

## **Determining Levels of Satisfaction with Online Learning at Private Higher Education in London**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose is to investigate and understand the satisfaction levels of mature undergraduate students engaging in online learning within the context of private higher education institutions in London. As the landscape of higher education evolves, with an increasing reliance on online platforms, it is crucial to explore how this mode of education aligns with the unique needs and expectations of mature learners pursuing undergraduate degrees. The study employs a structured survey instrument to collect data on various dimensions of satisfaction, aiming to provide valuable insights into the factors influencing mature undergraduate students' experiences in online learning.

The research methodology involves a survey administered to a diverse sample of mature undergraduate students in private higher education institutions offering online programmes. The survey encompasses questions about overall satisfaction, determinants of satisfaction, interactivity engagement, support services, technical training and demographic variations.

Data analysis involves applying statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics, to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the satisfaction levels of mature undergraduate students with online learning.

The anticipated findings of this research have the potential to inform private higher education institutions, educators, and policymakers about the specific areas of online learning that contribute most significantly to mature undergraduate student satisfaction. Identifying strengths and areas for improvement will enable institutions to tailor their online learning environments to meet this demographic's needs better. Ultimately, the research aims to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse surrounding enhancing online education experiences for mature undergraduate students in the private higher education sector.

**Keywords:** Mature Undergraduate Students, Online Learning, Student Satisfaction, Private Higher Education

## **Introduction**

Higher education institutions can be broadly classified into two main categories based on ownership and funding sources, which are public and private (Qureshi and Khawaja, 2021). A public higher education institution is an institution of tertiary or post-secondary education owned, funded, and operated by government entities, typically at the state or national level. These institutions play a crucial role in providing accessible and affordable education to the public, contributing to developing a well-educated and skilled workforce.

A private higher education institution is an institution of tertiary or post-secondary education owned, operated and funded by private entities rather than government entities. These institutions are typically independent and may include non-profit organisations, for-profit corporations, religious organisations, or other private entities. Private higher education institutions contribute to the educational landscape's diversity, offering various academic programmes.

The most straightforward understanding of a private higher education institution is that of an organisation with private ownership and funding, while a public higher education Institution is an organisation with state ownership and funding (Qureshi and Khawaja, 2021, Qureshi,2023).

The growth of private higher education has been a significant trend worldwide over the past few decades (Khawaja, Sokić and Qureshi, 2022). The recent rapid growth of private higher education was driven by various factors, such as the trend of capitalism and economic policies of liberalisation, marketisation and privatisation, which have allowed Private Higher Education (PrHE) to proliferate in many countries of the world, particularly since the 1990s (Qureshi and Khawaja, 2021). Hence, the sector is well-established in many countries; in some countries, it is more dominant than public higher education (Goodman and Yonezawa, 2007), such as in Brazil and Japan, and presently accounts for a third of global enrolment (Levy, 2018). Thus, more than 30% of the global population of higher education students is enrolled in this sector (Altbach et al., 2009; Levy, 2018).

The expansion of the private HE sector in the UK is the result of the broader emerging drive of privatisation in HE systems (Johnstone and Marcucci 2010) and is also part of a global trend (Middlehurst and Fielden, 2014).

An indicator of this expansion in the UK is the number of private HEIs with degree-awarding powers, which grew from only one private university (University of Buckingham) in 1983 to more than ten in less than a decade (Qureshi and Sarwar, 2021).

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are classified as either public or private (Qureshi and Khawaja, 2021). The UK's higher education system comprises public and private institutions, and this binary classification is quite challenging to define and distinguish each (Levin, 2005) because of a lack of conceptual clarity (Marginson, 2007). Levy (2012) describes *private higher education institutes* as those defined by national authorities. In defining private HEIs, Altbach (1999) implies that those organisations that operate for profit do not receive any grant from the Government and are "responsible for their own funding" (p.2). The most straightforward distinction between a private and public higher education institution is that a private HEI has private ownership and funding, while a public HEI is an organisation with state ownership and funding (Qureshi and Khawaja, 2021).

PrHEIs can vary in structure, mission, and offerings. Here are four types of PrHEIs:

1. **University/University College:** These institutions offer various undergraduate and postgraduate programmes across various disciplines. They often have a diverse faculty engaged in research and academic scholarship. They have degree-awarding powers. The oldest university is the University of Buckingham, and the newly established ones are BPP and Arden. Most of the HEIs offer online courses.
2. **Academy/College/School:** These institutions may have a more specialised focus, providing education in specific fields or professions. They may offer diploma or certificate programmes in addition to degree programmes. These HEIs do not have degree-awarding powers but have franchise agreements with public universities to deliver their programmes. Examples are, Oxford Business College (OBC) and the London School of Commerce (LSC)
3. **Company/Ltd (Limited):** Some private higher education institutions operate as for-profit entities under a company or limited company structure. They may offer a range of programmes but with a profit-driven motive. Operate as businesses to generate revenue. Offer degrees, diplomas, or certificates similar to nonprofit institutions but with a profit orientation. The London School of Business and Computing (LSBC) and QA Higher Education are examples.
4. **Other:** This category includes a diverse range of private higher education institutions that do not fit neatly into the traditional university or college structures. This may encompass specialised institutions, online universities, or those with unique missions. Highly variable and can include specialised institutions focused on specific disciplines. The best example is the University Campus Football Business (UCFB).

**Table 1a: Types and numbers of PrHEIs in the UK**

Type of PrHEI	Number
University/University College	10
Academy/College/School	407
Company/Ltd	265
Other	120
<b>Total</b>	<b>802</b>

Source: Adopted from: Hunt & Boliver (2023)

London's HEIs are powerful engines of economic growth, collectively educating over 507,000 students, employing over 223,000 people across all sectors of the UK economy, and generating over £27 billion in economic impact (London Higher, 2023). According to the QS Best Student Cities Rankings for 2023, London ranked at top students' choice for study and the capital retains the status for last many years. The ranking revealed the following top ten destinations.

1. London
2. Munich
3. Seoul
4. Zurich
5. Melbourne
6. Berlin
7. Tokyo
8. Paris
9. Sydney
10. Edinburgh

Source : <https://www.qschina.cn/en/city-rankings/2023>

## **Literature Review**

Technological advances have significantly promoted the growth and adoption of online learning. Consequently, such technological advances have created new opportunities for Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) to deliver content online (Palloff and Pratt, 2007). This trend was accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, which compelled HEIs worldwide to adopt new learning environments (Khawaja, Anjos, and Qureshi, 2023). Consequently, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face traditional teaching has suddenly been changed to online (Means & Neisler, 2020).

Some modern HEIs adopted online learning before COVID-19, but it has increasingly adopted by many HEIs since COVID-19 (Žmuk, Qureshi, and Khawaja 2023).

Within higher education, online learning refers to delivering educational content and facilitating academic interactions through digital and internet-based platforms with characteristics such as the learner being at a distance from the educator, using technology (a device with Internet), access to learning material and receiving some support (Anderson, 2011a). Thus, it is a mode of instruction that enables students to engage in coursework, access learning materials, and participate in academic activities without needing physical presence in a traditional classroom setting. In higher education, online learning takes various forms, including fully online degree programmes at undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate (including doctoral) levels, individual courses, and hybrid models that blend online and in-person elements. Online learning is becoming popular, and many students now opt for online classes (Qureshi, Sarwar and Zia, 2020).

There is no official definition of a 'mature student' (UK Parliament, 2021). We will consider the definitions immaculately related to age – for example, defining mature students as above the age of 21 when entering HEI (Chapman, 2015). The phrase 'mature student' refers to anyone attending an HEI (college or university) after some time out of full-time education. Generally, this implies students over 21 years of age at the beginning of their undergraduate studies or over 25 years at the beginning of their postgraduate studies (UCAS, 2020) and up to pensionable age in the UK (NUS, 2012). McCune et al. (2010) define younger mature students as 21–30 and older mature students as 31 or over. Mature students are a heterogeneous group with various roles and responsibilities (Zia, Qureshi, Kayode, 2023).

Many of the participants in HE has multiple roles (Jenkins and Burton, 2011), such as academic study, employment and family responsibilities (McCune et al., 2010). Concerning mature students, Osborne et al. (2004) suggest there are six categories of applicants to HE:

1. 'traditional delayed students'- these have chosen to take time out from their education but re-enter through a traditional route;
2. 'late starters' who have undergone a life-transforming event and require a new start-see also Lawton (2005);
3. 'single parents';
4. 'careerists' -people currently in employment;
5. 'escapees' who are employed but want a different career pathway and
6. 'personal growers' - those wanting to pursue education for its own sake.

Numerous researchers have stressed the need for a more comprehensive and inclusive definition (Zia, Qureshi and Kayode, 2023). For example, O’Shea and Stone (2013) call for a definition that regards mature students’ family commitments, employment status, and past education.

Student satisfaction is important for HEIs (Green, Hood, & Neumann, 2015; Douglas, Douglas, McClelland, & Davies, 2015) whether delivering courses traditionally face to face or online. Student satisfaction is a convoluted phenomenon and arguably related to or even extended from customer satisfaction, a relatively well-known concept in the marketing literature (Qureshi, Khawaja and Zia, 2021). Due to increasing competition in higher education, student satisfaction has become imperative to survive in the sector. Private HE has already recognised students as customers (Bunce, Baird and Jones, 2017; Clayson and Haley, 2015; Guilbault, 2018; Laing and Laing, 2016; Qureshi, 2020; Tarannum et al., 2017) and therefore endeavour not to meet their expectations but to exceed them by becoming more customer service-oriented (Qureshi, Khawaja and Zia, 2021).

Student satisfaction has been identified as an essential aspect of the journey of online students in higher education because it can impact students’ engagement, motivation, learning, performance, success, and ultimately, retention and graduation rates (Sahin & Shelley, 2008; Wickersham & McGee, 2008, Qureshi, 2020). Qureshi, Khawaja, and Zia (2021) included the crucial aspect of employability in their definition of student satisfaction.

*“Student satisfaction is the short-term pleasure of the academic journey and, in the long run, the pride of securing a job primarily based on the student’s academic qualification (P.74)*

Undoubtedly, student satisfaction is critical to student success in online education (Martin and Bolliger 2022) and after graduation with the right job based on the qualification achieved. Many studies on online learning area have widely represented the significance of student satisfaction as it is associated with student success in learning (Muzammil, Sutawijaya and Harsasi 2020).

Currently, limited literature on online student satisfaction is available, and the term became popular after COVID-19. Developing such an understanding is essential for HEI administrators as pedagogical decisions must be made concerning how content is delivered and assessed to achieve higher levels of student satisfaction.



## **Methodology**

Quantitative Research was used for this study. This quantitative methodology aims to systematically collect and analyse data on mature undergraduate student satisfaction, providing valuable insights for enhancing online learning experiences in private higher education institutions. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation across different online programmes, age groups, and other relevant demographic factors. The primary data was collected over a defined period of time to capture a snapshot of satisfaction levels. An initial sample of 530 was taken from the population of mature undergraduate students enrolled in private higher education institutions in London offering online programmes. The sample size determination was based on statistical power analysis to ensure adequate representation and significance. We developed a structured questionnaire with closed-ended and Likert scale questions. The online survey was administered for convenience and to align with the research context. We also included overall satisfaction, determinants of satisfaction, IT competency levels, accessibility, support services, technical training and material and demographic factors. We included an informed consent statement at the beginning of the survey. We ensured participant confidentiality and anonymised data during analysis.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the key determinants influencing the satisfaction levels of mature undergraduate students in private higher education with their online learning?
2. How satisfied are mature undergraduate students with the availability and effectiveness of support services, including technical training in online learning?
3. How satisfied are mature undergraduate students with their overall online learning experience in private higher education institutions?

## **Research Objectives**

- To analyse the specific factors contributing to the satisfaction of mature students in their online learning.
- To explore mature students' technological readiness, comfort and competency with online learning tools and platforms.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of support services, including technical training provided to mature students for online learning.



- To analyse the level of interaction and engagement experienced by mature students in the online learning environment and its correlation with satisfaction
- To assess the overall satisfaction levels of mature students with their online learning experience

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

The word "student satisfaction" is relatively broad and encompasses a range of academic resources and areas where students excel; therefore, it is essential to understand its various aspects from a reductionist point of view. This analysis will provide an in-depth insight into student satisfaction regarding online teaching. To begin with, we collected data online and sectioned the survey into different sections: demographics and student satisfaction with online learning and online platforms, training type, training material, overall training, and online learning experience.

### Preliminary Analysis§

The initial stage involved data cleaning; we found some missing values in the data (N=530) that were removed prior to the primary analysis. Twenty-two missing cases were eliminated from the demographic data, and the reduced sample consisted of N=508 participants. Further, missing online learning and internet competency cases were removed and the final sample was reduced to N= 496 participants. Additionally, the sample size differs for other variables under study.

### Descriptive Statistics

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics: Frequency and Percentages**

Variables	Gender		Age (in years)					*Course level				**Course discipline		
	Male	Female	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	>60	1	2	3	4	1	2	3
<i>F</i>	247	261	175	192	87	37	17	221	130	107	50	271	134	103
<i>P (%age)</i>	48.6	51.4	34.4	37.8	17.1	7.3	3.3	43.5	25.6	21.1	9.8	53.3	26.4	20.3

\*Course level: Foundation (level3)-1, Higher National Certification (level4)-2, Higher National Diploma (level5)-3, Top Up Bachelors (level6)-4; \*\*Course discipline: Business and Management-1, Health & Social Care-2, Travel & Tourism-3

In the whole sample (Table 1), there are slightly more females (51.4%) than males (48.6%). With 37.8% of all students, the age group "31-40" is the largest, followed by "21-30" with 34.4%. As people get older, there is a progressive decline in the number of students, with the ">60" age group having the lowest numbers. Most students are enrolled in Foundation Year (Level 3) (43.5%), followed by Higher National Certification (Level 4) (25.6%). Fewer students are enrolled in Higher National Diploma (level 5) and Top Up Bachelors (level 6). With 271 students, Business and Management is the most popular option. Comparatively speaking, Health & Social Care and Travel & Tourism have fewer pupils (approximately 20-26%).

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics: Online Learning and Competency**

Variables	First online learning experience?		Internet & Computer Competency				Software Competency			
	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
<b>F</b>	342	154	54	246	138	58	123	231	110	32
<b>P (%age)</b>	69.0	31.0	10.9	49.6	27.8	11.7	24.8	46.6	22.2	6.5

Novice-1, Beginner-2, Competent-3, Expert-4

The results in Table 2 showed that 31% of respondents have not yet experienced online learning, compared to 69%. This implies that a sizable proportion of the sample population has prior online learning experience. Four classifications of Internet proficiency levels exist (see footnote). The "Beginner" category has the most respondents (246), followed by "Competent" (138), "Expert" (58), and "Novice" (54). This suggests that a sizable portion of respondents have Internet and computer proficiency at least at the "Beginner" level (49.6%).

Apart from this, similar to Internet competency, software competency levels (Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype) are broken down into four groups: Novice (first-time user), Beginner (with some introductory knowledge), Competent (previous experience and sufficient knowledge), and Expert (advanced knowledge and extraordinary capable). The result obtained showed that the "Beginner" category received the most responses (231), followed by the "Novice" (123), "Competent" (110), and "Expert" (32) categories. This implies that the majority of responders (a very large number) have "Beginner" software expertise (46.6%). All levels of Internet and software competencies appear to have a more significant representation among respondents who have taken their first online course. This shows that earlier experience with online learning may be linked to greater computer and Internet practicality.

Notably, there are significantly fewer responders in the "Expert" group for both software and Internet competencies. Most respondents fell into the "Competent" and "Beginner" categories, suggesting that many students have a modest level of competency in these fields.

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics: Training and Training Type**

Variables	Type of Training <sup>a</sup>		Training Material Provided? <sup>b</sup>		*Quality of Training Material <sup>c</sup>				
	Online	Virtual	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
<b>F</b>	126	197	201	121	21	15	32	75	59
<b>P (%age)</b>	38.8	60.6	61.8	37.2	6.5	4.6	9.8	23.1	18.2

**Reference (baseline):** mature students who received training for using online teaching platforms such as, Moodle, Blackboard, Zoom, Teams etc.; \*very poor-1, poor-2, average-3, good-4, very good-5; **a: N=323, b: N=322, c: N=202**

We inferred valuable insights from Table 3. The results shed light on the different training methods, whether training materials were offered, and how well those materials were perceived. 60.6% of respondents said they had taken virtual training (face-to-face), while 38.8% had taken online training (recorded videos). In this sample population (N=323), virtual training is more prevalent, and it appears that the availability of training materials is related to perceived quality being higher. Compared to 37.2% of respondents who said no training materials were provided, most respondents (61.8%) said that training materials were provided. Ratings for the calibre of training materials range from 1 (very poor) to 5 (extremely good).

The majority of respondents (23.1%) gave the quality an excellent rating, while 18.2% gave it an excellent rating. Fewer respondents gave the quality a lower rating, with the lowest grade (1) receiving the fewest votes (6.5%). Most respondents gave the training materials a quality rating of 4 or 5, suggesting that most participants thought the quality was high.

Training materials were provided for both Online and Virtual training to a similar level, with Virtual training having a slightly higher provision rate. This may mean that the training style has little to no impact on providing training materials.

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics: Online Learning Experience (N=488)**

Variables	*Online Discussion with Teachers				**Device used for Online Learning			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
<b>F</b>	22	118	223	125	83	273	103	29
<b>P (%age)</b>	4.5	24.2	45.7	25.6	17.0	55.9	21.1	5.9

\*Always-4, Often-3, Rarely-2, Never-1; \*\*Computer-1, Laptop-2, Tablet-3, Smartphone-4

The results of Table 4 depict that the options for the question about how frequently respondents communicated with teachers online ranged from "Never" (1) to "Always" (4). 25.6% of respondents said they "Always" engage in online chats with teaching staff, while 45.7% said they "Often" do so. A lower percentage (24.2%) stated that they "Rarely," and the lowest percentage (4.5%) said they "Never" interact with professors/teachers online. On the other hand, the alternatives for the question about the devices respondents use for online learning were Computer (1), Laptop (2), Tablet (3), and Smartphone (4). With 55.9% of respondents utilising it, laptops are the most frequently used for online learning. With a usage rate of 21.1%, the Tablet (iPad) is the second most popular gadget. With 17% and 5.9% of respondents, respectively, using a computer and smartphone for online learning, utilisation is significantly lower.

Moreover, there is no significant correlation between the frequency of online discussions with teachers and the kind of equipment utilised for online learning. For instance, people who "Always" or "Often" interact with professors online use a range of gadgets, such as laptops, computers, tablets, and smartphones. Similarly, a number of devices are used by persons who "Rarely" or "Never" participate in online debates.

**Table 5. Descriptive Statistics: Time Spent on Online Learning**

Variables	Less than 5 hours (N=30)			5 to 10 hours (N=95)			11-15 hours (N=293)			More than 15 hours (N=70)		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
<b>F</b>	5	13	12	12	63	20	39	226	28	5	5	60
<b>P (%age)</b>	16.7	43.3	40.0	12.6	66.3	21.1	13.3	77.1	9.6	7.1	7.1	85.7

Number of hours matched with the required hours for student's programme: Behind-1, Equal-2, Exceed-3

Less than five hours, five to ten hours, eleven to fifteen hours, and more than fifteen hours are the four study-hour categories for students in Table 5. Each group is divided into three categories based on how closely their study hours correspond to the minimum requirements for their programme: Behind (1), Equal (2), and Exceed (3) (see footnote). The categories show different sample sizes due to removing missing values in the preliminary analysis. 293 students comprise the largest group in the "11-15 hours" category, followed by 95 students in the "5 to 10 hours" range. Also, 70 and 30 pupils are in the "More than 15 hours" and "Less than 5 hours" categories, respectively. By study-hour group, different percentages of pupils fall into each category (Behind, Equal, Exceed). For instance, in the "5 to 10 hours" category, 12.6% of students are labelled as "Behind," 66.3% as "Equal," and 21.1% as "Exceed." Most students in each of the four study-hour categories fall into the "Equal" group, meaning that they meet the program's minimum requirements for study time.

The fact that a sizable portion of students in the "5 to 10 hours" category fall into the "Exceed" category indicates that they are studying longer than is necessary. On the other hand, the "Less than 5 hours" group has a more significant percentage of students classified as "Behind," indicating that a sizeable portion of students in this category fail to complete the necessary number of study hours for their programmes.

**Table 6. Descriptive Statistics: Overall Online Learning Experience and Effectiveness**

(N=479)

Variables	Overall Online Learning Experience			Effectiveness of Online Learning for Students				
	Exciting	Boring	Normal	1	2	3	4	5
<b>F</b>	157	150	172	-	-	146	189	144
<b>P (%age)</b>	32.8	31.3	35.9	-	-	30.5	39.5	30.1

extremely effective-5, very effective-4, moderately effective-3, slightly effective-2, not effective at all-1

The effectiveness of online learning was rated by students on a scale from 1 (Not at all effective) to 5 (Extremely effective) (Table 6). Online learning was regarded as "Very effective" (4) by the majority of students (39.5%), "Moderately effective" (3) by 30.5%, and "Extremely effective" (5) by 30.1%. Fewer pupils (6.6%) gave online learning the "Not effective at all" rating (1). Students appear to have mixed feelings regarding online learning based on the distribution of their perceptions of their overall experience and its efficacy across different categories.

Others may find it uninteresting or less effective, while some find it intriguing and powerful. According to the findings, students have a range of perspectives regarding the value and effectiveness of online learning. A range of responses illustrate the complexity of students' experiences with online education, even while a sizable portion of students think it is very effective.

### Graphical Representation of Data

As the part of our survey on mature students' satisfaction with online learning, we also asked few questions that required multiple answers. The graphs below provide data that helps us understand student satisfaction from a different lens. Eight of the 25 questions on student satisfaction with online learning focused on the tools and software they used, the environment for online learning, the value of training, the role of the teacher, the students' contentment and familiarity with online learning, the difficulties they encountered, and overall satisfaction.

Questions 8, 9, 14, 16, 17, 21, 22 and 25 were based on multiple responses (1-low to 10-high) and we presented data in graphical form. We collected responses from N=515 participants.

8. How satisfied with the technology and software you are using for online learning?  
515 responses

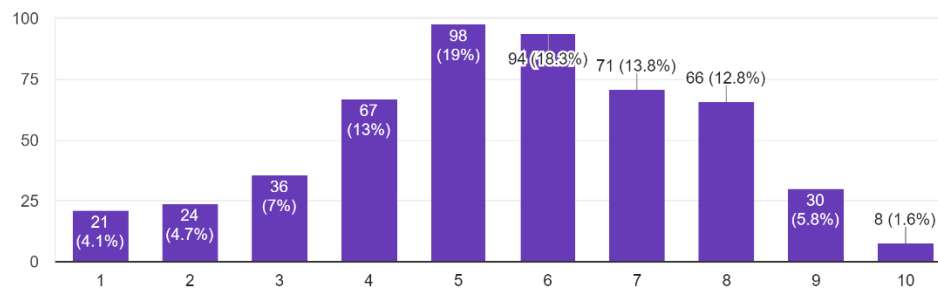


Figure 1. Showing mature student satisfaction with technology and software use

Questions 8, 9, 14, 16, 17, 21, 22 and 25 were based on multiple responses (1-low to 10-high) and we presented data in graphical form. We collected responses from N=515 participants.

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9. How peaceful is the environment (Home, Office and Other) online learning?  
515 responses

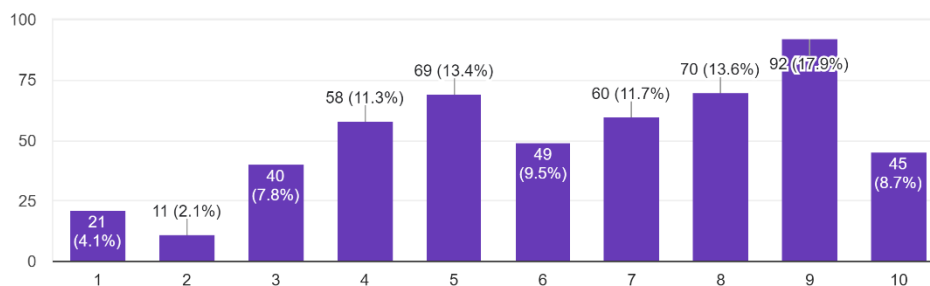


Figure 2. Online learning environment

Regarding the quiet environment, as reported by the mature students, we received a range of results on a scale of 1-10 where 1 refers to ‘not peaceful at all’ and 10 refers to ‘extremely peaceful’. Figure 2 shows how mature students viewed an online learning environment as peaceful. 17.9 % of the students rated it as ‘9’ and found the online learning environment to be highly peaceful, whereas still, a significant number of students thought that the online learning environment is moderately peaceful (13.4%), and very few found it to be less peaceful (4.1%).

14. The overall training was useful  
342 responses

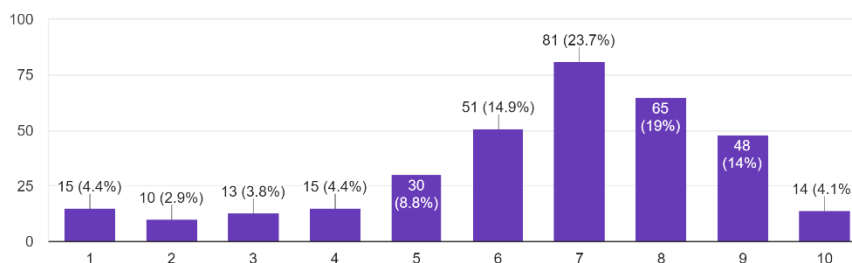


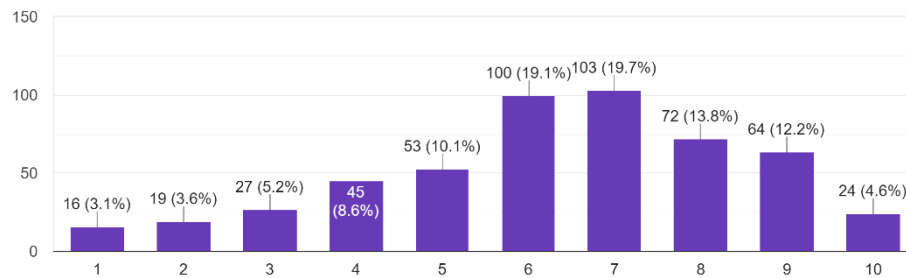
Figure 3. Overall training usefulness

The mature students were asked to rate the overall training usefulness on a scale of 1-10 where 1 refers to ‘not at all useful’ and 10 refers to ‘extremely useful’. Figure 3 shows that the overall training was rated as quite high according to a significant number of students (23.7%). A small percentage of students rated the overall training to be less valuable.



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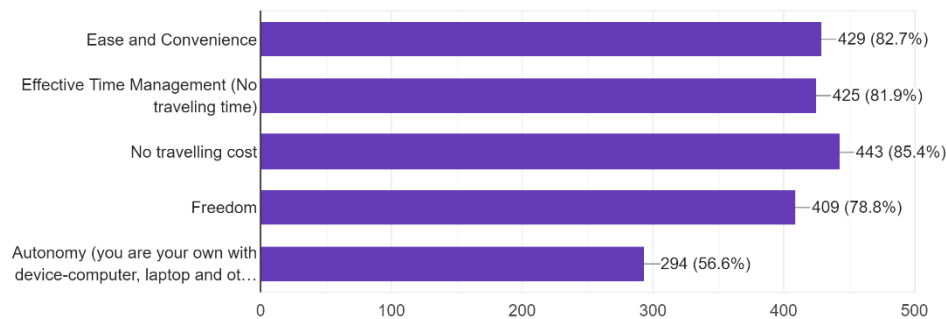
16. How helpful are your teachers while studying online?  
 523 responses



*Figure 4. Role of teachers during online learning*

Figure 4 shows that mature students were moderately satisfied with the help they were getting from their teachers during online learning. On a scale from 1-10, where 1 refers to ‘not helpful at all’ and 10 refers to ‘extremely helpful’, the majority of students rated 6 or 7, which indicates that they were moderately satisfied with the teacher’s assistance they received during learning online.

17. As a student what makes you happy with online learning (Please tick as many apply)  
 519 responses



*Figure 5. Mature students' happiness rating in relation to online learning*

Mature students were asked what makes them happy with online learning. We received multiple distinct responses as shown above (Figure 5). The highest percentage of mature students (85.4%) rated ‘Freedom’ as the most essential factor associated with their happiness level with online learning. Besides this, 85.4% of students reported that the reason for their happiness was zero travelling cost, 82% reported that it was the ease and convenience factor, and approximately 81% of students were content due to effective time management. However, ‘autonomy’ was rated as the lowest factor among all.

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21. How well do you manage your time while learning online?  
 512 responses

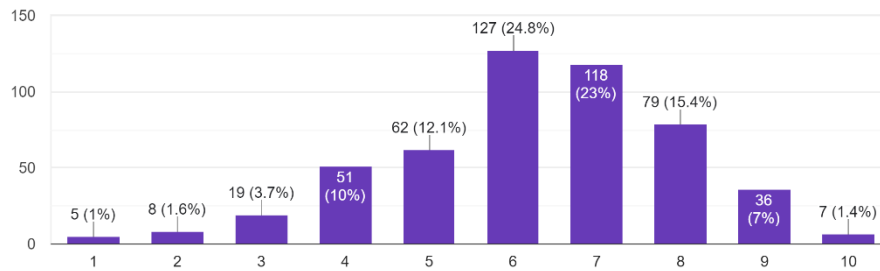


Figure 6. Mature students' time management with online learning

The time management of mature students during online learning was found to be overall moderate (Figure 6). On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is "not at all well" and 10 is "extremely well," students were asked to rate how well they can manage their time while learning online. The results showed that most students (24.8%) could manage their online learning time moderately (rated as 6).

22. Challenges with Online Learning (Please tick as many apply)  
 517 responses

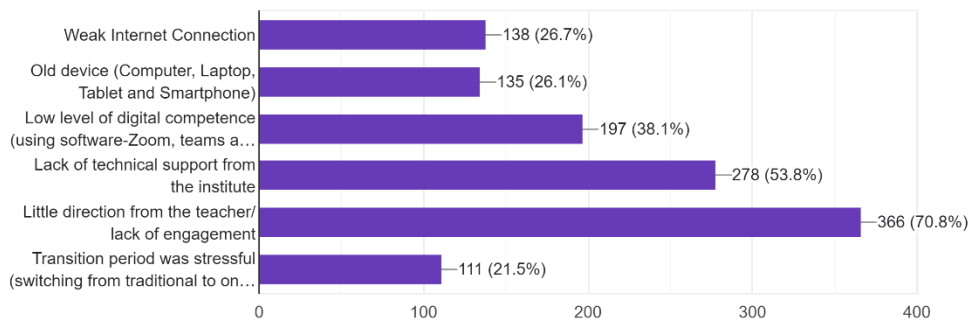


Figure 7. Challenges with online learning

Mature students were asked to rate their opinions based on their challenges during online learning. The results suggest that the highest proportion of the students (70.8%) found 'lack of engagement (little direction from the teacher)' to be the significant challenge, followed by 'lack of technical support from the institution' (53.8%), 'low level of digital competence (using software such as zoom, teams, etc.' (38.1%) and other challenges.

25. Overall satisfaction  
523 responses

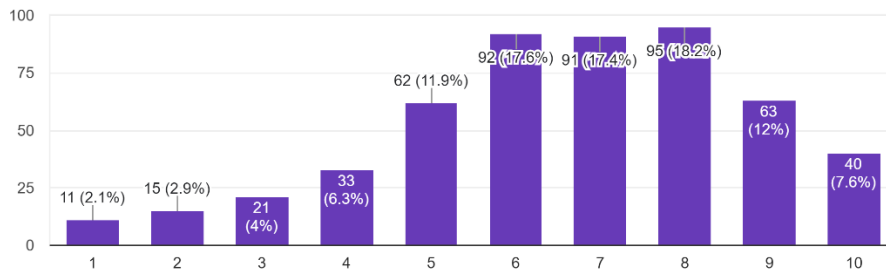


Figure 8. Mature student overall satisfaction with online learning

The overall student satisfaction with online learning was rated from 1-10, where 1 refers to 'not satisfied at all' and 10 refers to 'extremely satisfied'. The results from Figure 8 show that students rated their overall satisfaction as 6, 7 or 8. This indicates moderate to high overall satisfaction. Most students (18.2%) were high on overall satisfaction compared to other students.

## Discussion

Private higher education authorities interested in understanding how students view online learning and how satisfied they are with its various complexities should find this study helpful. This study should apply to private higher education authorities interested in learning how students perceive online learning and how satisfied they are with the different perplexities.

The research findings indicate that the satisfaction levels of mature undergraduate students in private higher education with their online learning are influenced by several key determinants such as Competency (Internet & Computer and Software Competency), training (type and quality), interaction (discussion with online teachers) and online devices. The identified determinants encompass a range of factors that contribute to the overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction of mature students in the online learning environment. These findings answered the first research question, "1. What are the key determinants influencing the satisfaction levels of mature undergraduate students in private higher education with their online learning"?

The identification of these key determinants provides valuable insights for private higher education institutions seeking to enhance the satisfaction of mature undergraduate students in online learning. Recommendations for improvement can be formulated based on addressing these determinants to create a more positive and effective online learning environment for this demographic. The further results obtained from the descriptive statistics showed that mature students were moderately satisfied with the online training they received concerning the type of training, whether they received the training material and the quality of training. These findings are relevant to research question 2 "1. How satisfied are mature undergraduate students with the availability and effectiveness of support services, including technical training in online learning"?

On the other hand, we also found that the satisfaction level of mature students about online learning is between moderate to high. This addresses the third research question, "How satisfied are mature undergraduate students with their overall online learning experience in private higher education institutions?"

Are mature students satisfied with their online learning experience in private higher education? Our result showed variations as the sample size differed for a few questions. In other words, it is significant to note that there were some fluctuations in the degrees of satisfaction, probably due to variances in sample sizes for particular questions. This implies that opinions on satisfaction with various online training and education components may differ.

The question of student happiness with online learning and training, mainly using programmes like Zoom and Microsoft Teams, has drawn much attention and has been a topic of significant research interest from researchers, especially in light of the widespread use of remote learning as a result of situations like the COVID-19 epidemic. Past research has reported that when compared to learning environments and learning tools, learning conferencing software is the most significant aspect that contributes to students' happiness with their online education and also the experience of using learning conferencing software causes a very slight difference in the perceived level of satisfaction among the students, and that users with more experience—more than two years—are more satisfied with the calibre of their training than users with less experience—less than one year. (Nguyen Trong Nhan et al., 2022). This is somewhat in line with our results.

Educational institutions have used well-known conferencing software platforms like Google Meetings, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams to facilitate students' learning while navigating the problematic pandemic landscape (Sakkir et al., 2021). The usability and ease of use of e-learning systems determine their appeal. Above all else, the software must be simple to use, install, and error-free (Djamdjuri & Kamilah, 2020; Nadeak, 2020; Pham et al., 2021).

According to research, students' happiness (highly satisfied) with online learning platforms has been found to vary widely (Means et al., 2014). Some students express significant levels of happiness, especially those who value the ease and adaptability of online learning. On the other hand, others express worries about problems, including technological difficulties, less interaction with classmates and teachers, and feelings of loneliness. These previous research results support our findings. Moreover, it has been reported that maintaining possibilities for connection and involvement in online learning is crucial and past studies have shown that collaborative activities, discussion boards, and live virtual classes have a favourable effect on student satisfaction (Bernard et al., 2009).

In many nations worldwide, online learning is a sophisticated and established form of education, yet numerous challenges and barriers remain to be overcome (Laksmi Sito Dwi et al., 2021; Roman & Aurelian-Petrus, 2021). The applicability of the learning platform, students' technological aptitude, and lack of focus are drawbacks (Febrianto et al., 2020). The student's learning performance is adversely affected by these obstacles (Bahasoan et al., 2020). Student happiness can suffer from technical concerns like poor internet connectivity (Qureshi, Khawaja and Zia, 2020) and software bugs (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Adequate technical support and training are essential to solve these issues. Student happiness is substantially influenced by faculty readiness for and proficiency with using online platforms. A more effective and exciting learning environment can be produced by instructors who are well-versed in online teaching techniques; student happiness can be increased over time by using regular feedback methods and iterative modifications in course design based on student feedback (McQuiggan, 2012; Sun & Chen, 2016). Student satisfaction can change depending on the particular situation and the kind of course. For instance, different disciplines could have particular difficulties and demands regarding online learning (Shea & Bidjerano, 2016).

Research regularly demonstrates that student satisfaction with online learning is substantially impacted by the amount of teacher support and involvement (Richardson & Swan, 2003). Students value possibilities for virtual office hours, live discussions, one-on-one support from instructors, and fast and personalised feedback. In the online setting, a strong teacher presence can promote a feeling of support and connection.

Previous studies have shown that the online learning environment's functionality and design significantly impact students' satisfaction (Artino & Stephens, 2009). Positive reviews are more common for platforms that are well-structured, user-friendly, and simple to use. Videos, interactive modules, and discussion forums are multimedia components that can improve satisfaction and engagement. Our results indicated that 17.9 % of the students found the online learning environment to be highly peaceful, which supports the past research.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the research on mature undergraduate student satisfaction with online learning in private higher education institutions has provided valuable insights into the factors influencing the overall satisfaction of this specific demographic. Through a comprehensive examination of determinants, the study contributes to a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics shaping the online learning experiences of mature students. Several key findings emerged, shaping the conclusion of this research. The level of interactivity and engagement in online courses is crucial. Incorporating interactive elements fosters a sense of community and active participation, positively influencing the satisfaction levels of mature students. The perceived accessibility (quality of device and strong internet signals) and flexibility of online learning formats play a pivotal role in satisfaction. Institutions that offer flexible scheduling and easy access to course materials enhance the overall learning experience for mature students. The availability and effectiveness of support services, including technical training, are critical determinants. Responsive technical support services and readily available academic resources contribute significantly to satisfaction. Seamless integration of technology positively influences satisfaction levels. Mature students appreciate technology that enhances rather than hinders the learning experience, emphasising the importance of user-friendly platforms.

Variations in satisfaction based on demographic factors underscore the diversity within the mature student population. Recognising and addressing these variations are essential for tailoring online learning experiences to individual needs.

In conclusion, several variables affect student satisfaction with online learning and training platforms like Zoom and Teams, such as the degree of interaction, technical difficulties, faculty readiness, and ongoing course improvement. Institutions and teachers must consider these elements to improve the quality of online learning and student happiness. Furthermore, teacher support, platform design, perceived support, community building, and the right amount of structure and flexibility all have an impact on how satisfied students are with their online education, particularly in terms of teacher support and the online learning environment.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the immediate context of the study. They provide actionable insights for private higher education institutions aiming to enhance the online learning experience for mature undergraduate students. As the educational landscape continues to evolve, acknowledging and addressing the unique needs of this demographic is crucial for fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment. HEIs emphasise student satisfaction; a new survey conducted by ICER Monitor (2023) among over 27,000 university students in the UK learning to some extent through online delivery reveals that satisfaction with digital learning has improved since 2020.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Given that our findings are based on descriptive statistics, it is essential to comprehend the cause-and-effect relationship before drawing any conclusions. We aim to comprehend the data from the perspective of the researchers. To acquire in-depth insights into student satisfaction and its correlates, it is strongly recommended to go for inferential statistics and more reliable data employing psychometric measures.

Conduct longitudinal studies to track the satisfaction levels of mature undergraduate students over an extended period. This would allow for a more dynamic understanding of their evolving experiences in online learning.

Assessing the effectiveness of AI-driven support tools, chatbots, and other technological solutions could provide insights into innovative approaches to enhance support.



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