BAME refers to Black (African/Caribbean/Black) Asian, and Minority Ethnic groups (<https://www.centreforlondon.org/blog/pandemic-bame-london>) or Asian, Black, Arab, Mixed ethnic group and others (<https://www.fca.org.uk/insight/covid-19-and-uk-bame-communities-economic-perspective>). Certain studies use the acronym BME. BME generally refers to the Black and minority ethnic population. More about the classification of an ethnic group can be found on: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/ethnic-groups>. In March 2021, the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities recommended that the government stop using the term “BAME”.

² The statistics that monitor the economic situation of minorities are much more comprehensive in the UK than across the EU countries where the data is limited and/or not systematically collected and analyzed.

³ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/regional-ethnic-diversity/latest#main-facts-and-figures>. In England and Wales, there are 18 ethnic groups (<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/ethnic-groups#list-of-ethnic-groups>).

Secondly, according to official population estimates from the 2011 Census, generally speaking, a more significant proportion of ethnic minorities are of working age.⁴ Therefore, we can reasonably expect this community to be disproportionately exposed to negative economic consequences (e.g., termination of employment, lower rates of employment and temporary loss of income).

Thirdly, socio-economic exclusion of ethnic minorities represents a significant loss of income for society. Failure to harness talent among ethnic minorities carries with it enormous opportunity costs and missed economic benefits. In the case of the UK, the Department for Communities and Local Government (2013) highlighted that, according to National Audit Office (NAO) estimates, the cost to the UK economy of failing to exploit ethnic minority talent fully could amount to more than £8 billion annually. The same report reveals that ethnic minority businesses already contribute £25 billion annually to the UK economy. Furthermore, the IPA Ethnic Diversity Forum report states that ethnic minorities represent more than £300 billion in purchasing power (IPA Ethnic Diversity Group, 2012). In addition, Froy & Pyne (2011) conclude that higher growth rates and a younger age demographic among immigrant communities mean that they will become an increasingly important part of the workforce in future years, making their relative exclusion even more problematic.

In this paper, we first present data revealing the extent of discrimination against ethnic minorities in the UK, and London in particular, mainly using labour market indicators from the year preceding the Covid-19 pandemic and some more recent data from other data relevant reports and studies. Secondly, we focus on the exposure of ethnic minorities to specific sectors and occupations in the Covid-19 environment and assess its impact on their economic situation. In the following part of the paper, we compare the position of ethnic minorities in London with the rest of the UK by using statistical data. We also discuss the available remedies to improve the economic prosperity of ethnic minorities in the Covid-19 environment. Finally, we present our conclusions.

⁴ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/demographics/working-age-population/latest>

2. Literature Review

History shows that during economic downturns ethnic minority groups are, in general, more likely to experience financial hardship compared to white ethnic groups. According to Lisa Wong, Senior Declaration Officer in the ILO's Programme on Promoting the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, "ethnic minorities face discrimination in the labour market and limited access to education and health care even when the economy is going well, and in downturns, those problems are exacerbated." (Humphreys, 2011). When the economy experiences a downturn, existing racial disparities tend to increase, suggesting that economic scarcity may fuel racial discrimination (Krosch et al., 2017). This has been especially noticeable during the Covid-19 pandemic. These inequalities in the pre-Covid-19 period are not new and have been thoroughly documented in numerous reports and studies. The reasons are deeply rooted in the prevailing economic and social inequalities that existed well before Covid-19. In addition, the sectors of the economy, which typically employ disproportionately high numbers of ethnic minorities, are also those that the Covid-19 pandemic has most severely impacted. These adverse effects include, but are not limited to, disparities in the labour market, generally higher unemployment rates, lower living standards and poorer health prospects. These inequalities are not mutually exclusive; they should be regarded as closely interrelated and interdependent. In particular, poorer health outcomes experienced by ethnic minorities during the pandemic are inextricably linked to lower social and economic status. People from ethnic minority groups are almost three times as likely to contract Covid-19 and five times more likely to experience serious illness, and this is mainly due to social inequalities, such as housing, occupational risk and unequal access to healthcare.⁵

The negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on ethnic minorities can be compared with the 2008 economic downturn. Indeed, Covid-19 has reinforced and brought to light economic inequalities between ethnic minorities and white ethnic groups that existed before the pandemic. For example, according to the Business in the Community (2020) report, "the ethnic minority groups fared worse due to the 2008

⁵ <https://post.parliament.uk/impact-of-covid-19-on-different-ethnic-minority-groups>

recession than the white majority in the UK, exacerbating pre-existing inequalities with higher unemployment, lower earnings, and lower earnings self-employment rates and higher housing costs.” They outlined that during the last global recession, by 2010, the non-white groups were twice as likely as white groups to have no savings, with 60% of Black and Asian people in the UK having no savings at all.

People from ethnic minorities also experienced economic difficulties before the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, in the period from January 2014 to December 2018, out of all ethnic groups, people from Asian or Black households were most likely to experience persistent low income before taking housing costs into account.⁶ In contrast, white households were least likely out of all ethnic groups to experience persistent low income, both before and after housing costs.

In the context of Covid-19, a vast number of documents have reported inequalities and discrimination towards ethnic minority groups related to specific economic aspects, and this includes not only the ethnic minorities in the UK but also those in other European countries and the USA.⁷ We now turn our attention to examining a series of reports and statistics related to the UK.

Platt & Warwick’s (2020) report addressed two generic forms of vulnerability faced by minorities in the Covid-19 pandemic: vulnerability to infection and economic vulnerability, i.e., exposure to loss of income. In terms of vulnerability to infection, they found that having accounted for the age, gender and geographic profiles of ethnic groups, mortality is higher among most minority groups compared to the white British majority. As far as economic vulnerability is concerned, the authors outlined that many ethnic minorities are more economically vulnerable in the current crisis than white ethnic groups.

The House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee (2020) reported that throughout the coronavirus pandemic, BAME groups had been acutely affected by

⁶ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/pay-and-income/low-income/latest>

⁷ For more: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/05/05/financial-and-health-impacts-of-covid-19-vary-widely-by-race-and-ethnicity>; <https://www.enar-eu.org/Evidence-of-the-impact-of-Covid-19-on-racialised-communities-exposes-need-to>; Froy & Pyne (2011).

pre-existing inequalities across various areas, including health, employment, access to Universal Credit, housing and the “no recourse to public funds” policy. As the pandemic continued, many of these inequalities affected BAME groups more severely than their white counterparts.

Another piece of research, which surveyed 2,064 people of working age across the UK, revealed that 58% of BAME workers had seen their employment affected since the start of the pandemic, compared to 47% of white workers.⁸

In addition, research by the charity Runnymede Trust (Khan, 2020) addressed noticeable differences between certain ethnic groups. For example, it found that BAME groups have less wealth, savings or assets than white British people. Moreover, people from all BAME groups are more likely to be living in poverty. Furthermore, while people from ethnic minorities are more likely to have a university degree, the monetary value of that qualification in the labour market is less (Zwysen and Longhi, 2018). Finally, unemployment rates among Black and minority ethnic men are much higher than those for White British men.

Platt & Warwick (2020) indicate that certain ethnic groups, such as Bangladeshis, black Caribbeans and black Africans, also have the least amount of savings to provide them with a financial buffer in the event of job loss. Only around 30% live in households with enough savings to cover one month’s income. In contrast, nearly 60% of the rest of the population have enough savings to cover one month’s income.

Among the ethnic population, millennials from ethnic minority groups are particularly affected. According to Bowyer & Henderson’s (2020) report, millennials from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are 47% more likely to be on a zero-hours contract than their white counterparts.⁹ In addition, the report revealed that BAME millennials are also 10% more likely to be working a second job, 5% more likely to be doing shift work and 4% less likely to have a permanent contract than white workers.

⁸ <https://www.turn2us.org.uk/About-Us/Media-Centre/Press-releases-and-comments/BAME-workers-take-biggest-financial-hit-from-coron>

⁹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2020/mar/bame-millennials-greater-risk-being-unstable-employment>

One of the best proxy indicators of discrimination in work is the unemployment rate (Humphreys, 2011). The statistics highlight the inferior position of ethnic minorities relative to the white group in the labour market. While 4% of whites were unemployed in 2019, only 7% of people from *all* the other ethnic groups combined were out of work. In almost all regions, white people were less likely to be unemployed than those from all the other ethnic groups combined, particularly in London (Table 1).¹⁰

Table 1: Percentage and number of the economically active population who were unemployed, by ethnicity (2019)

Ethnicity	Percentage and number of the economically active population who were unemployed, by ethnicity (White and Other than White) (2019)		Percentage and number of the economically active population who were unemployed, by ethnicity (White and Other than White), London (2019)	
	%	Number	%	Number
All	4	1.287.300	5	224.400
White	4	996.900	4	107.700
Other than White	7	289.900	7	116.400

Source: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/unemployment-and-economic-inactivity/unemployment/latest#by-ethnicity-and-area-white-and-other-than-white>

Considering that 76% of people aged between 16 and 64 in England, Scotland and Wales were employed during 2019; there are also noticeable differences among ethnic groups. For example, 78% of white people were employed in 2019, compared with 66% of all other ethnic groups. The disparity is evident for London as well (Table 2).¹¹

Table 2: Percentage and number of 16 to 64-year-olds who were employed, by ethnicity (2019)

Ethnicity	Percentage and number of 16 to 64-year-olds who were employed, by ethnicity (2019)		Percentage of 16 to 64-year-olds who were employed, by ethnicity, London (2019)
	%	Number	%
All	76	30.427.000	75
Asian	65	2.140.000	66
Black	69	996.900	69
Mixed	69	366.600	69

¹⁰ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/unemployment-and-economic-inactivity/unemployment/latest#by-ethnicity-and-area-white-and-other-than-white>

¹¹ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/employment/employment/latest>

White	78	26.395.600	79
Other	63	512.200	66

Source: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/employment/employment/latest>

Table 3 displays rates of economic inactivity in 2019 for England, Scotland and Wales. The percentage of economically inactive white people amounted to 20%, compared to 29% of people from all other ethnic groups. The figures for London reveal a similar disparity.¹²

Table 3: Percentage and number of 16 to 64-year-olds who were economically inactive, by ethnicity (2019)

Ethnicity	Percentage and number of 16 to 64-year-olds who were economically inactive, by ethnicity (White and Other than White) (2019)		Percentage and number of 16 to 64-year-olds who were economically inactive, by ethnicity, (White and Other than White) London (2019)	
	%	Number	%	Number
All	21	8.468.400	22	1.329.800
White	20	6.699.800	18	659.300
Other than White	29	1.759.900	28	667.900

Source: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/unemployment-and-economic-inactivity/economic-inactivity/latest#by-ethnicity-and-area>

The evidence confirms the presence of inequalities among ethnic groups, i.e., ethnic minorities compared to white groups, in different aspects of the labour market. Another critical economic factor relates to the economic vulnerability of minorities during Covid-19. Therefore, we now turn our attention to the exposure of ethnic minority groups to certain sectors and occupations.

3. The exposure of ethnic minorities to certain sectors and occupations in the Covid-19 environment

Ethnic minorities have been negatively exposed to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in several ways. In general, the vulnerability of someone's position in the labour market during the Covid-19 pandemic depends on the restrictions imposed on specific sectors, the degree to which the sector is resistant to consumer demand and consumer response to the pandemic. For example, the hospitality and tourism industry has been hit the hardest by pandemic restrictions. On the other hand, important

¹² <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/unemployment-and-economic-inactivity/economic-inactivity/latest#by-ethnicity-and-area>

businesses such as grocery stores and discount retailers have been less affected by counter-pandemic measures. Additionally, an individual's level of economic vulnerability during a pandemic is also determined by their occupation and relative position in the labour market, e.g., whether they are an essential worker, self-employed or on a temporary or part-time contract.

BAME workers are disproportionately likely to work in hospitality, arts and leisure, and retail.¹³ These are also the sectors that have been hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic (Washington-Ihime, 2020). To illustrate this point, in 2018, before the Covid-19 pandemic, Pakistani and Bangladeshi and “Asian Other” ethnic groups had the highest percentage of workers in the distribution, hotels and restaurants sector – 30.7% and 23.7%, respectively – compared to whites with 17.8%.

Regarding occupations¹⁴, there are noticeable differences among ethnic minority groups. Some people in “elementary” jobs can be easily replaced as less training and skills are generally required. On the other hand, people in “professional” occupations are less easily replaced and require more education and skills. Presumably, these jobs are less susceptible to termination during economic downturns. However, there are significant differences among ethnic groups. For example, Chinese and Indians are more likely to work in the highest-paid occupations. Ethnicities that are more likely to work in the lowest-paid occupations are Bangladeshi, Black, Pakistani, other Asian and other ethnicities (Allas et al., 2020). In 2018, 41% of workers from the combined Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups worked in the three least skilled occupations (“elementary”, “sales and consumer services” and “process, plants and machine operatives” jobs) (Gov.UK, May 2020). The percentage of workers in “elementary” jobs was highest among the Black (16%) and White Other (15%) ethnic groups. The same ethnic groups had the lowest percentage of workers in “professional” jobs (18%). On the other hand, some ethnic minority groups are better represented in higher ranked jobs. For example, 33% of people from the Indian ethnic group were in “professional” jobs, the highest percentage out of all ethnic groups.

¹³ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/employment/employment-by-sector/latest>

¹⁴ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/employment/employment-by-occupation/latest>

The extent of the impact of Covid-19 on employees depends primarily on the sector in which they work. Notably, government restrictions have been targeted towards those sectors where the risk of transmission is the highest. Therefore, we reasonably expect that during economic downturns, employees in “elementary” jobs, which require less training, will be more negatively affected than those in “professional” jobs, especially if these jobs are in sectors negatively affected by Covid-19.

Another important economic factor to consider is the number of start-up loans per 10,000 economically active people by ethnicity.¹⁵ Again, the results vary among the different ethnic groups. For example, people of mixed ethnicity (6.3 loans per 10,000 people) were more than 2.5 times as likely to receive a start-up loan than the overall rate in 2019. On the other hand, Asian people (1.8 loans per 10,000 people) and people from the other ethnic group (1.6 loans per 10,000 people) were least likely to receive a start-up loan in 2019. Thus, in terms of the number of start-up loans, we can reject the assertion that there is a significant difference between ethnic minority groups in general compared to the white group.

Self-employment, where incomes may be incredibly uncertain during the Covid-19 pandemic, is prevalent amongst Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. Pakistani men are over 70% more likely to be self-employed than the white British majority (Platt & Warwick, 2020). In general, most of these smaller ventures are far more susceptible to disruptions in cash flow during economic downturns than large corporations sitting on sizeable stockpiles of cash.

Concerning the relationship between occupations and exposure to the risk of infection, some occupations are at a much higher risk. At the same time, certain minority ethnic groups are disproportionally represented in “risky” occupations. Platt & Warwick’s (2020) report found that more than two in ten black African women of working age are employed in health and social care roles. Indian men are 150% more likely to work in health or social care than their white British counterparts. The Indian

¹⁵ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/workforce-and-business/business/access-to-start-up-loans/latest#by-ethnicity-over-time>

ethnic group makes up 3% of the working-age population of England and Wales, although they account for 14% of doctors. Bangladeshi men are four times as likely as white British men to have jobs in shutdown industries, mainly due to their concentration in the restaurant sector, and Pakistani men nearly three times as likely, partly due to their concentration in the taxi industry. Black African and black Caribbean men are 50% more likely than white British men to be employed in so-called “shutdown sectors”.

Benzeval et al. (2020) investigated how the economic shock caused by the pandemic has affected individuals across the distribution. Using data from the longitudinal survey “Understanding Society: COVID 19”, collected in April 2020, the authors concluded that the most extensive economic shocks had been felt by those least able to mitigate their impact. Those most affected have been BAME individuals, single parents and those in the lowest quintile of long-run income. In addition, ethnic minorities in London have been more exposed to job losses in the UK than the rest of the population during the crisis.

The cited reports and statistical data both paint the same picture. There is well-founded and supporting evidence that, generally, ethnic minorities are likely to have been more exposed to the negative health and economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic owing to the sectors of the economy in which a disproportionate number of BAME workers are employed.

4. The economic impact of Covid-19 on ethnic minorities – the case of London

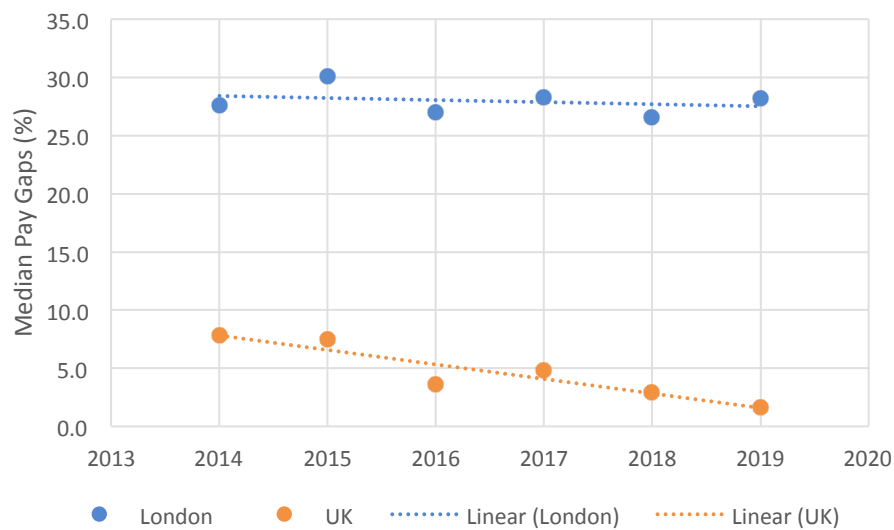
This section investigates the economic position of the BAME population vis-à-vis white groups in London compared to the rest of the UK.

We use data that measures economic fairness, i.e., how fair and inclusive London’s economy is for the labour market, equal opportunities and living standards.¹⁶ For

¹⁶ Mayor of London’s Economic Fairness. Data are available on: <https://data.london.gov.uk>.

example, regarding the labour conditions in 2019, the median pay gap¹⁷ between white and BAME employees in London was 28.2%, with an almost flat line. This figure contrasts with the UK in general, where the median pay gap has experienced a moderate downward trend since 2014. For the UK, the median pay gap was only 1.6% in 2019 (Figure 1).¹⁸ Thus, there is strong evidence that, in terms of wage equality, the position of BAME employees compared to their white counterparts is much worse in London than in other parts of the UK.

Figure 1: Median pay gaps (White to BAME) in London and UK

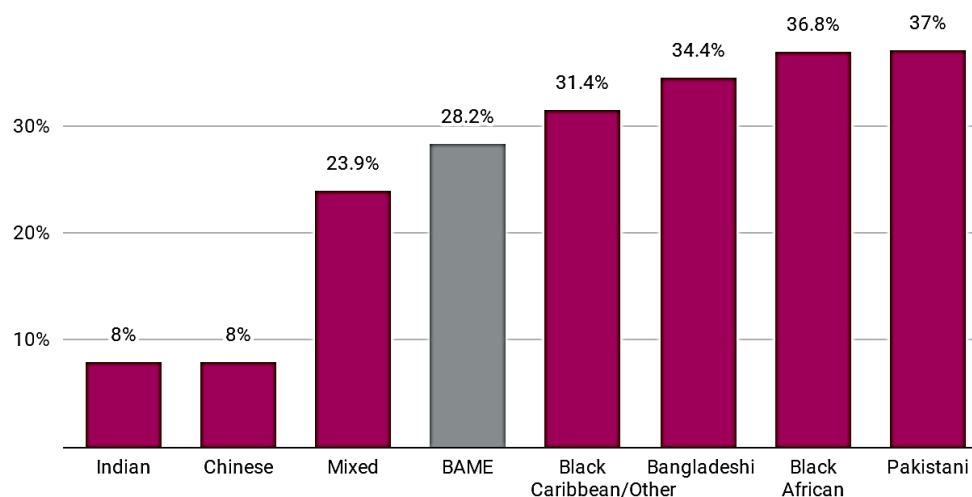


Moreover, some ethnic groups experience a disproportionately high pay gap, such as Black/Caribbean/Other (31.4%), Bangladeshi (34.4%), Black African (36.8%), and Pakistani (37.0%), as shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: London ethnicity pay gap 2019 median

¹⁷ The median pay gap compares the hourly pay (median only) for employees from the combined BAME category to the hourly pay for the combined white groups as a proportion of the median pay of the white group.

¹⁸ Data for 2020 has not yet been available.



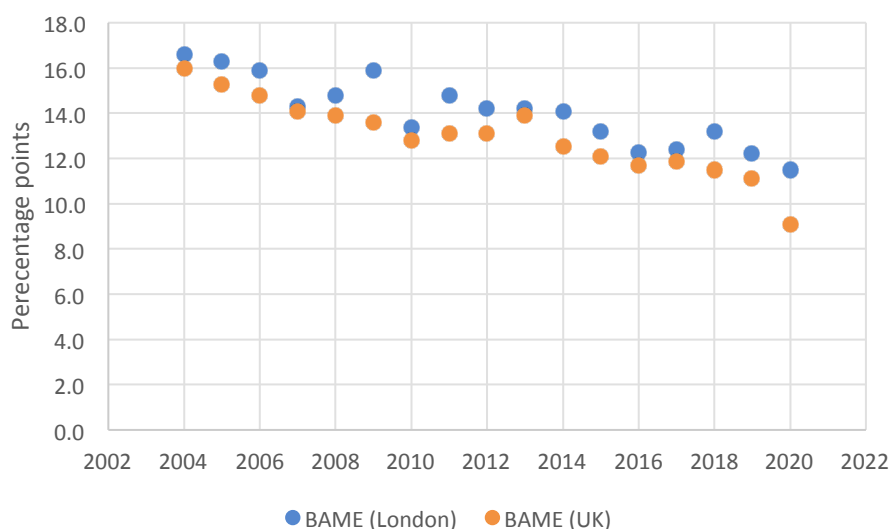
Note: BAME is comparison with All White, all others compare with White British

Chart: GLA Intelligence • Source: London Datastore • Created with Datawrapper

Source: <https://data.london.gov.uk/economic-fairness/labour-market/ethnicity-pay-gap>

A similar situation can be observed with employment gaps.¹⁹ The employment gaps between white and BAME employees in London and the UK for 2020 were 11.5 and 9.1 percentage points, respectively (Figure 3).

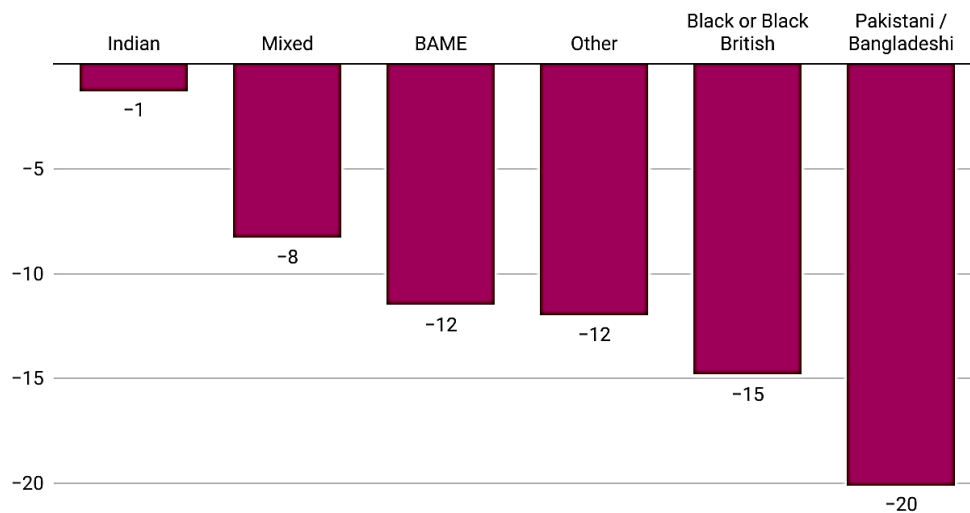
Figure 3: Employment gaps (White to BAME) in London and UK



It was exceptionally high for the Pakistani/Bangladeshi and the Black or Black British employees: 20.1 and 14.8 percentage points, respectively (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Employment gaps 2020 within various ethnic groups (vs White) in London

¹⁹ The employment gap presented here for London is the percentage point difference between the employment rate for one group and that for another, comparative group.



Data from Annual Population Survey

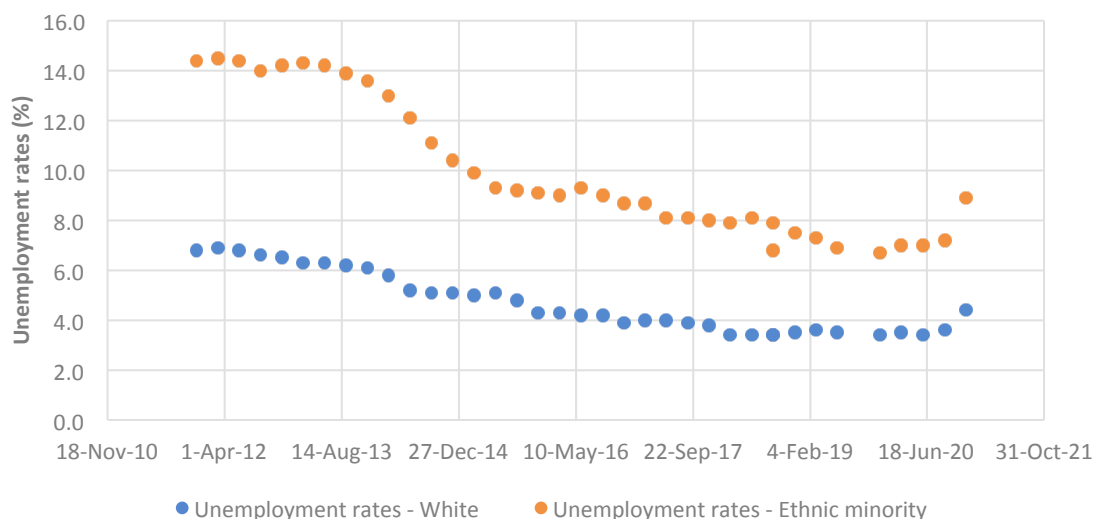
Chart: GLA Intelligence • Source: London Datastore • Created with Datawrapper

Source: <https://data.london.gov.uk/economic-fairness/labour-market/employment-gaps>

Similar disparities exist in accessing employment, as some groups find it harder to access the labour market than others. For example, according to December 2020 data (i.e., during the Covid-19 pandemic), the unemployment rate among ethnic minority groups in London was 8.9%, compared to 4.4% for the white community (Figure 5). For comparative purposes, before COVID-19, in December 2018, unemployment rates among the same groups were 7.5% and 3.5%, respectively.²⁰ Comparing the situation before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, economic unfairness for BAME Londoners existed long before the Covid-19 pandemic. Over time, the unemployment gap has in fact reduced. However, following a narrowing of the gap in unemployment rates between ethnic groups and whites, it again soars during the last observed period, i.e., during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 5: Unemployment rates (Dec 2011-Dec 2020) within various ethnic groups (vs White) in London

²⁰ <https://data.london.gov.uk/economic-fairness/equal-opportunities/unemployment>



The data is consistent with previous findings related to the inequalities faced by minority ethnic groups according to a wide range of economic indicators. Additionally, the data suggests that these inequalities are more pronounced in London, compared to the rest of the UK.

5. Remedies for greater economic prosperity among ethnic minorities

Inequality and discrimination against ethnic minorities in a number of economic aspects is not a new issue. However, to address the issue, a set of countermeasures and recommendations has already been put in place by the government and various NGOs.²¹ Some of these measures target specific aspects of inequality, e.g., fostering greater participation of the most vulnerable ethnic minority subsegments in the labour market, notably youths and women.

Surprisingly, even though the percentage of state school pupils aged 18 entering higher education during the Covid-19 period is higher among certain minority groups in contrast to the white group,²² various aspects of economic discrimination against ethnic minorities soared during the same period. Furthermore, ethnic minorities in the capital of the UK have been even more negatively affected than those in the rest of the UK.

²¹ For example, see in House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee (2020).

²² <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/higher-education/entry-rates-into-higher-education/latest>

Greater economic prosperity for ethnic minorities in the face of Covid-19 is a multifaceted issue, which is inevitably related to other social, educational and health factors. Nevertheless, lessons learned in the past and from the ongoing Covid-19 crisis may provide some general guidance to improve the economic prosperity of ethnic minorities in the period immediately following the Covid-19 pandemic. Prerequisites for these actions are sustainable achievements or continuous efforts towards greater social inclusion of ethnic minorities and a high rate of participation in higher education. In addition, remarkable technological advancements continue to sustain the demand for skilled workers, who are often rewarded with higher rates of pay in the labour market, improved living standards and greater prosperity overall.

Some solutions aimed at improving the economic position of ethnic minorities include, but are not limited to: (1) fostering greater participation of particularly vulnerable subgroups of ethnic minorities in the labour market, such as youths and women; (2) efforts to identify and abolish informal (indirect) discriminatory pay practices by regularly monitoring policies at the organisational level, with penalties for any discriminatory practices. It also includes raising awareness among employers about equal pay and fighting prejudice against ethnic minorities;²³ (3) encouraging and stimulating greater participation of ethnic minorities in the labour market; and (4) facilitating access to finance for ethnic minority businesses. In the following section, we briefly discuss these steps.

The experiences of young people from ethnic minorities and immigrant backgrounds in entering the labour market are far from homogeneous (Froy & Pyne, 2011). As they point out, their experiences are shaped by many factors, including their country of birth, reasons for migrating, gender, level of education, socio-economic background and the neighbourhood in which they live. Zwysen & Longhi (2018) found that ethnic minorities in the UK are more likely than the white majority to gain university qualifications. However, they fair worse in the labour market on average. The authors found that ethnic minority graduates are much less likely to find employment within six months of graduating, and the differences seem to persist and even increase among women. The authors also suggest that more significant support

²³ <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/blog/how-ethnic-minorities-still-discriminated-against-uk-job-market/>

in terms of career advice to students from more disadvantaged areas and backgrounds may be beneficial in reducing ethnic disparities in graduate employment. It seems that career advice, coupled with financial support for those continuing their education, may encourage young people, especially women, to remain in education longer. This situation is often related to having fewer social contacts, as well as financial difficulties. In addition, failure to secure employment soon after graduating may lead to discouragement. Subsequent failures to gain employment may be accompanied by more serious long-term economic and social consequences for these individuals.

We also need to consider the effects of indirect discrimination²⁴ against some ethnic minorities in the labour market, despite formal policies against discrimination already being in place.²⁵ For example, a study by researchers from The University of Manchester's Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE) and the Runnymede Trust found a sustained ethnic penalty in earnings suffered by Bangladeshi, Black and Pakistani groups.²⁶ They suggested that discrimination in the paid labour market has, in part, led to high rates of self-employment among ethnic minorities. This report recommended that employers with over 50 employees monitor their hiring, promotion, disciplinary and pay decisions according to ethnicity. In addition, a report by the International Labour Organization (2014) addressed worker discrimination and provided several recommendations. The report highlighted that employing a diverse workforce – and managing it effectively – not only satisfies legal and ethical obligations but is also suitable for business. Notably, having a policy in place to accommodate workers from diverse backgrounds minimises the negative potential legal and financial consequences and brings various benefits, such as enhancing the business's adaptability, growth, sustainability and competitiveness. An important action needed to tackle this is to accelerate progression and to increase the

²⁴ *Indirect discrimination* refers to apparently neutral situations, regulations or practices which in fact result in unequal treatment of persons with specific characteristics, e.g. ethnic group. It occurs when the same condition, treatment or criterion is applied to everyone, but has a disproportionately harsh or negative impact on some groups (International Labour Organization, 2014).

²⁵ The first Race Relations Act in the UK has been adopted in 1965 and amended by the 1968 Race Relations Act, which made it illegal to refuse housing, employment, or public services to a person on the grounds of colour, race, ethnic or national origins.

²⁶ <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/extent-of-uks-race-inequality>

representation of BAME groups in the workplace at all levels (Business in the community, 2020).

According to findings in the UK Department for Communities and Local Government (2013) report, before the Covid-19 pandemic banks had no evidence of racial discrimination. However, the 2013 report highlighted difficulties in financial access for ethnic minority businesses: collateral shortages, poor creditworthiness, lack of formal savings, poor financial track record and language barriers. The government and banks in the UK have implemented several measures in response to these challenges. However, easier small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) access to financing, including the relaxation of loan terms and conditions, should take place on a non-discriminatory basis, otherwise it may have the effect of improving the competitive market position of the receiver of these funds to the detriment of non-receivers.

These general actions apply to ethnic minorities in the UK and other countries facing similar challenges, particularly during economic downturns. In addition, it would be no exaggeration to say that the competitive success of countries with a large proportion of ethnic minorities will depend considerably on their ability to successfully integrate multi-ethnic populations and mobilise resources to harness their talents.

6. Conclusion

Ethnic minorities represent a large proportion of the UK population, particularly in London. They also represent a significant share of the workforce. Failure to exploit the full potential of the resources embedded in ethnic diversity often brings enormous costs from two sides: direct costs (government subsidies, social transfers) as well as opportunity costs of missed benefits.

The economic disadvantages faced by ethnic minorities are well known but are exacerbated during economic downturns. Thus, the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on ethnic minorities can be compared with conditions they experienced during the 2008 economic slump. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic, which has

brought enormous economic uncertainty, has also exposed ethnic minorities to greater inequality, especially in the labour market.

Over the past decade, ethnic minorities in the UK have made progress in terms of the median pay gap, employment gap and unemployment rates. However, in terms of the economic disadvantages measured by the median pay gap, employment gap and unemployment rates, the position of ethnic minorities in London is worse than that of ethnic minorities in other parts of the UK. This suggests that the policies against discrimination should often be implemented and monitored more rigorously at the local level.

Ethnic minorities have been more exposed to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic than whites. The hospitality sector and tourism industry, in general, have been hit the hardest by pandemic restrictions, and these are traditionally the sectors with relatively more jobs for specific subgroups of ethnic minorities. Additionally, the crisis has disproportionately impacted small businesses and the self-employed, which is often the only source of income for people from ethnic minorities. There are also significant differences between ethnic minorities groups. For example, Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi are the worst in the labour market.

Some measures aimed at improving the economic position of ethnic minorities include: (1) greater participation of the vulnerable subgroups of ethnic minorities in the labour market, especially the youth and women; (2) the identification and abolishment of informal (indirect) discriminatory pay practices by regularly monitoring compensation policies at the organisational level with accompanying penalties for any discriminatory practices (this also includes raising awareness among employers about fair pay and fighting prejudice against ethnic minorities); (3) encouraging and stimulating greater participation of ethnic minority adults in the labour market, and (4) providing easier access to finance for new and existing small business ventures managed by people from ethnic minority groups.

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APPLIED MANAGEMENT POST-COVID-19: IMPLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIC MANAGERS IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION, BEYOND CRISES

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Abstract

The outbreak of Covid-19 caused severe disruption to most sectors of the global economy, creating a spectre of fear, anxiety and uncertainty. The education sector has been one of the worst affected by the pandemic. The pandemic forced educational institutions worldwide to close, cancel classes and shift towards remote working and online teaching. The purpose of this study is to investigate the implication of the Covid-19 pandemic on private higher education. Moreover, the study's main objective is to assess the pandemic's academic management, especially in private higher education. For this, different landscapes were examined, including pre, during and post-Covid-19, focusing on the post-Covid-19 implications. In addition, various

publications and surveys have been analysed to find out about the Covid-19 follow-up changes happening in higher education and its management.

For this particular study, qualitative research was employed by conducting nine semi-structured interviews with academic managers working in the private higher education sector in the UK, to capture their experience, insights about the implications, advantages, disadvantages, and challenges faced during the pandemic.

The findings showed that workplace accessibility was the most affected factor. During the lockdown, the private higher education institutions (PrHEIs) could recruit highly qualified and experienced part-time academic staff, as they needed to teach online. However, most of these part-time academic staff wanted to quit when face-to-face teaching started, as they lived far from their institutions. Only online teaching motivated them to join during the lockdown because it provided ease and convenience, no travelling time and cost, freedom and autonomy. In addition, the online teaching amazingly increased the student attendance. There were higher pass rates but difficulties in engaging students in group activities. Another one of the challenges was the immediate adoption of online teaching and training of academic staff. Moreover, the reinvention of a new workplace approach and the high level of technology implementation to abide by the safety regulations will permanently transform the work routine. Therefore, most of the employees want to continue remote working in future.

Keywords: Applied Management, Covid-19 (pre, during and post), Implications, Private Higher Education

1. Introduction

In the attempt to contain the spread of Covid-19, the governments of the world's countries announced a major lockdown to safeguard the population. Covid-19 has produced significant challenges for all industries, including the higher education industry globally. For example, a critical challenge faced by higher education was the urgent request for suspension of face-to-face teaching and replacement with online teaching (Qureshi et al., 2020). Although the workplace concept differs through different professions, industries and countries, the challenges issued from Covid-19 were common. Due to the lockdown implications, different sectors suffered significant losses in human resources and the economy. In the educational sector, most institutions had to close for a short period or switch to online teaching to follow up on the orders issued by the governments. According to UNESCO (2020), the nationwide closure impacted over half of the world's student population. In addition,

severe changes were applied to managerial responsibilities, such as the cut-off of face-to-face activities. Following these changes, higher education institutions' guidance on managing operations was implemented as a preventive solution (Zhu and Liu, 2020). As a result, online education and remote working became the new everyday phenomena. Despite the considerable time that has passed since the pandemic, the situation has not improved, to the point where the education sector would implement back to work policy.

2. Literature Review

The Covid-19 pandemic seems to be leaving long-term ramifications that would alter the future of education, comprising the teaching, learning and what is implicated on the managerial level. At this point, it is still unclear to what extent these changes will extend. However, it seems that the most vulnerable tuition-dependent higher education institutions with international students, who often pay higher tuition fees than domestic ones (Qureshi et al., 2021), will face a severe outcome. Higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide shut down in 2020 to control the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, possibly affecting more than 3.9 million overseas students (UNESCO, 2020). In addition, hundreds of international students at three major London universities have refused to pay their tuition fees, arguing that mainly learning from their bedrooms did not justify tuition fees of up to £29,000 a year (Qureshi et al., 2021).

The situation seems notably worse to institutions already facing demographically driven declines in demand (Kim, 2020). Paterson disclosed that many public universities with feeble resources and a large proportion of private higher education institutions located in Africa, Asia and the US, encountered a struggle in adapting to the economic damage resulting from the pandemic (Paterson, 2021).

Remote working and online teaching or blended learning became the answer to the academic workflow for managers, tutors, mentors and students. However, the issue resides in understanding the implications of this new regime since it has not been thoroughly analysed, and the predictions remain uncertain (Diver et al., 2021).

2.1 Applied management theories in higher education

Education is one of the prominent organisations of society that requires applied educational management and leadership. Although education management has been developed over several years, determining the goals is fundamental, linking the goals and aims of the education, and its actions should be considered vital (Ghasemy and Hussin, 2014).

Management is a series of actions and tasks relevant to the well-organised and effectual utilisation of resources to attain organisational objectives (Sapre, 2002). Educational management is a discipline concerning the management of educational organisations (Bush, 2010).

Applied management is a type of study that analyses how management skills are used in various areas of businesses. Usually, this field is pursued by those in the technical field who already possess a few essential hands-on skills (Lawrence and Pasternack, 2002).

Applied management refers to examining existing business management practices and the implementing of strategies to alter, improve or streamline them. Applied management theory can involve implementing new hierarchical order, emerging technologies or new decision-making styles. The straightforward conceptualisation of applied management could be applying knowledge and skills in the context of managing activities (management).

While several studies have raised the issue faced in keeping up the classroom activities and the students' learning during the current pandemic crisis, it is essential to understand the applied management and its strategic issues confronting higher education.

The managerial level faces tremendous pressure in maintaining the education flow and effectiveness. The success of higher education in preserving the well-being of the staff and students may require fundamental changes to the academic model for long-term survival. In their study on strategic management theory, Siegel and Leih (2018) demonstrated that few theoretical framework management concepts are being applied to higher education to help managers identify problems and respond to the challenges to achieve strategic goals. Such management concepts are competitive advantages,

organisational capabilities and sustainable performance. The studies investigating the academic, managerial issues have demonstrated how improved management theory can be applied to help maintain the functionality of higher education (Ghasemy and Hussin, 2014; Musingafi et al., 2014; Siegel and Leih, 2018). Academic managers (department heads) play pivotal roles in the management and governance of higher education institutions, making decisions that affect faculty careers, curriculum, student enrolments and department budgets (Berdrow, 2010; Gmelch et al., 2017). Thus, academic managers make decisions, particularly concerning procedures within their departments. They lead and manage the totality of the day-to-day work of the faculty and staff who form the department as a unit.

A. Pre-Covid-19

Before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, several researchers had been studying the applied management theories in higher education and covered the insights of the strategic management of higher education institutions. Strategy concepts included organisational models and designs, and sustainable performance. In addition, other approaches were used, such as inherent phenomena including the role of technology in education, resource allocation decisions, governance and innovation ecosystems, or theoretical streams, including evolutionary approaches to strategy, leadership, dynamic capabilities, strategic behaviour and historical, sociological and economic analyses (Siegel and Leih, 2018). The studies concluded that in more stable times, higher education could survive with “ordinary capabilities”. However, with the increasing uncertainty, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, it becomes necessary to strengthen the “dynamic capabilities” which are future-oriented, focused on identifying threats and opportunities before they take on crisis proportions. Sensing, seizing, and transforming are the elements of the dynamic capabilities framework, which can be applied in the context of digitised instructions.

Siegel and Leih (2018) described higher education to follow two types of competitive strategies, being the “traditional” university and the “enterprise” university, which focuses on the future and the importance of the university. The enterprise university rules the university policies while the traditional university is observed within the university academic activities. The mixed performance within the universities is a result of this competition. The study outcome emerged in two key findings; a

successful strategy implementation requires the university to accommodate this competition and a vivid description of how strategic directions are developed over time to respond to the unexpected (Siegel and Leih, 2018).

B. During Covid-19

The pandemic impact was predicted to have adverse effects on higher education. The potential negative consequences include a drop in learning outcomes, a drop in graduation rates, interfering with the economic health of higher education institutions, and disadvantaging educators and managers due to a sudden change in work style by slowing non-academic related work for scholars, researchers and scientists (Salmi, 2020).

With the daily exponential increase in the number of Covid-19 infected cases in 2020, all public and private higher education institutions were required to postpone all classes and lectures for an initial period. Seeing that the situation was not showing any quick improvement, education had to rely on different measures to conduct courses and classes. The priority became understanding the emerging trends, issues and prioritising higher education (Salmi, 2020). Switching to suitable online platforms was found to be the most convenient solution. In addition, both public and private institutions had to adjust to the new situation where face-to-face interactions and mass gatherings became prohibited.

HEIs started to teach online quickly, comparing private higher education institutions to public higher education institutions in the UK; the former is minor with limited resources. Therefore, PrHEIs started to offer online teaching to students by using readily available online teaching software such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Face Time etc. However, academic staff and students were not ready for this sudden change. Within a short time, the academic managers had to plan and make sure delivery of lectures from home with all the practical and technological challenges this involves, and often without proper technical support (Hodges et al. 2020). On the other side, students also needed to be trained with online software (Zoom, Microsoft Teams etc.). Therefore, academic managers were required to arrange online training sessions for academic staff and students to ensure the smooth running of online courses (Qureshi et al., 2020).

Moreover, non-academic staff such as administrators and support units were compelled to adjust to working from home as the new operating arrangement (Chung et al., 2020). However, this methodology led to several unprecedented challenges (Yusuf, 2020). Many weaknesses have been observed in the sudden transition of the working style, such as carrying out all activities from physical to virtual interactions, determining which activities still required face-to-face meetings and to what extent (Brown and Box, 2020).

The significant challenges imposed on private higher education were mainly in the form of economic issues. The private colleges were struggling with endurance problems, as they were receiving no or very little direct support from the government and could not count on emergency grants to keep them afloat. In addition, some private HEIs started facing severe cash flow issues due to the decreased admission numbers. As a result of the new limitations, the private higher education leaders in developing countries had to abandon their regular institutional plans and attend to the day-to-day challenges (Tamrat, 2021).

The big challenge for PrHEIs in the UK was to make sure the online software could meet the needs of academic staff and students and, ultimately, effective online teaching without difficulties (Qureshi et al., 2020).

C. Post-Covid-19

Despite the Covid-19 predicaments, higher education ought to continue by procuring the necessary means for endurance. Toquero (2020) discloses in her study that the educational system needs to strengthen the practices in the curriculum and make a more adaptive environment for the students to continue their learning, even beyond conventional classroom learning (Toquero, 2020).

In attempting to develop a conceptual framework for post-Covid-19 managerial work, Henry et al. (2021) carried out a systematic collection of aspects defining the work distribution concepts, including remote work, distributed work, telecommunicating and virtual work teams, and distributed organisations. They then systematically analysed the reviewed definitions to extract each concept's fundamental principles

(Henry et al., 2021). Their findings suggest that virtual work and new work distribution fit under distinct continuation modes described as particular work settings when combined. In addition, they identified four factors impacting this new virtual and distribution work: magnitude of the task independence, nature of work, technological environment, and temporal distance. Thus, the framework gave managers the foundation to establish new work distribution and determine the implications while integrating the virtual mode of work to adapt to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

At the same time, institutions suffering from more profound pandemic implications, such as economic endurance, which is the case in private higher education, had to adapt new accommodations due to precariousness to lessen the aggravated influences predicted on the future.

3. Materials and Methods

Several studies have been conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic peak season to evaluate the challenges faced by the educational system in higher education (Bao, 2020; Boyer-Davis, 2020; Toquero, 2020), others studied the post-Covid-19 managerial implication (IESALC, 2020; Kim, 2020; Zhu and Liu, 2020). However, while most studies focused on higher education in general, a few studies addressed the challenges faced by traditional working to switching online in the private higher education managerial sector (Bao, 2020; Qureshi et al., 2020, Yusuf, 2020; Zhu and Liu, 2020; Tamrat, 2021).

Although several studies carried out surveys, other research adopted different methods. For example, Yusuf followed an applied qualitative research methodology with open-ended questions, where 20 participants were asked to write down answers in the space provided in the form of long paragraphs (Yusuf, 2020). This method was selected for its excellent understanding of the value and perception of the participant, being educators at a faculty of Management Sciences at a private institution. Boyer-Davis conducted a survey of 307 college and university professors predominantly teaching in various business-related disciplines. The survey purpose was to determine the different levels of techno stress creators perceived by educators before and during the Covid-19 pandemic (Boyer-Davis, 2020).

This study includes an interview with nine academic managers (head of departments) from five private HEIs. These participants were identified as “1”, “2”, “3”, “4”, “5”, “6”, “7”, “8”, and “9”. Each participant was assigned an abbreviation for Academic Manager (AM) with a number; therefore, we have AM1, AM2, AM3 etc., up to AM9. We also did not disclose the identity of five PrHEIs.

The interview was carried out by collecting answers with a semi-structured set of questions related to the academic managerial implications. The aim is to explore the variable phases at the managerial level during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the interview includes questions on post-Covid-19 implications, including the different phases across the pandemic, pre-, during, and post-Covid-19. However, the interview questions were related to the comparative aspects to work before, during and post-Covid-19. Therefore, several questions focused on the part related to the impact of the changes implemented during Covid-19. During the last part of the interview, participants described their experiences, how they perceived the changes triggered by the pandemic, as well as their thoughts on the long-term impact of the pandemic. The interviews were conducted online, but we sent all the possible questions by email and informed participants that some questions would be generated based on their replies as well.

4. Data Analysis

As a vital paradigm of inquiry, qualitative research aims to collect qualitative data that is non-numeric and captures opinions and concepts from participants to generate meaningful information (knowledge) grounded in human experience (Sandelowski, 2004). For data analysis, we used the thematic analysis approach, which is the first qualitative data analysis method that provides core skills that are useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

At this stage, we started to organise data in a systematic and meaningful fashion by using coding. Thus, for example, all of the interviews were assigned alpha-numeric titles as AM1 to AM9.

The study was based on theoretical thematic aspects of academic managers, originally three Covid-19 themes; pre, during and post. Therefore it was not necessary to code every piece of text or sentence. Instead, we used open and straightforward coding; this

meant that no predetermined codes were used except for the three Covid-19 predetermined themes.

Table 1: Coding samples

Sample Participant Quotes	Codes
<i>“We quickly recruited highly qualified and experienced academic staff during the lockdown as the teaching was online; therefore, the PhD candidates applied who were living far away from the college...some PhDs applied for the online teaching positions from outside the UK (Europe)....Pre-Covid-19, we had under ten PhDs, and this number was doubled in two months and exceeded forty within a year...we have been fortunate during Covid-19 and found recruitment for PhDs has been easy for us during the lockdown...”</i> . (AM1)	Highly qualified and experienced academic staff, Recruitment, Easy, PhDs, Online teaching, Lockdown, Covid-19, UK, Europe
<i>“Student attendances increased dramatically; during the first online teaching phase, the attendance has been 100% for a few courses during the lockdown...student punctuality and attendance has been a serious issue before Covid-19”</i> (AM4)	Student attendance, Punctuality, Serious issue, Online teaching, lockdown, Covid-19
<i>“Both students and academic staff found online teaching with many advantages as it saves time, money...no travelling cost, provides convenience and autonomy. Our survey (for staff and students) results showed that most students and staff want to continue online learning after the Covid-19 crisis...we are also considering the option of blended learning but not for all courses...only for a few courses.”</i> (AM7)	Students, Academic staff, Online teaching, Advantages, Time, Money, Travelling, Covid-19, Crisis, Online learning, Blended learning

After coding all nine interviews, we grouped them and produced a list, eliminating overlapping codes. For example, in the above table of coding samples, we noted recurring and salient codes, such as “Covid-19” and “lockdown”. The final list of codes provided relevant information in terms of carrying out data analysis. We categorised coded data under three themes of Covid-19 (pre, during and post) and created the following.

Table 2: The gist of the interviews

Participant	Pre-COVID-19	During COVID-19	Post-COVID-19
PrHEI (1)			
AM1	Problem in recruiting highly qualified and experienced academic staff	Recruited highly qualified and experienced academic staff	Loss of some highly qualified and experienced academic staff
AM2	Satisfactory pass rate Normal business expansion	Excellent pass rate Staff and students' productivity was higher than expectations. Fast business expansion	Concerns maintaining the same pass rate and productivity Continue business growth
AM3	No assessment of student and staff IT skills and competencies	Assessment of student and staff IT skills IT Training of staff and students to make online teaching effective	More IT skilled staff required
PrHEI (2)			
AM4	Punctuality and attendance issues of students	Excellent punctuality and attendance	Punctuality and attendance issue of students

		Problems managing group students' engagement	
AM5	No staff well-being concerns	Staff well-being concerns, stress, self-isolation	Socialising activities, Staff summer party
PrHEI (3)			
AM6	Staff holidays problems	100% availability of academic staff, Cancellations of holidays, Low academic staff turnover	Staff holidays problems
AM7	Traditional face-to-face teaching	Online teaching, Immediately switching to online teaching	Blended learning
PrHEI (4)			
AM8	High academic staff turnover Traditional working patterns	Covid-19 guidance for staff and students New staff working patterns (remote working)	High academic staff turnover Back to normal, some staff members prefer remote or flexible working and their adjustment problems
PrHEI (5)			
AM9	Working according to strategic planning	Death of College Director due to Covid-19 Catastrophic impact Difficulties in student recruitment	Restoration and sustainability of the college

AM=Academic Manager

5. Findings and Discussion

With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the requirement to change the managerial and strategic approaches, embracing the virtual concept became the most suitable option to continue the academic and managerial tasks. However, it is crucial to understand that the virtual teaching-learning process has not fully emerged due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Learning online is a method applied before Covid-19 by public and private higher education institutions and by the corporate sectors offering selected online courses (Yusuf, 2020). After the pandemic, this method forced managers, educators and students to continue their academic activities. A previous study presented teaching-learning experience in a non-classroom or blended environment before the appearance of Covid-19 as a flipped classroom methodology. Moreover, the study described the usefulness of this methodology in times where social and academic restrictions apply (Izagirre-Olaizola and Morandeira-Arca,

2020). As a result, the institutions introducing the online learning methodology pre-Covid-19 encountered fewer struggles in adapting to the new routine method.

Several PrHEIs found limitations in transitioning from face-to-face to a virtual modality due to structural, social and technical reasons. At the technical level, providing a fully-fledged online system requires arranging several technology tools which may prove challenging to administer in some private institutions (Tamrat, 2021).

As the pandemic led to a continuous shift in the work style in higher education and its management, the implications it has led to are represented in the three following landscapes, being pre-, during, and post-Covid-19.

5.1 Interview Findings

This study was limited to nine academic managers (heads of departments) from five private HEIs in the UK. We selected three academic managers from PrHEI one, two academic managers from PrHEIs two and three and one academic manager from PrHEIs four and five (see Table 2). Answers from the interview were substantial; however, due to the limited number, they will not be representative or generalised to all private higher education institutions.

A. Pre-Covid-19

Pre-Covid-19 study on the challenges facing the private higher education institutions academic management reported the challenges to be grouped in three major categories, namely; resources (physical and financial), capacity development (staff roles and responsibilities, academic leadership and development and research), and programme design, including curriculum design (Stander and Herman, 2017).

Most participants agreed that recruiting highly qualified (PhDs) and experienced academic staff was difficult Pre-Covid-19.

Qualified and experienced academic staff are a critical element of HEIs and it is not easy to recruit them, especially for PrHEIs. Once they are recruited, the PrHEIs must retain and use their skills, knowledge and abilities.

A few participants mentioned that academic staff turnover is higher as compared to non-academic staff.

The Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) revealed exciting facts about academic staff turnover in HE in a study conducted in 2017. Employee turnover has been rising steadily since 2012 but is still low compared to the broader economy, with an overall rate of 8.9% compared to 18.5% across the UK (UCEA, 2017, p. 4). The report also says that the turnover rate is higher for junior academic staff than senior. For example, a turnover rate of 11.2% for Lecturer Grade A compared with 6.2% for professors (UCEA, 2017, p. 25).

According to contemporary literature, high turnover among academic staff is most likely caused by the inability of the academic workplace to meet individual expectations and perceptions and that their specific needs are not being met (for example, see, Bucklin et al., 2014; King et al., 2018; O'Meara, Bennett & Neihaus, 2016; Robyn & Du Preez, 2013; Watanabe & Falci, 2016; Yan, Yue, & Niu, 2015).

One participant mentioned that before the Covid-19 pandemic the students' results were satisfactory; most students obtained marks between 50 to 60%. Moreover, most of the students could not obtain higher marks (70 to 80%) before Covid-19; maybe they had been wasting a couple of hours commuting to attend face-to-face classes. Nevertheless, the commuting time could be used to study to perform well and obtain higher marks.

One participant reported that punctuality and attendance were not excellent; attendance was never 100% for a cohort/semester. However, class punctuality and attendance are generally viewed as the most critical indicators of students' perseverance and performance, whereas absenteeism is viewed as a predictor of dropout probability (Credé et al., 2010). Therefore, as attendance is linked to performance, maybe one of the reasons for low academic performance is low attendance.

A few participants mentioned that there was no assessment of students and staff IT/computer skills and competencies. However, computer skills are an essential part of life; no organisation could perform better without using computers and their related skills effectively. The mammoth increase in computer use in every field of life and business has raised the question of whether people have to be assessed on computer skills before entering education for study, or the labour market for jobs. Nevertheless, many organisations do not assess employees' computer skills at work, and no development plans are made.

A few participants shared their experiences of preparations for the lockdown. Concerning the proper operation adopted in response to the pandemic crisis, managers attempted to keep all stakeholders informed and fully operational at all times. Therefore, they started preparing to shift to remote work as soon as the lockdown was being predicted.

In a matter of a week or so, the transition started with an initial period, which was utilised to prepare for the coming changes that higher education had to adapt to, to survive. Shifting from traditional office work to remote work required preparative steps such as purchasing Zoom accounts, creating shared folders and online meeting rooms, recording online training videos, followed by a training step in which managers, tutors and students started their training in using the video conferencing software. Once the lockdown started, they were fully operational and ready to carry on their daily work online. One of the interviewees answered that the preparative period took more than two weeks, while another reported that it took less than a week.

B. During Covid-19

In response to the questions related to changes in management practices during Covid-19, the interviewees' answers contradicted. For example, one answer showed that the coping was relatively more straightforward than expected, thanks to the facility provided by technology in meetings, work assignments and getting hold of colleagues. In contrast, other answers showed that coping was difficult; the workload, increased since the pandemic, kept developing, bringing more changes and regulations. As a result, managers had to be very active, pay attention to the

development, respond to the changes, keep the workflow and ensure that all academic and non-academic staff were up to date.

A few participants shared interesting facts regarding hiring qualified and experienced academic staff during Covid-19. For example, all higher education institutions in the UK went for online teaching during Covid-19; online teaching allowed hiring qualified and experienced academic staff across the country. One college even hired online qualified and experienced teaching staff across Europe.

There was a general consensus among all participants that private HEIs had to make hasty decisions to switch to online learning during the Covid-19 crisis in 2020.

However, a few participants mentioned that the immediate challenge was training students and staff to efficiently use the online teaching system. Since both staff and students had variable levels of skills and experience in using online provisions, both the groups had to be trained with different approaches. The adopted approaches of staff and students' IT training were generic and customised. A few participants mentioned that they assessed staff and students IT skills for the first time.

According to a few participants, the impact of these changes (remote and flexible working) meant the staff members were able to adapt to the changes and efficiently move towards the virtual work style. On the other hand, the shifting was not as smooth; joining classes from home decreased attentiveness in the classroom due to distractions at home, or difficulty carrying on the group activities virtually. This may create disadvantageous opportunities for some students, especially those in need of exceptional support. In addition, students were also affected by decreased opportunities to interact with each other and form study groups. On the other hand, student enrolment was well-managed thanks to the timely transition from face-to-face to virtual online learning.

A few participants said they discussed the online software with academic staff, either to use Zoom or Microsoft Teams but could not decide. Eventually, the senior management team made the final decision about the software.

All participants confirmed that with the initial challenges of switching from traditional face-to-face teaching to remote online teaching, once online teaching started, they did not face any challenges and had been running online teaching successfully. All participants also confirmed that they provided guidance on Covid-19 and quickly updated information related to Covid-19 on their websites; they strictly followed government instructions in updating the information.

Student academic success depends on regular class attendance; as mentioned elsewhere student attendance increased during Covid-19 as the classes were online and students did not have to travel to attend the classes. One participant reported that a few students attended their online classes while with positive Covid-19 in isolation. Therefore, as academic performance is linked to attendance, during the Covid-19 pandemic students' results were better. One participant mentioned that the students' attendance and results were excellent.

One participant said that Covid-19 had a catastrophic impact on the college, as the college director's death due to Covid-19 changed the college's strategy from growth to sustainability. He was the main driver of the growth strategy. As a result, they had student recruitment problems and closed a couple of campuses, creating confusion and chaos among staff. One participant mentioned that the college could not recruit even a single international student during Covid-19. However, the number of international students before Covid-19 was minimal.

On the contrary to the above answer, one participant confirmed the exponential growth of the college with the opening of three campuses and one university partnership. In addition, he further confirmed a high number of students recruited as compared to before Covid-19. Another participant shared a different view of a long wait on their university partnership application, perhaps due to lockdown.

The majority of participants said they had 100% academic staff availability for online teaching; even a few staff members cancelled their pre-booked holidays during the Covid-19 pandemic. They also confirmed that they had the lowest staff turnover. All participants agreed that remote working had been successful and most of the employees prefer to continue in the future.

A Gartner (2020) survey of 229 Human Resources (HR) departments indicated that roughly half of the companies had 81% of their employees working from home during the initial stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. The report also estimated significant long-term increases for remote work after the pandemic. As a result of Covid-19, the need for millions of workers to work from home has increased in recent years. The requirement for millions of workers to work from home in response to Covid-19 has sped up recent remote work trends, which have been aided by the advancement of information and communication technologies.

In addition, working hours have been affected. Two answers agreed that time flexibility was a positive point for managers; however, coordination, creativity and work flexibility had to be given a very high importance. Moreover, there was a high increase in informal staff meetings to compensate for the decreased spontaneous interactions caused by the remote work.

One participant confirmed that they realised the impact on staff well-being and mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic as they had to cancel all socialising events such as Christmas parties and dinners in 2020. He further mentioned that the college organised a staff summer party immediately after the easing of lockdown in June 2021 to provide a socialising platform. Human beings are primarily a social species, interacting with and forming various types of relationships with others. Extensive public health research confirms the importance of social interaction and relationships for mental health throughout the lifespan. For example, Umberson and Montez (2010) conclude that social relationships influence health over the lifespan and that, as others have suggested, social isolation contributes to anxiety and depression (Mishra et al., 2018, Mora-Gallegos, Fornaguera 2019, Ranjan, Yadav, 2019).

Concerning the new managerial approaches during Covid-19 and their success, the answers showed that the management became effective after the new system (flexible/remote working) was in place. Furthermore, the meeting ensured that the staff were kept updated on the changes, support was provided, the management

improved rapidly and the quality improvement was reflected in the students' performance and achievement rates.

C. Post-Covid-19

Covid-19 pandemic outcomes gave perspectives on how post-pandemic will change the higher education planning, management and funding of online education, as it proves to become a strategic priority in every institution.

From the questions related to remote working in the future and the advantages and disadvantages of remote working, it was found that most participants want to continue remote working in the future.

Regarding the advantages and disadvantages of remote work, the answers were in agreement. The advantages included saving travel time, work flexibility, effective time management, convenience in organising virtual meetings, the possibility to work extra hours if needed without worrying about the late office working permission policy due to the environment safety, and being around and looking after family and loved ones. In addition, there were environmental impact advantages such as reducing pollution, car parking issues and reducing the risk of accidents and paper for printing. On the other hand, the disadvantages resided mainly in the disruption of face-to-face meetings and communication struggles during technology failures, clarifying requirements when assigning job duties, creating monitoring systems, carrying out periodic health assessments and relying on IT for everything. A Gartner survey (2020) showed that many workers plan to work remotely more often in the future.

Two participants stated that the technologies that helped to continue online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic would become a permanent part of educational methods in the post-Covid-19 workplace and play a pivotal role in refining practices consistent with an ongoing shift to more student-centred learning.

Most of the participants prefer blended teaching in the future. As the blended teaching style began to show a dramatic increase, several studies investigated the new virtual mode in an attempt to understand its implications. Henry et al. (2021) analysis suggest that a combination of virtual and redistributed work practices define a novel particular

setting. They proposed a conceptual framework integrating virtual, distributed work practice and organisational levels (Henry, le Roux and Parry, 2021).

For the vast majority of private higher education institutions, surviving the pandemic was the top priority. However, those institutions that experienced an adverse impact from Covid-19, such as the death of a most senior and influential member of staff due to Covid-19, consequently found an inability to recruit students and a deficit in profit and higher costs. Therefore, it might be appropriate for them to rely on layoffs as the fastest way to balance their budget. However, unfortunately, this is also the fastest way to kill innovation, risk-taking and morale (Kim, 2020).

Quality online learning programmes require significant development of new technology as well as notable investment. Although great chances of returning to traditional learning are foreseen, online learning is beneficial when these methods are aligned with the face-to-face methods, thanks to the increased understanding of the digital tools by the academic staff and students (Kim, 2020). It seems that online education will become a strategic methodology at each educational institution. Therefore, according to Kim, managing is prone to change post-Covid-19. The future prediction of the academic changes will include the managers' understanding of the potential of online work practice as a source of revenue and a recognisable method that provides resilience and academic continuity.

In addition, in the future remote work will open up opportunities to people with different backgrounds and life situations, those with disabilities and those previously excluded from the traditional workplace due to their social situation or geographical location (Brown and Box, 2020).

6. Conclusion

With the spread of Covid-19, traditional office working witnessed a complete turnover. Almost overnight, institutions had to adopt a virtual and remote access working style. However, remote working is not equivalent to a less advantageous working style. Brown and Box (2020) discussed that traditional office work does not necessarily correlate to productivity, well-being, diversity and inclusion in the

workers. They describe the significant shift from the old input model (time spent in the office) to the new, driven by output (what the employee actually delivers), as growing evidence of how flexible ways of working can create a greater working environment (Brown and Box, 2020).

On these grounds, the development of appropriate technology tools, as well as a commitment to training educators and managers in methodology and adaptive skills, can be of significant importance (Izagirre-Olaizola and Morandeira-Arca, 2020).

De Lucas Ancillo et al. (2020) explain how the temptation to return to pre-Covid-19 approaches should be avoided. Instead, the best approach is to adopt methods that allow preventing mistakes previously made (de Lucas Ancillo, del Val Núñez and Gavrilá, 2020). Furthermore, it is necessary to construct new frameworks for a digital world, educate, and prepare the organisation so that they can adapt to different work regimes and successfully blend between the processes related to face-to-face and remote work. However, this should not imply switching to carrying out all work from home when the pandemic is over. As attractive as working from home sounds, the benefit from an office environment should not be disregarded (Brown and Box, 2020).

The interviews revealed that, despite the uncertainties, blended work in the future is predicted and preferred as a new working model for its apparent efficiency and convenience and productivity.

Moreover, it seems that the institutions did not suffer from any hiring-freeze, in fact, support was provided, or even more hiring of highly qualified and experienced staff took place due to the provision of online teaching and increase in students' enrolment in some institutions. Furthermore, the external collaboration was not dramatically affected, as the partners showed flexibility as well as understanding. However, some adjustments were applied in the case of some university collaborators, such as increasing the quotas or reconsidering their partnership after the government statement concerning putting caps on student numbers. In the case of others, the partnership process witnessed an inevitable delay, and some university partners were taking a longer time than usual in deciding on the partnership applications.

However, despite the undeniable fact that there were many challenges, the pandemic served as an excellent opportunity to learn about the business, update the information, carry out the competitor analysis, and enhance staff commitment and motivation.

The shift was easy to manage in some cases and difficult in others, yet staff and students had to cope with the changes as they did not have alternative options. However, from the received answers, managers are opting for this new style of online teaching learning and blended work.

A significant threat altered nearly every aspect of academic life, from learning and teaching to managerial functions. As a solution, the educational management sought adjustment to adapt to the rapid changes. The applied changes aided in dealing with the fast changes and led to a permanent change in the education system. This study covers aspects of the new working method applied during and post-pandemic, including remote working, flexibility and blended learning approaches.

The Covid-19 pandemic has offered HEIs a rare opportunity to put their dysfunctional strategies behind them. The current challenges permitted us to learn that private higher education needs a fierce commitment to developing their technology infrastructure as the current solution and for a future precaution during difficult times. It is fair to assume that the implications of Covid-19 on private higher education were not fully negative but gave emergence to a positive outcome as well.

The institutions adapted to change and survived and improved their organisational management and technology in educational aspects. However, there are uncertainties, the future of the private sector continuity depends heavily on what can be done today and during the post-Covid-19 period.

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SOCIAL MEDIA AND STUDENTS' CHOICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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Abstract

Over the past decade, online social networks (OSN) have become ingrained in our daily lives. They have changed the way young people live and have become one of the most important means of communication and entertainment. The use of social media by teens and young adults is on the rise. Higher education institutions recognise the value of social media as a tool of communication to provide information to target students and use its platforms for advertise their programmes to prospective students. Students also use social media and Facebook to access and analyse information to make informed study decisions. The current study examines how

social media in general, and Facebook in particular, influences students' choice of the study programme and Higher Education Institute (HEI).

Quantitative research methods were employed as being most appropriate for this particular study. A total of 170 students from Oxford Business College (OBC), UK, participated voluntarily in the survey; sixty-three (63) male and one hundred and seven (107) female students. All students completed a survey questionnaire based on four sections (A, B, C and D) comprising 15 questions primarily based on the Likert scale. Simple descriptive statistics and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) were used to identify and analyse the factors students considered most important (influential) in their (the students') choice of programme of study and HEI. The most popular social media site was Facebook, followed by Instagram. In regards to influence, Facebook seems to be more influential than other social media sites. It is also obvious that Facebook has been used as a marketing tool by the majority of HEIs. We do not make any claims regarding the generalisability of our study's findings because of the small sample size and convenience sampling used in the study. However, the results generally support what is already known about the most popular social media site – Facebook – as having a positive influence on students' choice of programme and Higher Education Institute.

Keywords: Social Media, Facebook, Students' choice, Higher Education Institutions

1. Introduction

Online social networks (OSN) have pervaded our daily lives during the last decade and changed how young people live. They have also become one of the most essential forms of communication and entertainment. The popularity of social media is skyrocketing among teenagers and young adults. Furthermore, it has proven to be a powerful tool that can significantly impact an individual's decision. With the arrival of social media, people's lives took a completely different turn. Not only does it function as a means of communication, but it has also now evolved into a significant source of knowledge. Higher education institutions that take advantage of the potential provided by social media might use its platforms to promote themselves to prospective students. Therefore, an inquiry is needed to determine how social media influences students' choices and, more specifically, how it influences their decision making when choosing an appropriate higher education institution.

Higher education marketing is a field that continues to expand, evolve and adapt. Higher education marketing specialists are still unsure as to exactly how social media marketing influences 18-year-old high school students' college selection decisions. Therefore, HEIs must understand new students' life experiences to market to them effectively. To sell to higher education consumers successfully, institutions must first understand their demands.

Millions of individuals, particularly young people, use social media sites, such as Facebook, Myspace, Twitter and Instagram, among others, on a regular basis. Facebook remains the most widely used social media platform in the USA: seven out of ten (69%) adult Americans use Facebook daily (Gramlich, 2021). According to another study performed in the United States, approximately 71% of higher education students use Facebook (Duggan and Brenner, 2013). For personal and educational use, Facebook is probably the most popular social network platform. Furthermore, students spend an average of 10 to 60 minutes per day on online social networking (OSN) platforms, even when they are studying (Sánchez et al., 2014).

Table 1: Top five social media sites and brief description

Top Five Social Media Sites	Brief Description
1. Facebook 2.853 billion monthly active users	Launched in 2004, became popular in the late 2000s, most popular and widely and actively used for social media marketing; most organisations have Facebook accounts.
2. YouTube 2.291 billion monthly active users	Launched in 2005, a video sharing platform to upload video and share with other users.
3. Instagram 1.386 billion monthly active users	Launched in 2010 as a free online photo-sharing application.
4. Pinterest 478 million monthly active users	Launched in 2010, a web and mobile-based visual discovery engine to find ideas, fashion tips, recipes, etc.
5. Twitter 387 million monthly active users	Launched in 2006, a microblogging and social networking service. Users post, respond and interact with brief messages (e.g. breaking news stories) known as 'tweets'.

Source: Data Reportal, July 2021

2. Literature Review

The academic community remains divided over a universally accepted definition of social media. However, Bryer and Zavatarro offered one of the first definitions: "Social media are technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible

collaboration, and enable deliberation across stakeholders” (2001, p. 327). A similar definition is “any technology that facilitates the dissemination and sharing of information over the Internet” (Robbins and Singer, 2014, p. 387). Marketing and communication experts have also described social media as “a wide range of new generation internet applications” (Constantinides & Stagno, 2012, p. 44) or, more specifically, “a web-based service that allows the member to construct a profile and connect with other members” (Chaffey et al., 2009, p. 11). It is a type of electronic communication that allows users to create online communities to share ideas, information and opinions with fellow members with whom they share common interests (Jobber & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012, Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, & Seymour, 2011). Therefore, it acts as conversational media (Safko and Brake, 2009). This definition best explains the idea of conversation and interaction between people online (Strauss & Frost, 2011). It includes creating and exchanging user-generated content based on any number of technological systems related to collaboration and community (Joosten, 2012).

Social media usage has increased at a surprising rate over the past decade, and Facebook has dominated the social media market: almost all organisations now use the platform for marketing and communication purposes. In addition, nearly three billion individuals worldwide have an active Facebook account (Statista, 2021).

According to Rowan-Kenyon and Alemán (2016), society has become entrenched in social media use; the researchers explain the universality of social media use as a result of people constantly communicating via the Internet on different platforms. This constant connection via a range of modalities, such as social media, messaging and online applications, allows individuals to absorb news, talk, and make decisions without seeing one other (Rowan-Kenyon and Alemán, 2016). According to McCorkle and Payan (2017), social media marketing is one of the most successful strategies to reach target audiences in today’s marketing communications.

Because of the amount of time students spend on social media, they are an ideal target for social media marketing. They come across many types of content on social media, which influence their opinions and choices. According to several academics, international students use social media to help them decide about the university

(Reddy, 2014). Several studies have examined the use of social media in higher education institutions as well as its impact on student choice (Krezel and Krezel, 2017; Zachos et al., 2018). Although most of these studies yielded useful results, new research is required as technology advances and social media influence shifts (Wang et al., 2011).

The main contribution of our study lies in defining the basis on which social media in general, and Facebook in particular, influences students' choice of higher education institution and understanding the role of social media in motivating these decisions.

As a platform for users to produce, share or exchange information and interact with others globally, social media is developing as a critical marketing component of the HEI admissions process. Thanks to social media, HEIs are now able to communicate more effectively with so-called "millennials" or 'Generation "Y" – those born after 1998 who grew up with the internet and information technology and who perceive themselves as living in a "global village" (Qureshi et al., 2020). As a result, they can understand social media platforms and the use of the Internet. For example, according to the data, 92% of respondents use Facebook at least once a day, and 78.9% of students have joined at least one social media site. The findings contribute to a better understanding of how higher education institutions may effectively employ technology to impact college selection (DiAna, 2014).

Young people, both boys and girls, exchange their feelings, ideas, pictures, personal information, videos and any other data type using social media (Khan et al., 2014). In the United States, 73% of teens now use social media apps and websites. Owing to its potential to build relationships, social media provides a virtual place for young people to explore their interests or issues with like-minded individuals as well as academic assistance. Because of their technical skills and expertise in Internet communication, those students who fear speaking openly in the classroom can now participate in discussions about books and blogs on social media. Web-based tools for learning purposes are also being developed by institutes all the time (Brydolf, 2007).

According to McCorkle and Payan (2017), social media marketing uses Internet communication to connect with audiences through social media platforms (e.g. Twitter, Facebook and Instagram). Social media has become a vital component of human interaction and communication and significantly influences people's behaviour and decision-making processes (Cheung & Lee, 2010). It has fundamentally changed the nature of communication, collaboration and consumption (Aral, Dellarocas and Godes, 2013). Currently, social media is recognised as an essential part of the decision-making process (Weinberg, 2009; Zarrella, 2010). Decision making is a complex process in which consumers go through different stages before making their final purchase decision (Belch and Belch, 2003). Consumers make two types of decisions: *low-involvement decisions* made with no planning or previous thought, and *high-involvement complex decisions* that go through the stages of the decision-making process (Kotler & Armstrong, 2011). High involvement decisions involve a five-stage process: (1) recognition of the problem that requires a solution; (2) the search for information; (3) an evaluation of alternatives; (4) making the purchase decision and, finally, (5) evaluation of the purchase decision (Kotler, 2003). The impact of social media within each step (except the fifth one) is explained in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Decision making stages and impact of social media

Stage of process	Impact of social media
1. Problem recognition	Needs can be triggered by advertisements displayed on a Facebook page or through the 'Like' button, which is a powerful tool to make consumers recognise a need (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). If students see advertisements popping up on their social media feed, this may trigger their study needs
2. Information search	An external search is critical – it includes word-of-mouth and online social networking (Castronovo & Huang, 2012). The internal search involves the consumer's memory about the products/services they used. This means that students seeking information about universities can use social media platforms or ask their 'friends' for information
3. Evaluation of alternatives	Blogs and forums are ideal places to obtain valuable information
4. Purchase decision	Students choose among the alternatives and, before coming to a final decision, consult Facebook or read reviews on social media (e.g., which educational institution to choose)

Source: Authors' own conceptualisation based on secondary research.

In the initial stages of the decision-making process, sources of information available to prospective students were traditionally brochures, prospectuses, newspaper advertisements, educational exhibitions (e.g., graduate fairs), websites, parents and

friends and peers. Since the advent of social media, they can find even more relevant information and make informed choices based on collaboration, communication and community interaction. According to Peruta and Shields (2017), social media has become an emerging and prominent marketing and advertising strategy for higher education institutions to exploit. However, they argue that there is variation in how higher education institutions employ social media marketing (SMM) to stimulate enrolment and connect with potential students. The authors also suggest that further research is required into online marketing strategies for higher education institutions using SSM so that HEIs can use SSM more effectively to increase enrolment. The digital native generation is known as “Generation Z”, according to Rothman (2016), and includes 18-year-olds. He argues that technology is second nature to this generation. They rely on digital technologies, such as the internet and social media, as their primary sources of information, which greatly impacts their decision making.

Chang et al. (2018) argue that in this era, when social media is so prevalent in society, it is very common for people to be influenced by others. Social media has become extremely common these days and is now an important part of everyone’s life. According to Chang et al., social media has become a rich source of information for many people in today’s world, and some use it to influence others. The study’s major goal was to find out how high school students use social media marketing to inform their college selection decisions (Chang et al., 2018).

University websites can provide basic information and offer an engaging environment for the user. As social media is highly interactive and collaborative in nature, it provides an ideal platform for the university to promote their activities (Weiss, 2008). Colleges in the United States are moving towards the use of social media platforms in their marketing strategies (Barnes and Mattson, 2009). In their case study, Hayes et al. (2009) examined the use of social networks by a university for marketing purposes. They discovered a strong correlation between the students who used these social networks and those who applied to that same institution.

According to research, a rising number of businesses are already using social media as part of their marketing strategy (Barnes and Mattson, 2009). Higher education institutions embracing the use of social media must keep in mind how it affects

students' decision making. HEIs, therefore, have the potential to influence students' decisions by introducing new elements on their websites and/or social media apps (Constantinides et al., 2010).

The importance of the Internet and social media as a commercial platform has been widely acknowledged, and firms are increasingly opting for online marketing channels over more traditional ones. In addition, second-generation internet services, including user engagement, interaction, communication with other users and content generation, are all now possible thanks to social media. As a result, higher education institutions are becoming more interested in adding social media to their marketing arsenal. However, further research is needed to understand the usefulness of these platforms for marketing purposes in higher education (Constantinides and Stagno, 2012).

Marketing used to be a phrase that could only be mentioned in the most hushed tones in academia, and thoughts concerning the marketing of educational institutions have frequently sparked concerns and controversy. According to Anderson (2008), one of the main arguments against higher education marketing techniques was that it would jeopardise the academic quality and excellence (Anderson, 2008). However, to build and maintain valuable exchanges between HEIs and the three primary consumer groups – current students, alumni and potential students – is exactly what is implied by relationship marketing in higher education: customers' long-term loyalty is positively related to the quality of these ties (McAlexander & Koenig, 2001).

Several studies (Teng and Lin, 2013, Tuncay et al., 2011) have examined the efficiency of educational programmes in Facebook-like environments, while others (Ellison et al., 2007, Yu et al., 2010) reported that the transition to university culture went well. According to Gray et al. (2013), social contacts provided by social networks “help students feel more connected to the college, which may enhance the probability that they will persevere beyond their first year.” According to the authors, Facebook is the most beneficial social network for assisting students in their scholastic pursuits. According to a survey, several colleges in Israel (Forkosh-Baruch and HersHKovitz, 2012) have developed more than 70 Facebook and Twitter profiles to assist instructional procedures. Consequently, a supportive network for informal

learning has been established, with promising outcomes in terms of knowledge dissemination.

According to Hobson's (2017) survey on international higher education, more than 80% of students depend on social media platforms to find information about an education institution (Galan et al., 2015, Rowe, 2014). Choosing a university is a one-of-a-kind decision-making process in which candidates go through various stages of a lengthy evaluation process (Maringe, 2006, Moogan et al., 1999, Stephenson et al., 2016). Advertisements and promotional events, university websites, reports, friends and instructors, are all sources of information for prospective university students (Simões and Soares, 2010) and they may consult different sources depending on the type of information they are looking for (Bonnema and Van der Waltd, 2008). For example, university websites can provide information about tuition fees and scholarships, while social media or professional reports can provide information about job opportunities. Social media helps to make everything clear to prospective students so they can make informed choices about which college or university would be most suitable for them (Le et al., 2019).

3. Methodology

3.1 How does social media in general, and Facebook in particular, affect students' choice of higher education institution?

To answer this question, we used quantitative research methods to examine the impact of social media on students' choice of higher education institutions. The study used a survey approach in which students from Oxford Business College (OBC) participated in a series of questions regarding the influence of social media sites and Facebook on their choice of institution and particular programme of study. Surveys and questionnaires were a clear strategy widely employed by researchers due to their simplicity in delivering the desired results. Therefore, the data was gathered, processed and analysed to determine the results.

A total sample of 170 students from OBC participated in the research investigating the relationship between social media and students' choice of HEI. 63 males and 107

females were asked to complete the survey. The majority of the respondents (70.56%) were in the 26-35 age bracket and were currently enrolled or had completed their Foundation Programme (64.71%). The research was conducted in accordance with British Educational Research Association (BERA) and OBC protocols.

4. Results and Discussion

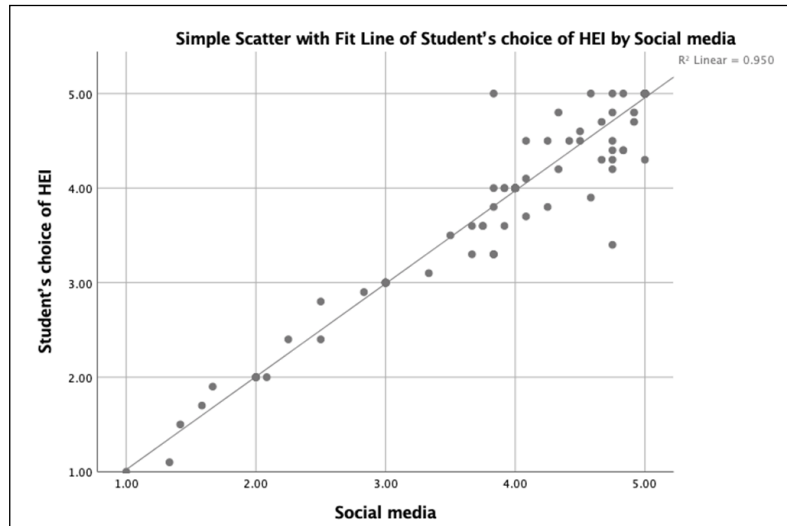
4.1 The relationship between social media and students' choice of HEI

A Pearson correlation was conducted to determine the possible presence of a significant relationship between social media and students' choice of HEI. The analysis demonstrated that there was a significant relationship between social media and students' choice of HEI ($r = 0.975$, $p \text{ value} = 0.000$). Furthermore, the value of the Pearson correlations indicates a very strong, positive relationship between the two factors.

4.2 Social media influences students' choice of HEI

Simple regression analysis was used to determine whether following social media can significantly influence students' choice of HEI. In combination, social media accounted for 95.0% of the variability in students' choice of HEI ($R^2 = 0.950$, adjusted $R^2 = .950$, $F(1) = 3179.697$, $p < 0.001$), with social media recording a positive and stronger beta value ($\beta = 0.975$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that, if the number following social media increases by one unit, the likelihood of the students' choice of HEI will increase by 0.975 units. Thus, the analysis showed that social media has a strong, positive impact on students' choice of HEI.

Figure 1: Regression summary

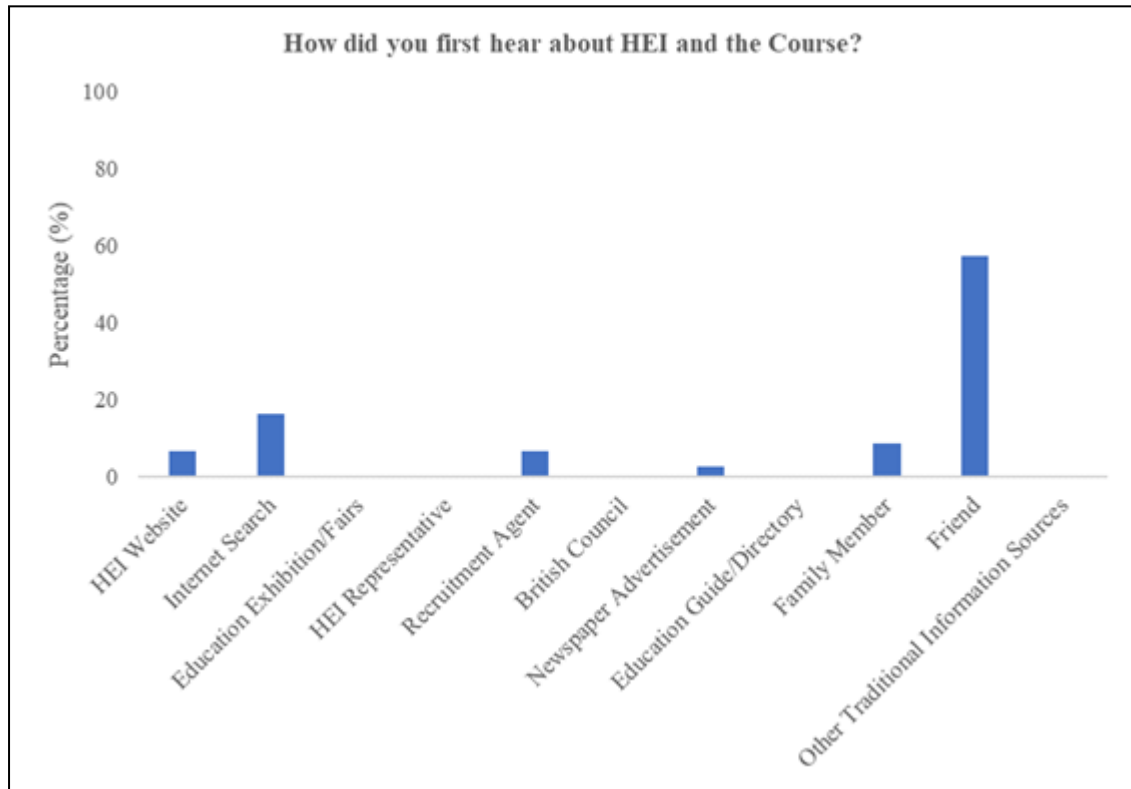


4.3 How did you first hear about your HEI (College/University) and course?

A chi-square test for goodness of fit with $\alpha=.05$ was used to assess whether there is a difference in the number of students who chose a particular answer regarding how they first heard about the HEI. The chi-square test was statistically significant ($\chi^2(7) = 392.474, p= 0.000$), indicating a significant difference in the number of people in the sample who chose a particular answer. Thus, the analysis showed that the likelihood of first hearing about the HEI from friends is significantly higher than any of the other options.

Respondents mostly first heard about their chosen HEI and course through their friends (57.44 %), followed by an internet search (16.41%), family member (8.72%), HEI website (6.67%), recruitment agent (6.67%) and newspaper advertisement (2.56%).

Figure 2: Means of first hearing about the HEI and course

**Table 3:** Summary of the findings

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Education Guide/Directory	1	24.3	-23.3
Family Member	17	24.3	-7.3
Friend	112	24.3	87.8
HEI Representative	1	24.3	-23.3
HEI Website	13	24.3	-11.3
Internet Search	32	24.3	7.8
Newspaper Advertisement	5	24.3	-19.3
Recruitment Agent	13	24.3	-11.3
Test statistics			
Chi-Square	392.474 ^a		
df	7		
Asymp. Sig.	.000		

4.4 How did you obtain more information about your HEI and course?

A chi-square test for goodness of fit with $\alpha=.05$ was used to assess whether there is a difference in the number of people in the sample who chose a particular answer regarding obtaining more information about the HEI. The chi-square test was statistically significant ($\chi^2(8) = 362.982$, $p=0.000$), indicating that there was a significant difference in the number of people who chose a particular answer. Thus, the analysis showed that the likelihood of someone obtaining more information about

the HEI from friends who are already studying at the HEI is significantly higher than any of the other options.

Respondents mostly obtained information about their HEI and course from friends already studying there (44.21%). Other options included Internet search (19.01%), HEI website (8.68%), prospectus (8.68%) and visiting a recruitment agency (6.20%).

Figure 3: Means of acquiring more information about HEI and course

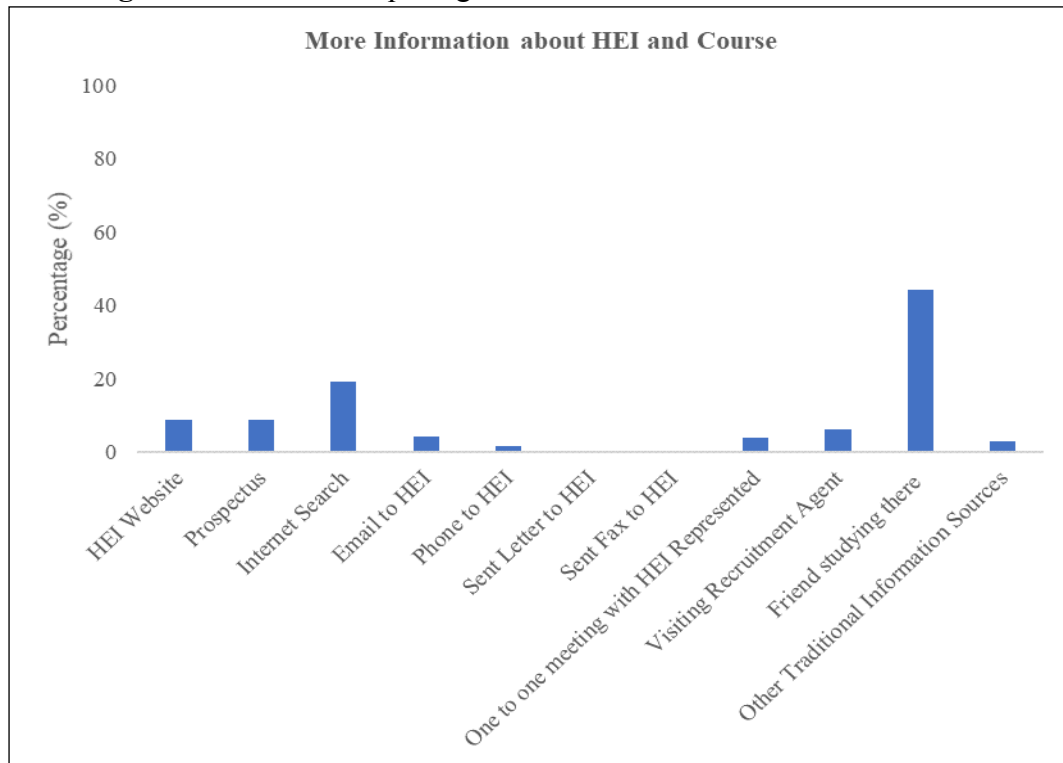


Table 4: Summary of the findings

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Email to HEI	10	25.1	-15.1
Friend Studying There	107	25.1	81.9
HEI Website	21	25.1	-4.1
Internet Search	46	25.1	20.9
Phone to HEI	4	25.1	-21.1
Prospectus	21	25.1	-4.1
Sent Fax to HEI	1	25.1	-24.1
Sent Letter to HEI (Snail Mail)	1	25.1	-24.1
Visiting Recruitment Agent	15	25.1	-10.1
Test statistics			
Chi-Square	362.982 ^a		
df	8		
Asymp. Sig.	.000		

4.5 On which social media sites did you have a profile?

A chi-square test for goodness of fit with $\alpha=.05$ was used to assess whether there is a difference in the number of people in the sample who chose a particular answer regarding their active profiles on social media. The chi-square test was statistically significant ($\chi^2(6) = 269.897$, $p=0.000$), indicating that there was a significant difference in the number of people in the sample who chose a particular answer regarding their social media accounts. Thus, the analysis showed that the likelihood of having a profile on Facebook is significantly higher than any of the other options.

The majority of the respondents had profiles on Facebook (47.83%), followed by Instagram (18.97%), LinkedIn (12.25%) and YouTube (10.28%). A relatively small number of respondents had Pinterest (5.14%) and Twitter (4.74%).

Figure 4: Open profiles on social media sites

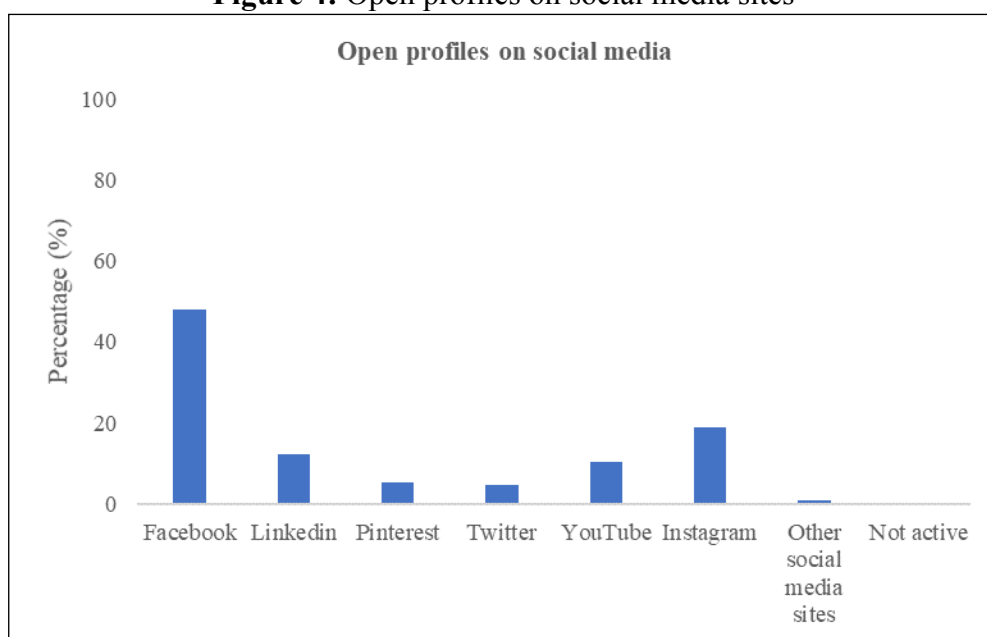


Table 5: Summary of the findings

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Facebook	121	36.1	84.9
Instagram	48	36.1	11.9
	31	36.1	-5.1
Other social media sites	2	36.1	-34.1
Pinterest	13	36.1	-23.1
Twitter	12	36.1	-24.1
YouTube	26	36.1	-10.1
Test statistics			
Chi-Square	269.897 ^a		
Df	6		
Asymp. Sig.	.000		

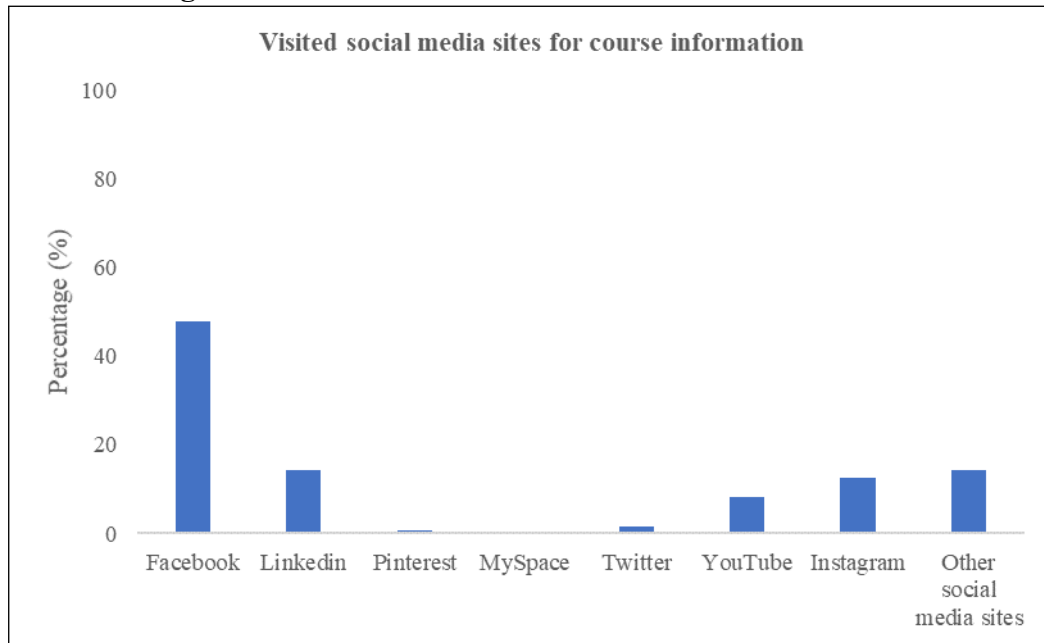
4.6 Which social media sites did you visit for course information?

A chi-square test for goodness of fit with $\alpha=.05$ was used to assess whether there is a difference in the number of people in the sample who chose a particular answer regarding visiting certain social media sites for course information. The chi-square test was statistically significant ($\chi^2(7) = 396.721$, $p=0.000$), indicating a significant difference in the number of people who chose particular answers. Thus, the analysis showed that the likelihood of visiting Facebook for course information is significantly higher than any of the other options.

When it comes to searching for course information, the majority of respondents visited Facebook (47.96%), followed by other social media sites (14.29%), Instagram (12.58%) and YouTube (8.16%).

Table 5.1: Which social media sites did you visit for course information?

Facebook	LinkedIn	Instagram	YouTube	Other
47.96%	14.29%	12.58%	8.16%	14.29%

Figure 5: Visited social media sites for course information**Table 6:** Summary of the findings

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Facebook	141	36.8	104.3
Instagram	37	36.8	.3
	42	36.8	5.3
MySpace	1	36.8	-35.8
Other social media sites	42	36.8	5.3
Pinterest	2	36.8	-34.8
Twitter	5	36.8	-31.8
YouTube	24	36.8	-12.8
Test statistics			
Chi-Square	396.721 ^a		
df	7		
Asymp. Sig.	.000		

4.7 What kind of course information did you seek on social media site(s) when searching for a course?

A chi-square test for goodness of fit with $\alpha=.05$ was used to assess whether there is a difference in the number of people who chose a particular answer regarding the type of course information they sought on social media. The chi-square test was statistically significant ($\chi^2(3) = 231.370$, $p=0.000$), indicating a significant difference in the number of people in the sample who chose particular answers. Thus, the analysis showed that the likelihood of seeking course information on the website is significantly higher than any of the other options.

When searching for a course on social media, the majority of respondents sought course information on the website (69.44%), while some of the respondents were interested in course videos (11.11%), sample lectures videos (14.35%) and other information (5.09%).

Figure 6: Course information sought on social media sites when searching for a course

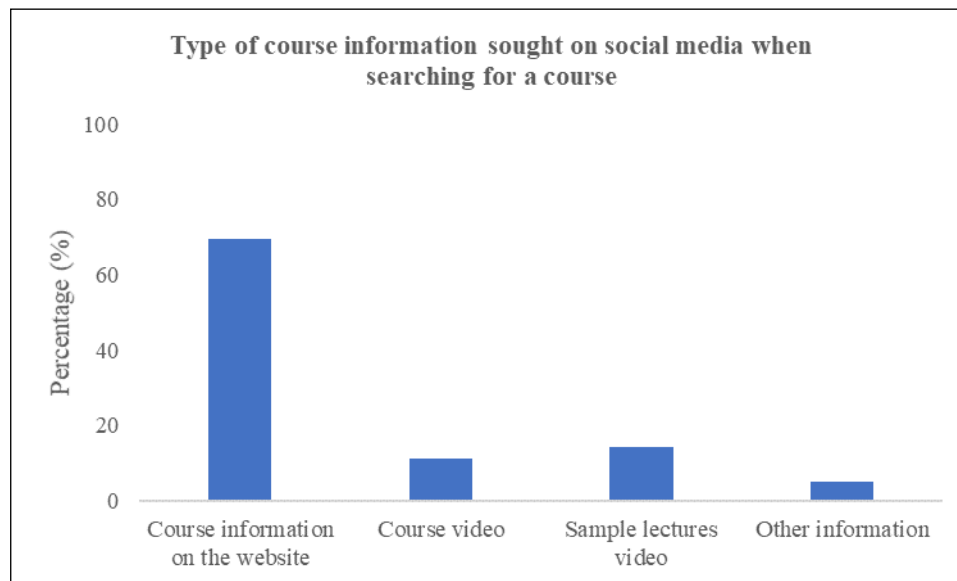


Table 7: Summary of the findings

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Course Information On The Website	150	54.0	96.0
Course Video	24	54.0	-30.0
Other Information	11	54.0	-43.0
Sample Lectures Video	31	54.0	-23.0
Test statistics			
Chi-Square	231.370 ^a		
df	3		
Asymp. Sig.	.000		

4.8 During your course search, how did you contact the HEI?

A chi-square test for goodness of fit with $\alpha=.05$ was used to assess whether there is a difference in the number of people in the sample who chose a particular answer regarding how they contacted the HEI during their search. The chi-square test was statistically significant ($\chi^2(5) = 177.758$, $p=0.000$), indicating a significant difference in the number of people who chose a particular answer to this question. Thus, the analysis showed that the likelihood of using an HEI Facebook page is significantly higher than any of the other options.

During the course search, the majority of respondents used an HEI Facebook page to get in touch with the institution (50%), 18.69% of respondents did not interact with the HEI using any of the listed methods, 14.14% used an HEI profile on LinkedIn, 7.58% contacted HEI staff using Instant Messaging, 7.07% used other forms of interaction, while a few (2.53%) followed an HEI on Twitter.

Figure 7: Contact with HEI during course search

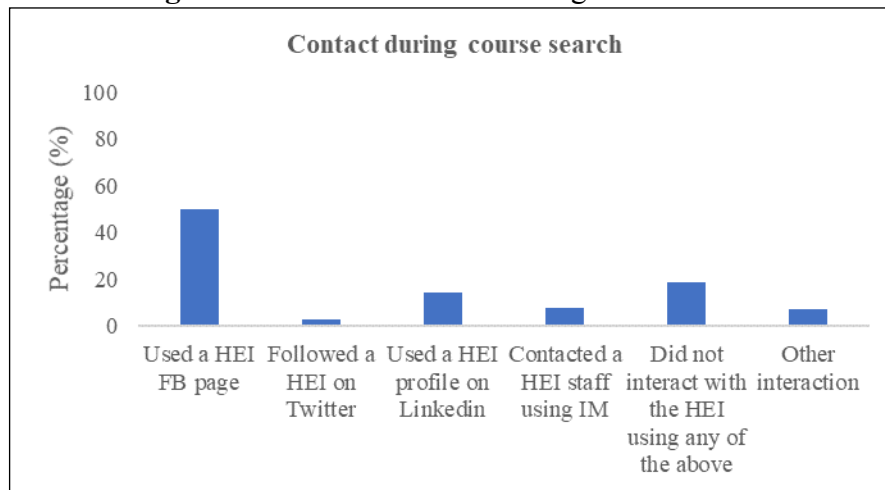


Table 8: Summary of the findings

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
I contacted a member of HEI staff using Instant Messaging (IM)	15	33.0	-18.0
I did not interact with the HEI using any of the above methods	37	33.0	4.0
I followed an HEI on Twitter	5	33.0	-28.0
I used an HEI Facebook page	99	33.0	66.0
I used an HEI profile on LinkedIn	28	33.0	-5.0
Other interaction	14	33.0	-19.0
Test statistics			
Chi-Square	177.758 ^a		
df	5		
Asymp. Sig.	.000		

4.9 Which of the following social media information sources influenced you most in your course selection?

A chi-square test for goodness of fit with $\alpha=.05$ was used to assess whether there is a difference in the number of people in the sample who chose a particular answer regarding the social media site that influenced them most when choosing a course. The chi-square test was statistically significant ($\chi^2(5) = 273.073$, $p=0.000$), indicating a significant difference in the number of people in the sample who chose a particular

answer. Thus, the analysis showed that the likelihood of someone being influenced by the information on Facebook is significantly higher than any of the other options.

Information presented on Facebook influenced course selection for the majority of respondents (63.25%). However, some respondents were also influenced by information on other social media sites (11.45%), LinkedIn (10.84%), Instagram (10.84%), YouTube (2.41%) and Twitter (1.20%).

Figure 8: Social media information sources influencing the most course selection

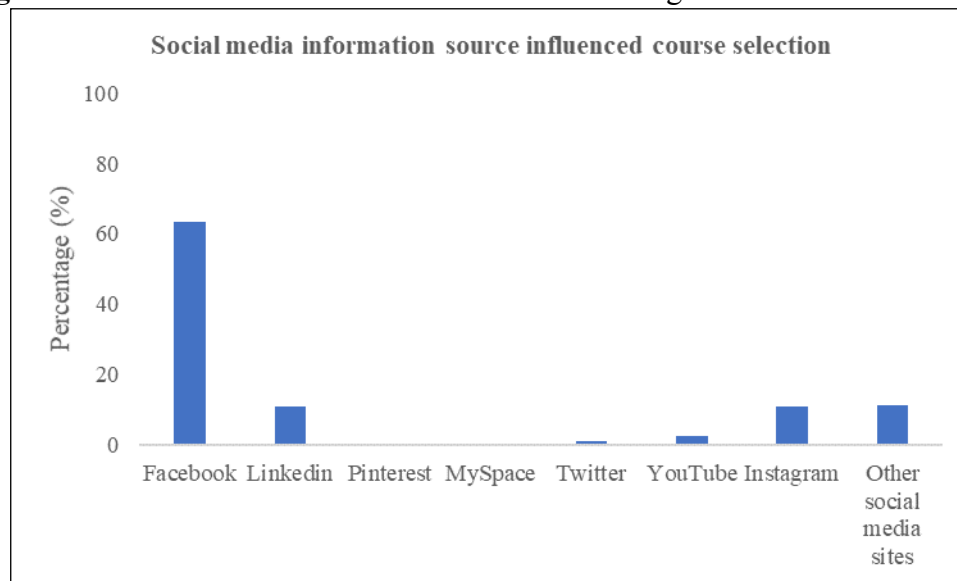


Table 9: Summary of the findings

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Facebook	105	27.5	77.5
Instagram	18	27.5	-9.5
LinkedIn	18	27.5	-9.5
Other social media sites	19	27.5	-8.5
Twitter	2	27.5	-25.5
Youtube	3	27.5	-24.5
Test statistics			
Chi-Square	273.073 ^a		
df	5		
Asymp. Sig.	.000		

4.10 How should HEIs use social media applications to provide information on their programmes to students?

A chi-square test for goodness of fit with $\alpha=.05$ was used to assess whether there is a difference in the number of people in the sample who chose a particular answer regarding how HEIs should use social media applications to provide course information to international students. The chi-square test was statistically significant

($\chi^2(7) = 268.606, p=0.000$), indicating a significant difference in the number of people who chose particular answers to this question.

Most of the respondents (43.12%) think that colleges and universities should use social media applications to create blogs and forums about specific university courses and education topics to provide key information about their programmes to international students. Some think that social media should be used to provide course information through videos (27.52%), while 7.43% think HEIs should use social media to host sample video lectures. A minority of respondents think that HEIs should create and host a presentation of the university on social media (8.12%), participate in education-related blogs and forums (8.26%), use photo and video hosting services to show their facilities and activities (3.67%), advertise in blogs and social networks (3.67%) and showcase students from their own countries on a video sharing application (1.83%).

Figure 9: Use of social medial applications to provide information on the programmes to students

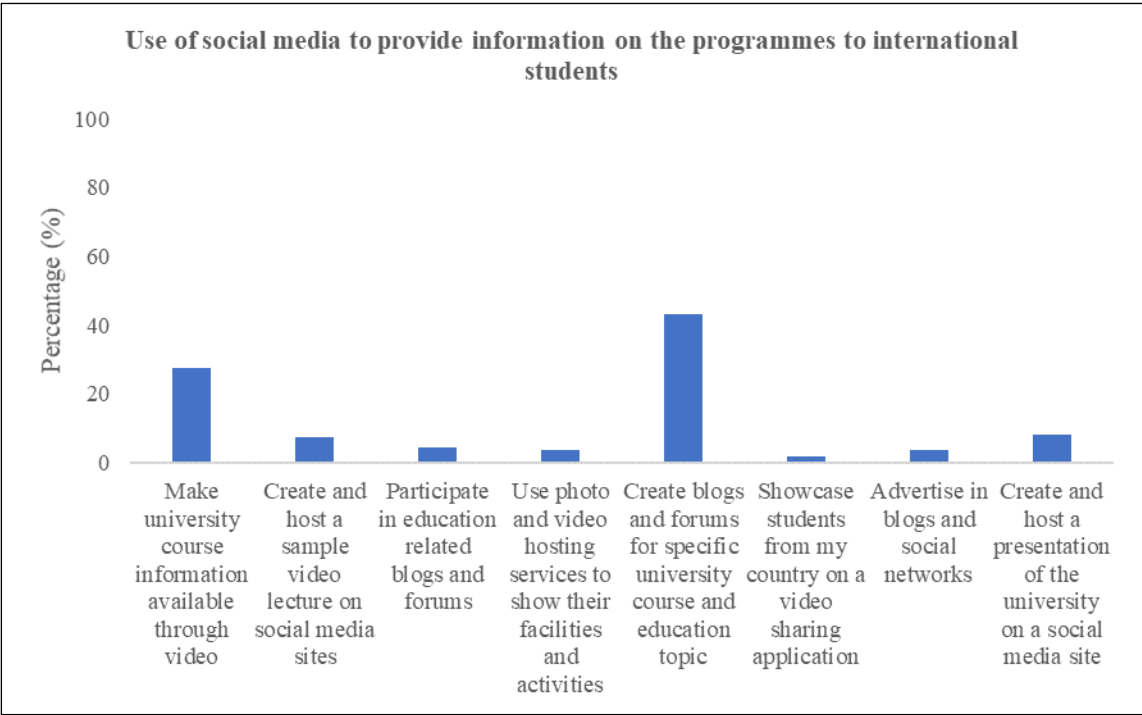
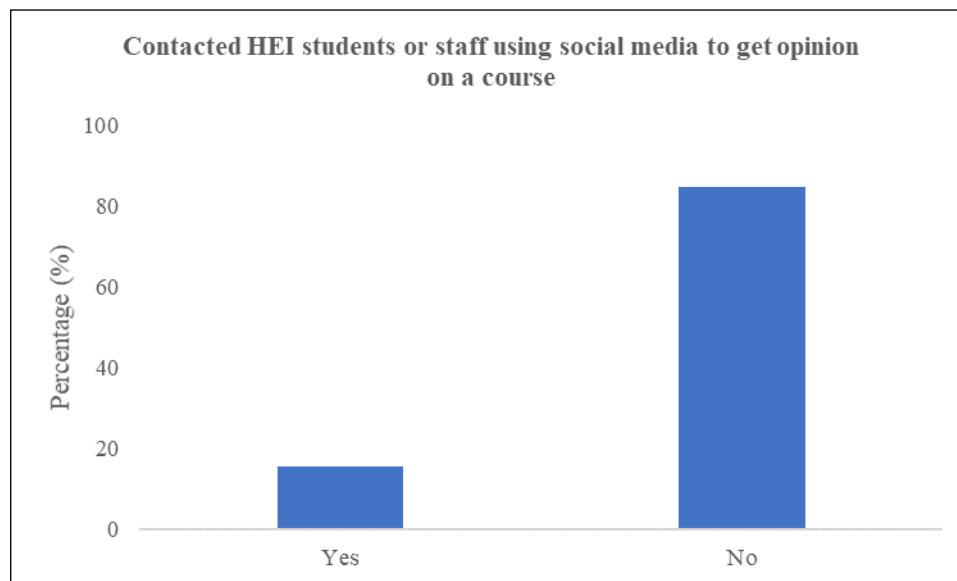


Table 10: Summary of the findings

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Advertise in blogs and social networks	8	27.3	-19.3
Create and host a presentation of the HEI on a social media site	18	27.3	-9.3
Create and host a sample video lecture on social media sites	16	27.3	-11.3
Create blogs and forums for a specific course and education topic	94	27.3	66.8
Make course information available through video	60	27.3	32.8
Participate in education-related blogs and forums	10	27.3	-17.3
'Showcase students from my country on a video sharing application'	4	27.3	-23.3
Use photo and video hosting services to show their facilities and activities	8	27.3	-19.3
Test statistics			
Chi-Square	273.073 ^a		
Df	5		
Asymp. Sig.	.000		

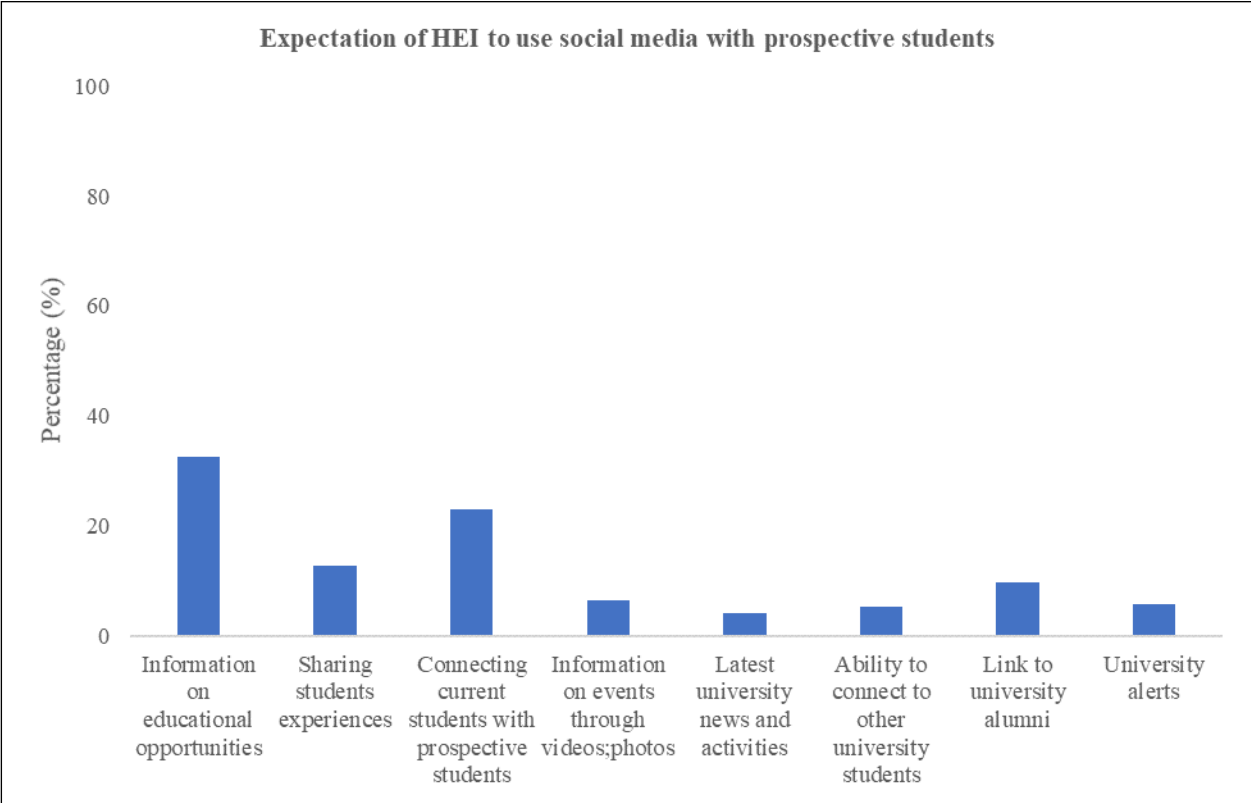
Respondents tend not to contact HEI students or staff on social media about their opinion on a particular course (84.71%).

Figure 10: Contacted HEI students or staff using social media to get their opinion on a course



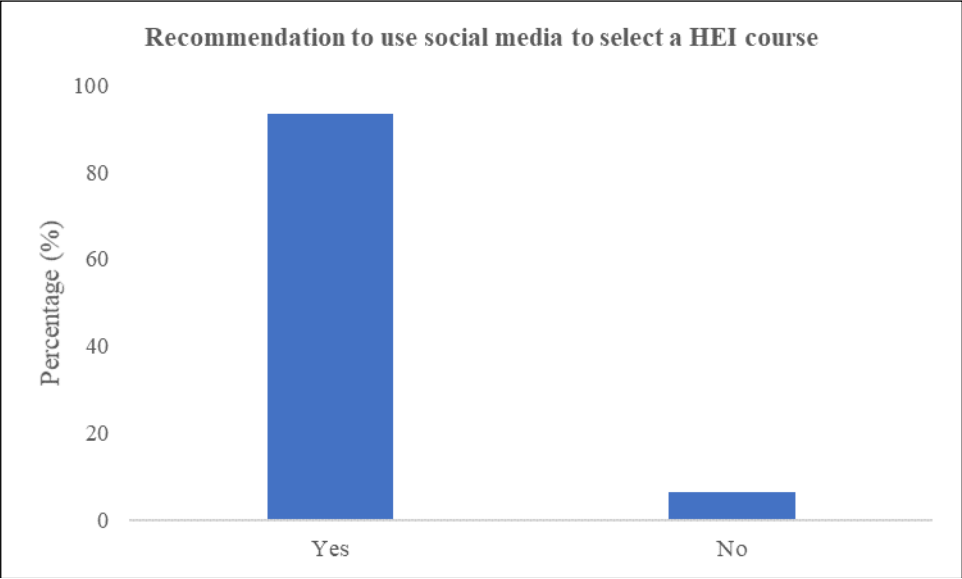
HEIs are expected to use social media to interact with prospective students mainly regarding educational opportunities (32.48%), to connect current students with prospective students (22.90%) and to share students' experiences (12.85%). In addition, HEIs are also expected to use social media as a link to university alumni (9.81%) and other university students (5.37%), to provide information on events through photos/videos (6.54%), send alerts (5.84%) and post the latest university news and activities (4.21%).

Figure 11: Expected ways of HEI using their social media with prospective students



Almost all of respondents (93.53%) would recommend the use of social media to their friends to select an HEI course, as they believe it is a useful, practical and efficient way of acquiring information, while 6.47 % would not due to the limited amount of information provided on social media regarding the college and its courses.

Figure 12: Recommending friends to use social medial to select HEI course



5. Conclusion and Recommendations

HEIs' websites provide a basis for attracting and engaging users (Weiss, 2008). Social media sites can be extended and comprehensive marketing tools, affecting human behaviour both positively and negatively (Barker, 2009; Kolbitsch & Maurer, 2006). In educational circles, they primarily serve as an essential communication tool (Kietzmann et al., 2011) to target prospective students in particular, and, more generally, alumni and multipliers, such as parents and employers etc. (Kohn, Griesbaum, Mandl, 2012).

Be they part of generation X, Y or Z, or millennials, all students are exposed to almost all types of technology in many different aspects of their lives (Browning, Gerlich, & Westermann, 2011). In addition, HEIs are increasingly using social media as a tool of direct marketing at low cost, enabling direct communication with the target audience (Smajlovic, Kamaric and Sinanagic, 2015).

Our study aimed to authenticate the effectiveness of social media in general and Facebook in particular as a marketing communication tool for HEI's in the UK to attract prospective students. Primary data for the study was collected using Google Forms and analysed for statistical significance using SPSS; both tools are commonly used and effectively facilitated the study. However, there is room for improvement in the methodology for data collection, and a slightly different questionnaire structure would reduce the scope and improve the confidence factor.

The study explored to what extent social media influences students' choices and, in particular, how it influences their choice of HEI and programme of study. As part of our study, we conducted eight chi-square goodness of fit tests where we took an average of the responses given for each statement, which generated a new variable – social media and students' choice of HEI. For those two variables, we conducted correlation and regression analysis and confirmed that social media (especially Facebook) had a notable impact on students' choice of HEI. Although students first hear about their chosen HEI and courses from friends, they rely on the internet to obtain more information about the HEI and the courses on offer. Out of all the social media sites available, we found Facebook to be the most widely used when searching for a course and HEI during our research.

Almost all HEIs have Facebook pages about contacting HEI staff for more details about the courses available but not about the courses themselves or current students' opinions on the different programmes of study. Prospective students also search HEIs' Facebook pages for course information that may only be available on the website. However, as HEIs' Facebook pages rarely contain such information, our recommendation based on these findings is that HEIs should incorporate more detailed course information on their Facebook pages.

Prospective students indicated that the information available on social media sites (Facebook in particular) influenced their course selection and HEI. When communicating with students, our survey results suggest that HEIs should mainly use social media to promote specific courses and present further information using different methods, such as videos on their social media sites. Furthermore, HEIs are expected to use their social media sites to share educational opportunities with prospective students. Almost everyone would advise their friends to use social media to select an HEI course since they believe it is helpful, practical and efficient to acquire information.

HEIs should modify their social media sites accordingly, as currently, the majority of them provide limited information regarding the college/university and the courses available.

The findings revealed that prospective students widely use numerous social media tools to choose an HEI and particular programme of study. Although there was a variation in the appearance and use of a particular tool, social media was predominant compared to traditional tools, such as phone contact, emails, etc. Furthermore, among the various tools available, most prospective students used Facebook to communicate with an HEI and share knowledge with peers. Facebook also came out on top as the most recommended tool for researching potential HEIs and courses.

The majority of students also believed that Facebook is a fast and reliable source of information. The information obtained via Facebook is relevant, reliable, unbiased, valuable and convenient to obtain. Considering students' perception of the site,

Facebook should be at the top of HEIs' list when it comes to spreading the message and reaching their target audience quickly and ubiquitously. Instagram closely followed Facebook in terms of effectiveness for education marketing, and these two tools alone accounted for a significant share of the effectiveness index.

A future study could look at just one tool, such as Facebook, and fine-tune the questionnaire accordingly. Furthermore, a broader, deeper and more systematic target audience selection might produce generalisable results. As more studies are done examining the influence of social media on the social, cultural and political aspects of our lives, it remains to be seen how these tools will transform traditional collaboration, communication and politicisation tools. There are already signs in related studies that these tools may significantly change political and even cultural dynamics. There is every reason to believe that education and educational marketers will make even more use of these social media in the future. However, to predict the longer-term effects these tools will have on educational marketing strategies and how they might indirectly influence social and political attitudes, and students' decisions would be mere speculation.

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GENDER DIFFERENCES IN CREATIVITY AMONG STUDENTS IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between openness to experience, creativity, creative behaviour, general creativity and support for creative behaviour from academic staff (lecturers and professors) and by the environment among students in private higher education. The aim was to investigate the contribution of gender, support for creative behaviour from academics, and the environment in predicting different measures of creativity. Additionally, this study examined the structure of the creative behaviour self-assessment questionnaire. The openness to experience scale, creativity subscale, inventory of creative behaviours, creativity self-assessment questionnaire and assessment of incentives for creative behaviour by academics and the environment were tested on a sample of 346 students (54% female), who were randomly selected from different private higher education institutions (college and universities). Students with different majors participated (70% finance and law, 16% information technology and 14% web design).

Consistent with our predictions, the “openness to experience” domain was positively related to the creativity facet, creativity behaviour and general creativity. As expected, the openness to experience domain and its creativity facet and creative behaviour and general creativity were associated with supporting creative behaviour by the environment in both males and females. However, contrary to our predictions, support for creative behaviour from academics was unrelated to openness to experience, creativity and general creativity in both males and females. In contrast, support for creative behaviour by academics was related to creative behaviour in females but not in males. On the other hand, creative behaviour and general creativity were positively associated and supported creative behaviour by the academics and the environment. Support for creative behaviour from the environment was positively associated with openness to experience, creativity, creative behaviour and general creativity, while gender only showed independent positive associations with creative behaviour. Gender, support for creative behaviour from academics and support for creative behaviour from the environment together accounted for 9% of the variance in openness to experience, 7% of the variance in creativity, 12% of the variance in creative behaviour and 13% of the variance in general creativity. The results highlight the importance of support for creative behaviour from the environment in explaining openness to experience, creativity, creative behaviour and general creativity. Furthermore, they show that gender is a significant predictor of creative behaviour. The results also provide further validation of the inventory of creative behaviours and further delineate the nomological network of the creativity construct.

Keywords: Creativity, Gender Differences, Students, Private Higher Education

1. Introduction

Creativity is a complex, multidimensional construct that encompasses behavioural, biological, cognitive and sociocultural elements, such as genetic, hormonal and neurological and gender differences, as well as personality traits, cognitive strategy and cognitive styles, thinking skills, cultural factors, creative potential and creative achievement (Abraham, 2015). There is no single definition of creativity, but most authors agree that it is the ability to create something new, original and valuable (Baron, 1988; Sternberg, 2005). Nowadays, creativity is the focus of different scientific disciplines, primarily psychology, education, human resource management and medicine. High levels of creativity are a desirable trait in some disciplines (e.g., art, design) as well as a prerequisite for certain professions. Creativity is a significant predictor of academic achievement (Ai, 1999) and well-being (Acar et al., 2020), which are both related to life success, economic prosperity and social stability. Kaufman & Beghetto (2009) classify creativity as one of the most important economic resources of today. Creativity includes flexibility, originality and divergent thinking (Barron & Harrington, 1981).

Amabile (1983) emphasises the theoretical complexity of the creativity construct and states that creativity is influenced by three groups of factors: personality traits, cognitive abilities and the social environment.

Numerous studies and meta-analyses have shown that personality traits (especially openness to experience and introversion) explain a significant amount of the variance in creativity (da Costa et al., 2015; Feist, 1998; von Stumm et al., 2011). However, it should be borne in mind that some aspects of creativity, such as scientific and artistic creativity, are related to socially aversive personality features, such as low levels of sociability, aggression, dominance and introversion (Stumpf, 1995).

Cognitive abilities include opinion processes (divergent thinking) that lead to creative production. Dominant measures of creativity from this cognitive position are Guilford's tests of divergent thinking (Guilford, 1971) and Torrance's tests of creativity thinking (Torrance, 1974). Divergent thinking is characterised by finding a variety of solutions to a problem (Guilford, 1971) whereby the results depend on the

type of tasks performed and the method of evaluation (Wallach & Kogan, 1965). According to Guilford (1971), divergent thinking is the core of creativity, while other authors (i.e. Runco, 2008; Runco et al., 2006) warn that divergent thinking is a significant predictor of creativity, but it is not synonymous with creativity.

Social and environmental factors, such as cultural diversity, model availability, financial support, external evaluations and supervision, significantly influence eminent creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Simonton, 2000). A meta-analysis of 120 studies by Gajda et al. (2016) demonstrated a positive relationship between creativity and academic achievement, which was moderated by the types of measures used to assess these constructs.

In the last two decades, an increasing amount of research has been dedicated to examining gender differences in creativity. However, the results of these studies show that the role of gender in creativity is unclear, especially considering that there have been few neuroscientific investigations. Specifically, most research into this phenomenon is behavioural and has shown that gender differences in creativity are influenced by cognitive styles or adopted strategies that differ in men and women (Abraham, 2015).

2. Creativity, Gender and Personality – Overview

Some researchers (e.g., von Stumm et al., 2011) state that personality explains a significant amount of variance in creativity. Sternberg & Lubart (1995) also propose that personality is related to creativity. It has been shown that creative individuals are reserved, dominant, serious, sensitive, self-sufficient and ignore rules (Guastello, 2009). In his meta-analysis comparing scientists with non-scientists, creative scientists with less creative scientists, and artists with non-artists, Feist (1998) discovered that creative people are generally more open to experience, less conscientious and more introverted. It should also be noted that other studies have found a consistent link between openness to experience and creativity and a somewhat less clear relationship between other traits and creativity. Other authors emphasise the importance of knowledge (Hayes, 1989), talent and temperament (Averill & Nunley, 1992) in some forms of complex creativity. In addition to

investigating artistic and scientific creativity, many authors also researched everyday creativity, i.e., creativity in ordinary people who are not well known, as well as prominent artists, scientists or inventors. Lin et al. (2012) state that divergent thinking tests are most commonly used to measure creativity in such cases.

Interestingly, several studies (Lin et al., 2012; McCrae, 1987; von Stumm et al., 2011) have shown that, when examining the association of divergent thinking with broader personality dimensions, a consistent link with openness to experiences is also obtained. Much research in psychology focuses on creativity and the differences that distinguish creative individuals from non-creative individuals. Previous knowledge about creative individuals' personalities were focused on their characteristics, intellectual abilities, knowledge and opinion styles, motivation and status in society.

Lubart (1994) formed a constellation of five personality characteristics important for creativity: tolerance of uncertainty, openness to new experiences, willingness to take risks, the strength of self-confidence, and perseverance. Regarding the observed gender differences in creativity, historical research shows that there have been more creative men throughout history in the fields of art, literature, music, science and technology.

Modern research explains gender differences in creativity as a consequence of learning stereotypical gender roles (socialisation). With the emancipation of women, gender differences in creativity are decreasing to a greater extent than ever before. Furthermore, a recent meta-analysis by Taylor & Barbot (2021), showed that gender differences in creativity are inconsistent across different domains and tasks.

A second-order meta-analysis conducted by da Costa et al. (2015) showed that openness to experience, emotional intelligence, divergent thinking, intrinsic motivation, positive affect and androgyny, are all positively related to creativity. Moreover, their meta-analysis showed that creativity is, to a lesser degree, related to intelligence, extrinsic motivation, self-efficacy and the female gender.

The results of a study by Matud & Grande (2007), which examined gender differences in creative thinking, showed that women with university-level education

scored significantly higher on measures of creative thinking than women with only a primary or secondary level of education and that women with university-level education significantly surpass men in some aspects of creativity, such as verbal fluency.

3. Current Study: Objectives and Hypotheses

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the associations between openness to experience, creativity, creative behaviour, general creativity, support for creative behaviour from academics and support for creative behaviour by the environment, as well as the gender differences in these variables among students in private higher education. A further aim of this study was to investigate the contribution of gender and levels of support for creative behaviour from academics and the environment in predicting different measures of creativity. Additionally, this research examined the structure of the self-assessment of creative behaviour. We focused on students at private higher education institutions (college and universities) because this population has certain characteristics that distinguish it from public educational institutions. The number of students in the private higher education sector is growing year on year, and this trend is apparent in most parts of the world (Qureshi & Khawaja, 2021).

The demographic characteristics of students in private higher education institutions show some sociodemographic differences compared to those in the public sector. For example, the results of a study by Shury et al. (2016) showed that students in the private sector are on average older (60% are under 30) than those in the public sector (80% are under 30). Furthermore, half of the student population in the private sector are from ethnic minorities, while in the public sector, only a fifth students are from ethnic minorities.

To our knowledge, this research is the first to examine gender differences in creativity among students in the private higher education sector.

The HEXACO model's description of the "openness to experience" personality domain (which includes the creativity facet used in our study) involves elements such as enjoyment of the arts, the tendency to explore the new, the unknown and the unusual, and the tendency to look for new solutions to problems (Lee & Ashton,

2004, Ashton & Lee, 2008). Therefore, we predicted that openness to experience would be positively correlated with creativity, creative behaviour and general creativity. We are also bearing in mind that support from within the education system (primarily from teachers and academics), family members and society in general significantly influences the development of creativity. Therefore, we expected that the “openness to experience” domain and creative behaviour and general creativity would be positively related to support for creative behaviour from academics and the environment in both males and females.

Based on previous research, which shows a positive association between creative behaviour and general creativity (e.g. Ljubotina et al., 2015), we expected positive associations between these variables in both males and females. Furthermore, in line with a previous study by Ljubotina et al., (2015) we predicted positive associations between support for creativity from academics and support for creative behaviour from the environment in both genders.

4. Method

4.1 Participants

A sample of 370 students took part in the study. The students were randomly selected from private higher education institutions (colleges and universities) in Croatia. Students from different disciplines participated in the study (70% finance and law, 16% information technology, and 14% web design). The data was collected online during the spring of 2021. The questionnaire data of 24 participants was excluded from analysis due to missing data, so the final sample comprised 346 students ($M_{\text{age}} = 23.7$, $SD = 5.29$, range = 18 – 42; 54% female). Participation was on a voluntary basis and students gave their consent to take part in the study. They were asked to complete a battery of self-reporting measures anonymously and received no compensation for their participation.

4.2 Measures

4.2.1 Openness to experience and creativity

The openness to experience personality dimension was measured using 16 items from the 100-item Croatian version of HEXACO-PI-R (Ashton & Lee, 2007; Babarović &

Šverko, 2013). The Openness to Experience dimension contains the following subscales: Aesthetic Appreciation, Inquisitiveness, Creativity and Unconventionality. In addition, items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Scores for this personality dimension were calculated as sums of ratings on associated items divided by several items per scale.

This study measured creativity as personality traits by the creativity facet of the HEXACO Openness to Experience dimension. The creativity facet consists of four items (e.g. “I would enjoy creating a work of art, such as a novel, a song or a painting”; “People have often told me that I have a good imagination”).

4.2.2 Creative behaviour

Creative behaviour was measured by 29 items specifically created for the purposes of this research and was modelled on similar inventories of self-assessment of creative behaviour, such as the Biographical Inventory of Creative Behaviours (BICB; Batey, 2007). The questionnaire describes behaviours that constitute an effort to produce something new and original. Participants were asked how often they had ever engaged in a specific creative activity (e.g., write an essay, design a game, play musical scrap, make jewellery, create a comic book, paint the surface of a glass or wall, create a gift for someone, design a website) on a three-point scale (1 – never, 2 – once or only a few times, 3 – often).

4.2.3 General creativity

General creativity was measured by the creativity self-assessment questionnaire (Ljubotina et al., 2015). The questionnaire contains ten claims (e.g., “I often feel like I’m full of ideas”; “I consider myself to be a creative person”; “It’s easy for me to come up with more solutions to a problem”). Participants assessed the extent to which each statement applies to them on a four-point scale from 1 (it doesn’t apply to me at all) to 4 (it absolutely applies to me). The total score on this scale is calculated as sums of ratings on associated items divided by the number of items per scale.

4.2.4 Supporting creative behaviour by academics and environment

In questions about supporting and rewarding creative behaviour, participants assessed the degree of support from academics and the environment on a five-point scale from 1 (none) to 5 (regularly).

4.3 Data Analyses

In this study, two main analytic approaches were used. Firstly, zero-order correlations (Pearson's r) were used to quantify bivariate relationships between all scales and subscales. To assess the incremental contributions of gender in predicting scores on openness to experience, creativity, creative behaviour and general creativity, four hierarchical multiple regressions were performed with the scores for each of the scales and subscales as the criterion variables. The gender variable was entered in Step 2 of the multiple regressions. Given the wide age range of the participants (from 18 to 42), age was included as a control variable in Step 1 of the regression analyses. Significant differences in correlations between openness to experience, creativity, creative behaviour, general creativity, support creative behaviour from academics and environment across gender were tested via Fisher r -to- z transformation.

5. Results

5.1 Factor structure of inventory of creative behaviours

The appropriateness of the correlation matrix for factorisation was verified with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin coefficient, which was 0.825 and Bartlett's test of sphericity (approx. Chi-square = 1922.87, $df = 406$, $p < .001$), which indicates the adequacy of the correlation matrix analyses. Both Kaiser-Guttman criterion and Scree-test clearly yielded a three-factor solution, which accounted for 61.60% of the variance of creative behaviour. The three extracted components were rotated to varimax solutions. In this study, we investigated creativity behaviour as a unitary construct and, therefore, different forms of this behaviour are not the focus of our attention.

5.2 Descriptive statistics

The descriptive data from all the questionnaires (range, means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha, skewness, kurtosis), gender differences in mean scores and internal consistency values are shown in Table 1. All scales and subscales demonstrated an

adequate range and internal psychometric characteristics. Cronbach's alpha was from 0.74 (for creativity) to .86 (for self-assessment creative behaviour). Skewness and kurtosis for all scales were within the recommended values for normal distribution (between -2 to +2) (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2014). A one-way ANOVA was used to compare males and females in the mean level of openness to experience, creativity, self-assessment creative behaviour, self-assessment creativity and support for creative behaviour from academics and the environment. Mean values were higher on most of the scales and subscales in both males and females, indicating that participants perceive themselves as creative people. As shown in Table 1, Cohen's *d* indicated gender differences in openness to experience in favour of males ($d = 0.29$), which is in line with previous findings (e.g., Lee & Ashton, 2004).

Table 1: Descriptive data and internal consistency values in male ($n = 159$) and female ($n = 187$)

	Male	Female							
Variable	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>F</i>	<i>d</i>	Min	Max	α	<i>Sk</i>	<i>Ku</i>
Openness to experience	59.50(7.80)	56.91(10.06)	.01	0.29	26	79	.82	.05	-.17
Creativity	14.36(2.82)	14.38(3.74)	.33	0.01	4	20	.74	-.09	-.36
Creative behaviour	53.37(8.43)	56.08(9.68)	3.42*	0.30	37	85	.86	.32	-.27
General creativity	28.41(4.91)	29.54(5.24)	1.97	0.22	16	40	.81	.01	-.68
Support for creative behaviour from academics	3.27(1.06)	3.26(.90)	.00	0.01	1	5	-	.02	-.26
Support for creative behaviour by the environment	3.25(1.08)	3.26(.99)	.00	0.01	1	5	-	.04	-.48
Note: <i>M</i> = mean on item level, <i>SD</i> = standard deviation, <i>d</i> = Cohen's <i>d</i> index. According to Cohen's (1988) interpretation of effect size, effect sizes around 0.2 are considered small, 0.5 medium, and 0.8 large, <i>Sk</i> = skewness, <i>Ku</i> = kurtosis, α = Cronbach's alpha. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.									

It is important to note that significant gender differences in openness to experience ($d = 0.62$) and creativity ($d = 0.53$) were found in an earlier study conducted by Babarović & Šverko (2013) but in favour of females. On the other hand small but significant differences in the self-assessment of creative behaviour ($d = 0.30$) and creativity ($d = 0.22$) were found in favour of females. At the same time, there were no gender differences in creativity, support for creative behaviour from academics and support for creative behaviour from the environment.

The results of Fisher's r -to- z transformation (Table 2) showed that there were statistically significant differences in correlations across gender between the openness to experience domain and its creativity facet ($r_{\text{male}} = .62$, $r_{\text{female}} = .79$, $z = -3.181$, $p = 0.001$) and gender-moderated observed relationships between openness to experience and general creativity ($r_{\text{male}} = .43$, $r_{\text{female}} = .56$, $z = -1.589$, $p = 0.04$). Statistically significant differences in correlations across gender were found between creative behaviour and general creativity ($r_{\text{male}} = .39$, $r_{\text{female}} = .60$, $z = -2.585$, $p = 0.005$). Therefore, we present below the correlations from our regression analyses according to gender.

Table 2: Results of Fisher's r to z transformation in male ($n = 159$) and female ($n = 187$)

	Creativity	Creative behaviour	General creativity	Support for creative behaviour from academics	Support for creative behaviour from the environment
Openness to experience	-3.183**	-0.794	-1.589*	0.744	0.397
Creativity		-1.057	-1.239	0.837	0.300
Creative behaviour			-2.585**	-0.283	-1.025
General creativity				-0.464	-0.211
Support for creative behaviour from academics					0.127

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Fisher's z values are shown.

5.3 Correlations analyses

Bivariate correlations between scales and subscales for both male and female are shown in Table 3. Consistent with our predictions, openness to experience correlated positively with creativity, creative behaviour and with general creativity in both male and female. Correlations between the openness to experience domain and creativity facet were high in both males ($r = .62$, $p = .000$) and females ($r = .79$, $p = .000$). Strong correlations were also found between openness to experience and creative behaviour in both males ($r = .40$, $p = .000$) and females ($r = .47$, $p = .000$), as well as between openness to experience and general creativity in males ($r = .43$, $p = .000$) and females ($r = .56$, $p = .000$).

As predicted, the openness to experience domain and its creativity facet and creative behaviour and general creativity were positively related to support for creative

behaviour from the environment in both males and females. Furthermore, in line with expectations, creative behaviour was positively related to support for creative behaviour from academics but only in women ($r=.18, p<.05$). In males, creative behaviour is unrelated to academics' support for creative behaviour ($r=.15, p>.05$). General creativity shared moderate to significant positive correlations with the majority of the measured variables except with support for creative behaviour from academics in both genders.

Creative behaviour positively correlated to a lesser degree with support for creative behaviour from academics in females ($r=.18, p<0.05$), while in males, the correlation between self-assessed creative behaviour and support for creative behaviour from academics was insignificant ($r=.15, p=.263$). Contrary to expectations, openness to experience, creativity and general creativity were unrelated to the support for creative behaviour from academics in both males and females. Thus, Hypothesis two was partially supported. In line with our prediction, creative behaviour was positively related to general creativity in males ($r=.39, p<.001$) and females ($r=.60, p<.001$). As expected, support for creative behaviour from academics and the environment highly correlated in males ($r=.53, p<.001$) and females ($r=.52, p<.001$).

Table 3: Bivariate correlations (Person's r) among the measured variables in male ($n = 159$) and female ($n = 187$)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Openness to experience	-	.62***	.40***	.43***	.15	.29**
2. Creativity	.79***	-	.42***	.53***	.15	.30***
3. Creative behaviour	.47***	.51***	-	.39***	.15	.27**
4. General creativity	.56***	.62***	.60***	-	.07	.35***
5. Support for creative behaviour from academics	.07	.06	.18*	.12	-	.53***
6. Support for creative behaviour from the environment	.25**	.27**	.37***	.37***	.52***	-
Note: The results for males are above the diagonal and the results for females are below the diagonal. * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$.						

5.4 Regression analyses

Table 4 shows standardised beta coefficients (β) from the regression analyses, reflecting the unique contribution of gender, support for creative behaviour from academics and the environment in predicting of openness to experience, creativity, creative behaviour and general creativity.

Table 4: Regression of the creativity on gender (N= 346)

	Openness to experience			Creativity			Creative behaviour			General creativity		
	β	t	p	β	t	p	β	t	p	β	t	p
Step 1												
Age	.13	1.82	.07	.07	.89	.38	.10	1.35	.18	.00	.03	.98
R	.13			.07			.10			.00		
R^2	.03			.00			.01			.00		
Adj. R^2	.01			-.00			.00			-.01		
Step 2												
Age	.14*	2.04	.04	.08	1.12	.27	.11	1.58	.12	.02	.29	.77
Gender	-.12	-1.71	.09	.01	.12	.90	.14*	2.05	.04	.11	1.65	.10
Support academics	-.07	-.88	.38	-.10	-.115	.25	-.02	-.23	.82	-.11	-1.41	.16
Support environ.	.28	3.57	.00	.33	3.94	.00	.34	4.22	.00	.42	5.17	.00
R	.32			.30			.38			.39		
R^2	.10			.09			.14			.15		
Adj. R^2	.09**			.07**			.12			.13		
Note: Standardised regression coefficients (β). R = coefficient of determination. R^2 = squared multiple R . Adj. R^2 = Adjusted R Square. Bolded values of β indicate effects that are significant at $p < .001$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$												

Within the joint regression analysis, support for creative behaviour from the environment showed independent positive associations with all criterion variables (β) for openness to experience = .28, β for creativity = .33, β for creative behaviour = .34, and β for general creativity = .42, all $p < .001$. On the other hand, gender showed positive associations in terms of beta weights only with creative behaviour (β = .14, p = .04).

Gender, support for creative behaviour from academics and support for creative behaviour from the environment together accounted for 9% of the variance in openness to experience, 7% of the variance in creativity, 12% of the variance in creative behaviour and 13% of the variance in general creativity (Table 4).

6. Discussion

The major aim of this study was to investigate the associations between openness to experience, creativity, creative behaviour, general creativity, support for creative behaviour from academics and support for creative behaviour by the environment, as well as gender differences in these variables among students in private higher education. Furthermore, we investigated the contribution of gender, support for creative behaviour from academics and the environment in predicting different

measures of creativity. Finally, we checked the psychometric characteristics of the inventory of creative behaviours constructed for the purposes of this research.

According to our knowledge and the available literature, creativity among students in private higher education institutions had not been examined previously. In addition, no research had previously been performed on gender differences in levels of creativity of students at private higher education institutions. However, in the last two decades, the number of studies on students at private higher education institutions has grown. In these studies, however, psychological constructs, such as students' motives, satisfaction, expectations and perceptions are commonly examined (e.g., Barnes, 2007; Min et al., 2012).

Therefore, this research serves as an incentive to conduct further studies involving different psychological constructs on separate populations of students in order to determine the existence of differences between them. Generally, the results of the study confirmed most of our hypotheses and demonstrated the reliability and accurate psychometric characteristics of our measurements of creative behaviour.

Overall, gender, support for creative behaviour from academics and support for creative behaviour from the environment explained 9% of the variance in openness to experience, 7% of the variance in creativity, 12% of the variance in creative behaviour and 13% of the variance in general creativity.

As expected, in both genders, openness to experience correlated positively with creativity, creative behaviour and general creativity, which is consistent with the theoretical assumptions that openness to experience reflects the need for the new, the unknown and the unconventional and includes intellectual curiosity, imagination, originality, creativity and rebelliousness (Lee & Ashton, 2004). Furthermore, these results are consistent with previous studies demonstrating that openness to experience consistently predicts creativity (e.g., Silvia et al., 2011; Silvia et al., 2007; Oleynick et al., 2017).

Consistent with our predictions, openness to experience, creativity, as well as creative behaviour and general creativity, were positively related to support for creative

behaviour from the environment in both genders, which is in line with previous findings (Ljubotina et al., 2015).

The regression analyses also showed that environmental support is a strong positive predictor of openness to experience, creativity, creative behaviour and general creativity, while gender only significantly predicts creative behaviour. These results are similar to Ljubotina et al.'s. (2015) findings, which also confirmed that environment support positively predicts different forms of creative behaviour (e.g., making original objects, art and technical creations, creations in the field of music and games) and general creativity to a significant extent. These findings emphasise the importance of environmental support in developing and expressing creativity and show that creativity is a construct that significantly depends on environmental factors. Therefore, it will be crucial for future research to examine which environmental factors in particular affect an individual's creativity (e.g., family, friends, the wider social environment, material opportunities, leisure activities, availability of information, leisure time, etc.).

Contrary to expectations, there was no significant association between support for creative behaviour offered by academics and students' openness to experience, creativity, creative behaviour and general creativity, which may be related to the age of the student population (adults), who have developed their creative potential. Another reason may be the fact that the research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, so a large proportion of first-year students had less contact with academics. Only in females, creative behaviour positively correlated to a lesser degree with support for creative behaviour from academics ($r = .18, p < .05$), indicating that there are gender differences in the perception of support and that creativity in females is more influenced by environmental factors, including support from academics. After all, the association between creative behaviour and environmental support is greater in women ($r = .37, p < .001$) than in men ($r = .27, p < .01$), although the difference in these correlations is not statistically significant.

With respect to the relationship between gender and creativity, females in the current study scored significantly higher than males on the self-assessed measurement of

creative behaviour, replicating findings from previous studies of students and adults from the community (e.g., Lee & Ashton, 2004). However, other studies show that males achieve higher results on different measures of creativity and creative behaviour (e.g., Abraham, 2015; Babarović & Šverko, 2013; Chan, 2005; He & Wong, 2021; Kaufman, 2006). In summary, the results from the current work provide further evidence that the different measures of creativity are distinct yet partially overlapping components of a coherent construct of creativity.

In general, relationships between creativity and creative behaviour and creativity scores observed in the current study were consistent with ideas about personality traits associated with creativity and are in line with previously published findings regarding associations between the two (von Stumm et al., 2011).

6.1 Limitation and future direction

Our findings must be considered in the light of certain limitations. Firstly, a notable limitation concerns our exclusive reliance on self-reporting measures, which may have inflated observed associations between openness to creativity domains, creativity facet and creative behaviour, as well as general creativity scores. Secondly, participants were recruited online, and the study sample consisted of the student population. Thirdly, students were randomly selected with different majors (70% finance and law, 16% information technology and 14% web design) from private higher education institutions (colleges and universities) and differ in terms of their individual preferences, motivation and areas of study.

Therefore, future research on creativity should be conducted on a homogeneous student population from different fields, such as architecture, painting, mathematics, choreography and acting, and compare them with levels of creativity in students from other fields of study. In addition, future studies should compare the creativity of students in the public and private sectors.

Although our findings provide preliminary support for further research on creativity in the private education sector, they cannot be generalised to other populations. The present study used short, self-assessed measures of creativity, which could have been affected by the participants' desire to present themselves in a favourable light.

Therefore, future research should use other measures of creativity, such as divergent thinking tests and creative achievement questionnaires, and compare them with other external outcomes, such as academic achievement.

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STUDY-LIFE BALANCE AND MATURE STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THE CASE OF OXFORD BUSINESS COLLEGE, UNITED KINGDOM

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Abstract

A number of case studies have brought to light the challenges and barriers mature students face as they embark on a course of study. Yet there is no agreed definition of the term “mature student”. The first part of this paper presents several definitions of the term “mature student” found in the contemporary literature. The two prevailing criteria are the typical constraints that mature students face while studying and student age. A survey questionnaire was distributed electronically to 64 mature students at Oxford Business College in August 2021. Our research found that the most concerning issue for the mature students who took part in the survey during Covid-19 was reconciling financial obligations associated with education and family responsibilities, which may be the consequence of increased job insecurity during the pandemic. However, only one-third of the students in our study said they had significant difficulties in balancing study with other commitments and slightly more than one-fifth had felt extreme or significant amounts of stress. Most students had succeeded in finding the right balance, albeit with minor difficulties. As we start to move beyond the pandemic, almost two-thirds of the students said they would prefer lessons to be delivered online in the future, while only a minority of them prefer traditional classroom-based lessons (on-campus). This is perhaps no surprise given the substantial time-saving advantages of online learning, the scarcest resource for mature students.

Keywords: Mature Students, Adults Learning, Part-Time Learning, Study-Life Balance, High Education, Educational Tools

1. Introduction

For a long time, study-life balance for mature students has been one of the most challenging issues in higher education, and even more so during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, technological advancements almost unthinkable 20 years ago have greatly facilitated access to higher education for mature students. Although distance learning tools in higher education have brought specific challenges, they have also offered significant time savings, which is the most common argument made by mature students in favour of online learning.

The reasons for this paper are twofold. Firstly, as many countries, including the UK, are experiencing labour and skills shortages among their adult populations, increasing access to higher education for mature students has become a global priority (Amorim, 2018). On the one hand, technological advances (automation of jobs), disruptions to traditional business models and the creation of entirely new industries have created a gap between the demand for labour and the supply of new skills. For example, Sibiet et al. (2021) highlight the issue of skills shortages, particularly in technical areas, and the lack of responsiveness of the current system to labour market demand in the United Kingdom. They add that the economic impact of the pandemic could also lead to a shift in the demand for different types of skills. On the other hand, the use of distance learning tools in higher education has gained momentum compared to traditional classroom teaching, making those skills and competencies in short supply more desirable than ever before. This is particularly true in the context of Covid-19. However, the rapid expansion of the use of distance learning tools in higher education does not necessarily herald the demise of traditional classroom teaching, nor the triumph of distance learning over more conventional teaching methods. Rather, there is a growing preference for 'hybrid' learning models in specific learning environments, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The second reason for this paper is the relatively high number of mature students among the UK population and their significance to the economy. In particular, the inclusion of mature students in higher education contributes to social mobility, diversity and life-long learning and has substantial socio-economic benefits, such as

social capital (Putnam, 1995) and productivity. For example, it has been estimated that the skills gap could cost the UK economy £90bn by 2024.¹

The number of enrolments at UK universities is significant. As Table 1 shows, in the 2019/20 academic year there were around 271,970 mature undergraduate students at UK universities, comprising 37.7% of all undergraduate entrants. In addition, there were 208,170 mature postgraduate entrants in 2019/20 – 49.8% of all postgraduate entrants. Mature students are more likely to study part time.

Table 1: Mature entrants at UK universities 2019/20

	Undergraduates (age 21+)		Postgraduates (age 25+)	
	Number	%	Number	%
Full time	162,710	27.4%	107,350	35.6%
Part time	109,260	86.1%	100,820	86.5%
All	271,970	37.7%	208,170	49.8%

Source: Who's studying in HE?, HESA.

Table 2 summarises the student population by level, mode of study and age group of first-year entrants at UK universities in 2019/20.

Table 2: Age group of first-year entrants at UK universities 2019/20

	Undergraduates (age 21+)		Postgraduates (age 25+)	
	Number	%	Number	%
Full time				
20 and under	432,120	72.6%	3,895	1.3%
21-24 years	74,825	12.6%	190,015	63.1%
25-29 years	30,905	5.2%	63,710	21.1%
30 years and over	56,980	9.6%	43,640	14.5%
Age unknown	20	0.0%	5	0.0%
Total full time	594,850	100.0%	301,265	100.0%
Part time				
20 and under	17,575	13.9%	135	0.1%
21-24 years	21,245	16.7%	15,665	13.4%
25-29 years	23,330	18.4%	24,575	21.1%
30 years and over	64,685	51.0%	76,245	65.4%
Age unknown	50	0.0%	50	0.0%
Total part time	126,885	100.0%	116,670	100.0%

Source: Who's studying in HE?, HESA.

Overall, there were 241,550 students aged 30 or older across all modes and levels in 2019/20. 271,970 undergraduates were aged 21 or older, and 175,900 were aged 25 or older. There were 208,170 postgraduates aged 25 or older and 119,885 aged 30 or

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https://www.millionplus.ac.uk/documents/Forgotten_learners_building_a_system_that_works_for_mature_students.pdf

older. As mature students are more likely to study part-time, part-time students are also more likely to be older.

After examining the definition of the term “mature student”, we will turn to how mature students manage study-life balance. One of the most prominent characteristics of mature students is that they typically do not have as much time at their disposal to study compared to traditional (younger) students. As a result they balance study with other responsibilities, such as their job and career and parenting and family time, among other personal commitments. Today, educational technology enables mature students to more successfully balance study with these other commitments, at least to some degree in terms of time saving. We would therefore expect mature students to prefer distance learning over traditional classroom teaching post-Covid-19.

2. Definition of “Mature Student”

There is no agreed definition of the term “mature student” in the literature.² According to Fragoso et al. (2013), a mature student is a complex and contested term used differently according to researchers’ specific objectives. However, two main distinguishing criteria emerge from a review of the literature. The first relates to the different constraints that mature students face while studying. In this respect, Fragoso et al. (2013) note that, in general, mature students are characterised as needing to overcome a series of constraints in order to participate in education, representing barriers that become more noticeable when they transition to higher education. The second criterion relates to the age of the students, although there is again no agreement in the literature on the age at which somebody is regarded as a mature student. Those who commence studies over the age of 21 are sometimes considered mature students, whereas others confine the category to those embarking on HE over the age of 23 (official Portuguese definition) or even 25 (the official definition in Spain) (Fragoso et al., 2013). McCune et al. (2010) distinguish between three age groups: “traditional” age students (those aged under 21 at the start of their course), younger “mature” students (aged 21-30) and older “mature” students (aged 31 or

² Instead of the expression *mature student*, the expression *adult student* is sometimes used interchangeably. The other expression *non-traditional student* has a broader meaning. According to (Fragoso et al., 2013), the term non-traditional student is useful to describe different groups of students that are in some way underrepresented in higher education and includes disabled, mature, female, first-generation and working-class students, or students from specific ethnic groups who do not fit into “traditional” categories.

over). Western et al. (1998) note that an age threshold of 25 years is commonly used to distinguish between recent school leavers and mature-aged students in research reports. This definition is based on significant differences in life circumstances, such as marital status, dependent children and home ownership.

Most of the dictionary definitions refer solely to the age criterion. For example, the Collins Dictionary defines a “mature student”, albeit imprecisely, as one who begins their studies at university or college a number of years after leaving school, so they are older than most of the people they are studying with.³ Yet another definition from the same dictionary defines a “mature student” as one who has passed the usual age for formal education. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines the term as a student at a college or university who starts studying there at a later age than usual.⁴ The Cambridge Dictionary uses a similar definition.⁵ Other sources are more precise in terms of the age criterion. For example, the Macmillan Dictionary defines a mature student as someone who begins studying at college or university after the age of 25.⁶

The Universities and Colleges Applications Service (UCAS) gives a more comprehensive definition of the term “mature student” and uses both criteria.⁷ The term “mature student” refers to anyone going to college or university after some time out of full-time education (Qureshi, Khawaja, and Zia 2020). Typically, this will include students over the age of 21 at the start of their undergraduate studies, or over 25 years of age at the start of their postgraduate studies and who often fit their studies around work and/or care responsibilities.

³ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/mature-student> (Accessed: 10 August 2021).

⁴ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mature%20student> (Accessed: 10 August 2021).

⁵ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mature-student> (Accessed: 10 August 2021).

⁶ <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/mature-student> (Accessed: 10 August 2021).

⁷ <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/mature-undergraduate-students> (Accessed: 10 August 2021).

For the purposes of our study, a “mature student” is defined as a student of 21 years of age or over at the beginning of their undergraduate studies, or 24 years of age or over at the beginning of their postgraduate studies.

The remainder of this paper is divided into four further sections. In the following section, we conduct a review of the literature on study-life balance and mature students. We then outline the methodology used in our study before discussing the results of the research. Finally, we draw some important conclusions and identify the practical implications of our research. Here, we also discuss the limitations of the study and scope for further inquiry.

3. Literature Review

Most of the literature on mature students is descriptive and exploratory research that aims to study the experiences of mature students in an open-ended manner (Gongadze et al., 2021). Several reports and studies have explored the barriers and challenges mature students face and how they balance study with other commitments. However, the concept of “study-life balance” is not only applicable to mature students: a review of the existing literature reveals that it is a relatively common term for all students, regardless of their age or student status.

Bowl’s (2001) study portrays the non-traditional student as a frustrated participant in an unresponsive institutional context and questions the tendency to problematise students from non-traditional backgrounds rather than the educational institutions responsible for their academic progress. Lowe & Gayle (2007) studied full-time and part-time students’ work/life/study balance at a Scottish further education college. The majority of the students involved in the research combined study with work and/or family commitments. The authors concluded that the students’ success in balancing study with work and family life was influenced by their coping strategies and the nature and quality of the support they received from both family and employers. Ang (2008) investigated how undergraduate students combine full-time study with part-time work and social activities to achieve a balanced life. The author found that most students had no formal tools to manage part-time work, study and social activities; instead, students would focus on either work or study at any given time. This strategy often led to time pressures and time-related stress.

Tones et al.'s (2009) study examined mature students' perceptions of university support services and barriers to study. They concluded that a greater understanding of mature students' academic and social integration strategies leading to academic success is a prerequisite to understanding how their life experiences influence their experience of learning at university and whether or not they complete their degrees. McCune et al. (2010) note that, compared to younger students, mature students are likely to have had more varied and fragmented learning careers, shaping their relationship with higher education, and are more likely to have work and family commitments, which may explain their reasons for studying in particular ways. In addition, the authors found that older students had different reasons for wanting to go to university and seemed to have a particularly rich understanding of the broader meaning and relevance of their studies. Cliplef (2015) report that, owing to their already busy lives, mature students often experience barriers to returning to education that are not encountered by traditional, younger students. In addition, mature students must be encouraged to understand their unique value and see education as an investment in order to stay motivated and overcome any barriers to success. Another study by van Rhijn et al. (2016) demonstrates that mature students can struggle to access much-needed resources, support, essential services and flexible study options. They suggest that there are certain steps to be taken to better support mature students in three key areas: changes to institutional policies and practices, the creation of social support networks and better access to financial support. Some researchers have analysed satisfaction levels in virtual learning environments (e.g., Qureshi et al., 2020). Herrador-Alcaide et al. (2019) found that students with positive perceptions of their generic skills are also satisfied with the learning process and the virtual learning environment. According to Hubble & Bolton (2021), mature students enter higher education with a greater variety of qualifications than younger students, and providers are often more flexible regarding the admission criteria. In addition, these students often enter higher education for many different reasons, not solely for career purposes.

4. Research Design and Methods

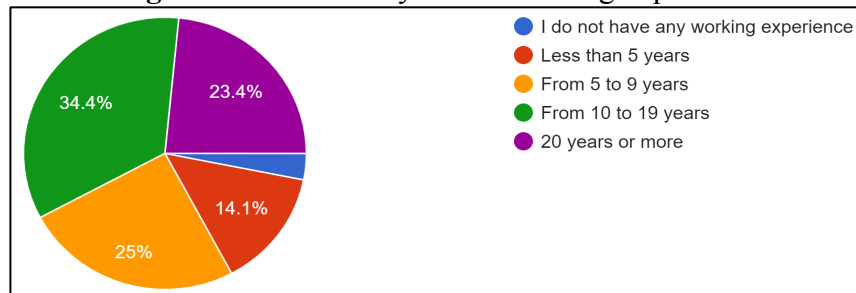
A survey questionnaire was distributed electronically to 64 mature students at Oxford Business College in August 2021. The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions and covered demographic characteristics and students' life-study balance experiences. Students taking part in the study needed to meet the definition of a mature student. In the questionnaire, a mature student was defined as a student of 21 years of age or over at the start of their undergraduate studies or 24 years of age or over at the start of their postgraduate studies. All participants were informed about the nature of the study and participated voluntarily. The students were asked about their experience of studying during the Covid-19 pandemic, emphasising study-life balance, including the challenges and barriers they had faced. Additionally, one part of the questionnaire referred to the students' learning preference during the Covid-19 pandemic, i.e., classroom teaching, distance learning or a combination of both (hybrid model).

The data was analysed using descriptive statistics and the results were compared to findings from similar existing studies and cases that have explored the study-life-work balance of mature students. Our results are displayed graphically to highlight specific patterns. Firstly, we describe the general demographic characteristics of the participants, after which we explore the causalities in order to substantiate our conclusions later on.

In this research, we used sample $N = 64$. With a relatively small sample size, the research questions could be addressed within a reasonable amount of time. The further related point is that obtaining ethical and institutional approval for smaller studies is less time-consuming compared to more extensive studies.

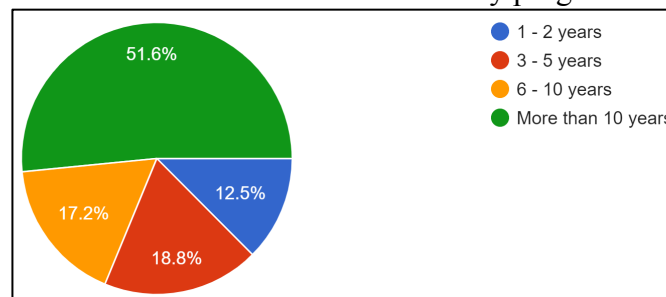
62.5% of the students taking part in our study were female. The ages of the participants ranged from 21 to over 60 (only one student). 67.2% were in full-time employment, 15.6% in part-time work and 6.3% were self-employed at the time of our study. The remaining participants were assigned to the category "other status" (e.g., maternity leave, housewife, jobseeker). More than half of the respondents (57.8%) had more than ten years' work experience; only 3.1% of the respondents had no work experience at all (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of years of working experience



Slightly more than half of the respondents (51.6%) had been out of full-time education for more than ten years before enrolling in their current programme of study and 17.2% between 6 and 10 years (Figure 2). Over ten years is a substantial amount of time that may pose significant challenges for mature students transitioning to college or university.

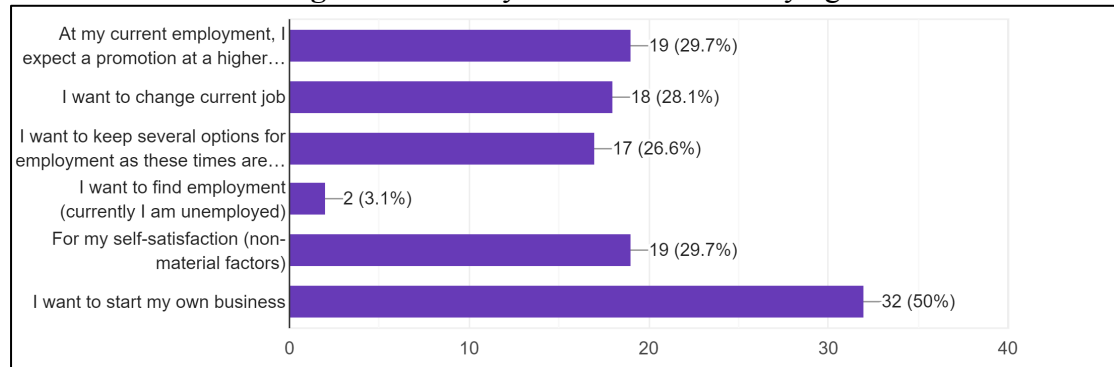
Figure 2: Period of absence from full-time education before enrolment in the current study programme



We asked students about their primary motivations for studying (they could select more than one answer). Interestingly, the most frequent answer was a desire to start their own business venture, 50% (Figure 3). The other answers with the same frequencies (29.7%) included promotion to a higher position at work or a higher salary and self-satisfaction (non-material reasons). Less common reasons were to find another job (28.1%) or to “keep their options open” in uncertain times caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (26.6%). Only 3.1% were motivated to study in order to find a job. The results correspond to Butcher’s (2020) research, which revealed that part-time students have many different reasons for studying, with many individuals citing a combination of personal and professional motivations. For part-time adult learners thinking predominantly in vocational terms, it is less about getting a job (although

that is true for some) and more about gaining a promotion, earning more money or enhanced job security.

Figure 3: Primary motivations for studying

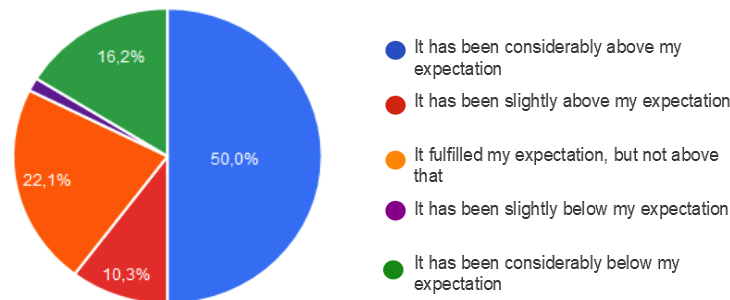


5. Results and Discussion

The main objective of our research was to explore the life-study balance of mature students during the Covid-19 pandemic. During the study, we found that the most concerning issue (extremely or very concerned) for the respondents related to meeting the financial obligations of higher education (25%). Although student finance is usually one of the most pressing financial issues people face, it has been particularly poignant during Covid-19, as many jobs have been under threat during the pandemic. The second most significant concern was fulfilling family responsibilities, such as childcare or care for other family members (20.3% of respondents), which is common in other studies too. Finally, the less concerning issues were an adaptation to the class schedule (14.1%), keeping in touch with fellow students (15.6%), getting all the required information from the college's support staff (17.2%) and receiving support from family and friends (18.8%).

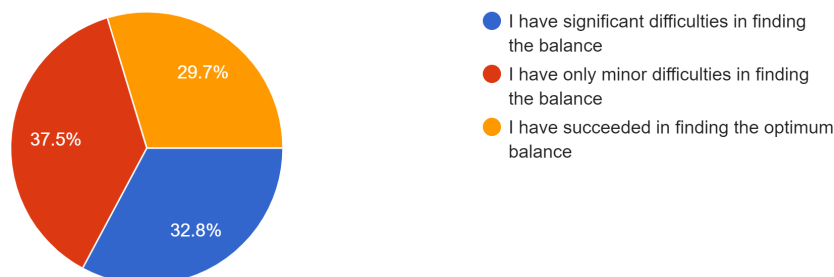
The students were also asked to describe their experience of studying during the Covid-19 pandemic (Figure 4). The majority agreed that their experience had been considerably or slightly above their expectations (60.9%). Only 17.2% of students responded that their study experience had fallen below their expectations (or considerably so).

Figure 4: Experience of studying in the period of the Covid-19 pandemic

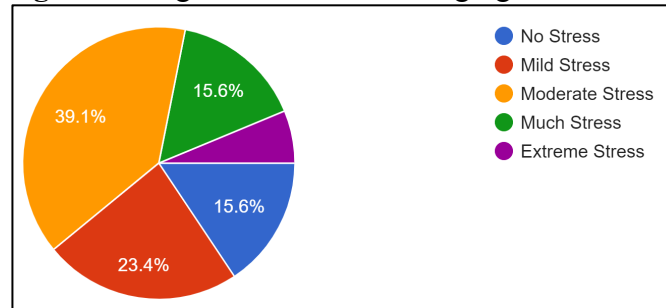


In response to the question of how they managed find the right balance between study and other commitments (“life activities”) during the pandemic, one-third had experienced significant difficulties in achieving a balance (32.8%). On the other hand, more than two-thirds of students had been able to find the optimum balance between the two or had only minor difficulty in doing so.

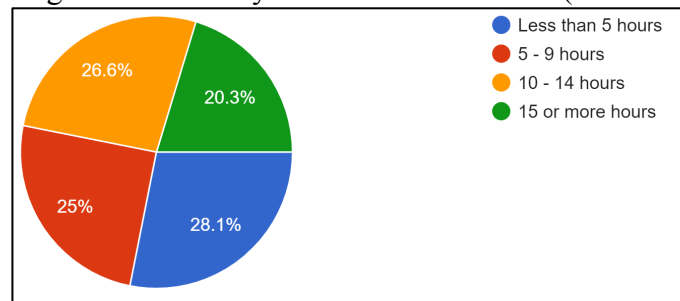
Figure 5: Balance between studying versus other life activities during the period of studying in the Covid-19 pandemic



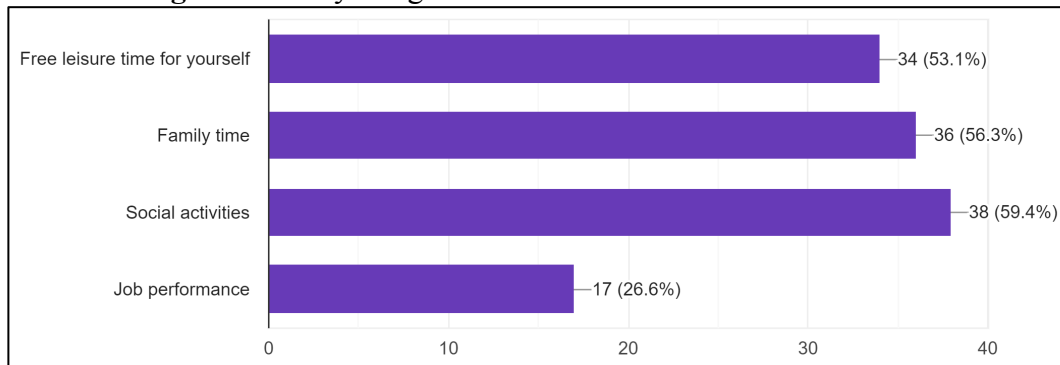
Related to life/study balance is the degree of stress in managing other life activities while studying (such as a job, other studies, family, social activities/other) (Figure 6). Slightly more than one-fifth of students (21.9%) reported feeling either a lot or extreme amounts of stress, whereas 39.1% of respondents had experienced only “moderate” amounts of stress. Thus, 61% of the respondents had experienced moderate or more than moderate levels of stress.

Figure 6: Degree of stress in managing life activities

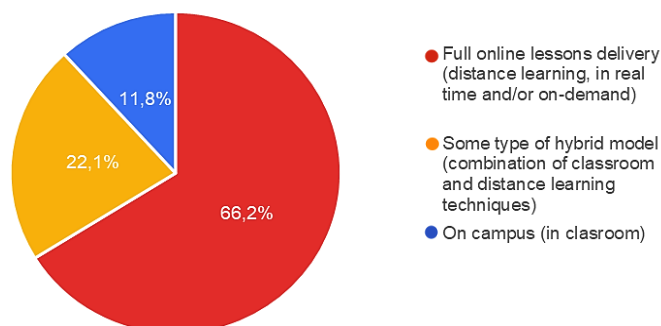
Levels of stress are linked to study workload. For example, only slightly more than one-fifth of participants in our study (20.3%) spent 15 hours or more a week on study-related activities (listening to lectures and self-study). In contrast, the highest proportion of students (28.1%) spent less than five hours a week studying. This can contribute to stress, as it can make it more difficult to keep on top of study-related responsibilities. However, almost the same number of students had experienced difficulties in finding a good study-life balance.

Figure 7: Average hours of study activities in one week (one hour = 60 minutes)

Making the transition to college or university often entails sacrifices in other areas of life. As expected, the most frequent responses were social activities, family time and free leisure time, while studying only had a minor impact on job performance. Thus, while students are likely to sacrifice all other areas of life, job security takes priority, even during study time.

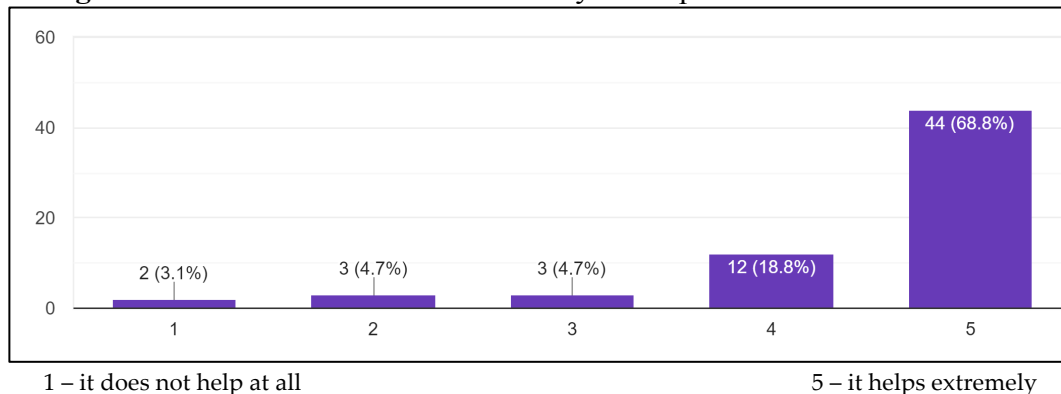
Figure 8: Study obligation vs. Sacrifice of other life activities

The participants were also asked about the mode of lesson delivery they would prefer once the pandemic is over (Figure 9). Interestingly, almost two-thirds would prefer lessons to continue exclusively online, i.e., distance learning (65.6%), while only a minority (12.5%) would like to return to traditional classroom-based lessons (on-campus). The rest of the respondents would like to see some sort of blended learning approach. These responses also suggest that the students who took part in our study experienced a relatively high quality of lesson delivery online during the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, online classes are more conducive to a better study-life balance for mature students who may also have many other, non-study commitments (e.g., work, family). For example, online learning offers substantial time-saving advantages – a scarce resource for most mature students. Thus, it seems that the time-saving benefits of distance learning outweigh the advantages of traditional classroom teaching, at least for mature students.

Figure 9: Preference for lessons delivery in the post-Covid-19 environment

There was a strong consensus among respondents that modern technology helps mature students achieve their academic outcomes compared to traditional classroom-based lessons (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Preference for lessons delivery in the post-Covid-19 environment



The students were also asked about the most significant barrier or challenge facing them in today's education system. The majority of respondents identified a lack of time, as studying is a time-consuming activity. The overwhelming preference for online learning therefore comes as no surprise. However, one of the most intriguing responses about the challenges of studying as a mature student, which enriches our discussion and may also be representative of other responses, was the following:

It's just an observation, and it's strictly personal, I can't generalise, I can say as a parent and at the age of over 40 that I no longer have the enthusiasm and passion for study, which I had 20 years ago, and I don't remember so easily ... I have to reread the information a few times, but I can say that this could be my challenge as a mature student.

6. Conclusions

The subject of study-life balance and mature students has been intriguing researchers in higher education for a long time now, and the Covid-19 pandemic has brought the issue to the forefront. Our study aimed to contribute to a better understanding of the challenges and barriers mature students face in general and during the Covid-19 pandemic in particular, focusing on the issue of study-life balance. Several studies and cases have exposed challenges and barriers mature students encounter while studying. However, the population of mature students is far from homogenous, nor is there a common definition of the term “mature student”. However, the two prevailing criteria, which informed our study, are the constraints that mature students most commonly face and student age.

In our study, a survey questionnaire was distributed electronically to 64 mature students at Oxford Business College during August 2021. The research found that one-third of respondents had significant difficulties finding the right balance between study and other commitments. In addition, 61% of respondents had experienced moderate amounts of stress at some time. However, the majority of mature students (two-thirds) had been able to find the right balance, albeit with minor difficulties. Significantly, almost two-thirds of the mature students who participated in our study would prefer online learning to continue post-pandemic, while only a minority prefer traditional classroom lessons (on-campus). This may come as no surprise in view of the fact that online learning saves students a lot of time – the scarcest resource for mature students.

There are some practical implications of our study, which may help universities and colleges develop more suitable study environments for mature students. The research suggests that the value of distance learning tools over traditional classroom-based teaching post-Covid-19 will come from saved time. Implicitly, we may assume that younger students prefer traditional classroom teaching over online learning environments as they generally tend to have fewer commitments outside of college compared to mature students.

However, our research has certain limitations: the results are not necessarily generalisable to the entire mature student population. This is because students' experiences may vary from one university or college to the next and the same results may not be replicated in different institutional settings. Therefore, a deeper investigation of this topic could therefore be conducted using a broader sample of students studying at different institutions to understand better the factors affecting mature students' study-life balance, particularly as we start to move beyond the Covid-19 pandemic.

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Authors' Profiles

Dr Fayyaz Hussain Qureshi



Fayyaz Hussain Qureshi is one of the emerging academic experts in student satisfaction. He is a Director of Research and Quality Assurance at Oxford Business College.

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He is a founder of the Centre of Applied Research and Entrepreneurship (CARE) at Oxford Business College and has been its Director since 2020. The CARE undertakes a range of activities from research to consultancy. It provides enterprise expertise in solving business problems, sustainability and business growth strategy. In addition to CARE, he established Oxford Business Research and Innovation Network – OxBRAIN – in 2021. The primary purpose of the OxBRAIN is to provide a stimulating and congenial environment for research, collaboration and exchange of research ideas both within the college and across the world. He is the Chair of the Research Committee, Research Ethics Panel and Publication Panel.

In addition to his doctorate in marketing from the UK, Fayyaz completed two bachelor degrees – BSc in pure sciences and BA in social sciences – from the University of Punjab, Pakistan and an MA in English Literature from the same university. While studying Advanced Diploma in the English Language at the National Institute of Modern Languages (NIML) Islamabad, now National University of Modern Languages (NUML), he wrote his first research paper on “Varieties of English Language”. After that, he pursued an MBA in Marketing and an MBA in Finance. He also completed MSc in Internet Technologies from Luton University. He has also studied at Cranfield University, Gloucestershire University, Edge Hill University, University of Chester and Gothenburg University Sweden, where he studied at levels 7 and 8. He started his academic career as a business lecturer in 2001 in the UK.

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Tayyaba is a research associate and business and management lecturer at Oxford Business College. Tayyaba is pursuing her PhD in Consumer Behaviour. Before that, she obtained her masters in Marketing (MSc) from Hertfordshire University in 2017. In addition, she completed the Extended Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership. She is a highly competent, efficient, motivated and enthusiastic person. She has more than ten years of experience in the UK retail industry, UK higher education and student recruitment Sector. She has been working at Amazon in a managerial position since 2015.

She considers teaching a noble profession and tries her level best to make teaching easy and exciting for her students. She strongly believes in student satisfaction and endeavours to meet a diverse range of students' academic needs. She has recently published a few research papers and participated in the International Conference in 2021.

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He is CFA Chartholder and Regular Member with CFA Institute and an Investment Adviser and has a Broker Licence granted by the Croatian Financial Services Supervisory Agency. In 2014 he was appointed a Court Expert Witness on finance and accounting matters. He regularly holds workshops on financial analysis, company valuations and cost-benefit analysis. He also served as the editor of the Croatian translation of the textbook *Fundamentals of Financial Management* written by Van-Horne and Wachowicz. He has published more than ten research papers.

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She is a regular guest at international conferences and congresses, where she gladly gives lectures in two foreign languages. To this day, she has advised more than 100

different companies on developing their brands, strengthening their market position in terms of strategy, and repositioning themselves in the market. She has also published more than 30 scientific and professional papers on marketing and neuromarketing, peer-reviewed at both national and international levels. She worked for the Government of the Republic of Croatia (TIPA) where she was responsible for marketing development at the national level and is the author and co-author of several marketing projects supported by the Croatian Government and of the marketing strategy of various towns and municipalities. She was educated in Croatia, Europe and the USA. She is the author of the first book on neuromarketing published in Croatia under the title “Marketinška oružarnica”. She has won numerous awards and recognitions, and her passion for marketing and science has led her to a doctorate in Economic Science with a specialisation in neuromarketing. She graduated from a postgraduate doctoral course in socio-economic sciences. She obtained the title: Doctor of Economic Sciences (PhD), which led her to hold the academic rank of Docent (Associate Professor) at Herzegovina University. She is also a permanent expert witness for marketing and intellectual property rights cases at the County Court in Zagreb and a much-quoted interlocutor in the media.

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