

Listening to the Voices of Undergraduate Students: Exploring Astin's Theory of Student Involvement During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

As future scholars and holistic education practitioners, it is important to understand how developmental theories are constructed and how they can serve as a foundation for further understanding. The primary objective of this study is to discover how the COVID-19 epidemic has affected students' involvement both inside and outside of the classroom. Astin's Theory of Student Involvement was used to describe student involvement issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data for this study was gathered through a qualitative interview. Eight highly active undergraduate students were interviewed to know about their current life, whether in their involvement inside and outside of the classroom activities. Additionally, the impact of their student engagement, particularly during the COVID-19 outbreak, on their life development as individuals and university students is being investigated. The most immediate concerns among students were a loss of social connection, living conditions unsuitable for home office activities, such as inadequate data bandwidth, and a general lack of enthusiasm and concentration. As a result, the university must ensure that students have a reliable system in place for communicating with lecturers, club advisors, administrators, classmates, and peers. Maintaining a positive student-lecturer relationship, on the other hand, would surely increase academic performance and allow students to study more successfully.

Keywords: Astin's theory, student involvement, student voices, COVID-19, undergraduates

1. INTRODUCTION

Who would have thought that in the year 2020, the human race would be facing a global pandemic that could lead to millions of deaths until now? The World Health Organization (WHO) first announced that a novel coronavirus called COVID-19 was a global pandemic on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020). Soon after, Malaysia implemented a 14-day Movement Control Order to curb the virus on March 18th, 2020 (New Straits Times, 2020). Since then, there have been several phases of lockdown in Malaysia due to the pandemic (Hashim et al., 2021). The global health, economic, and educational sectors have all been impacted by the pandemic. Higher education sectors, in particular, have been forced to shut down, and students have been required to return to their home countries or become trapped in host nations due to global travel restrictions (Times Higher Education, 2020).

Universities around the world must adapt to the pandemic where most of the staff need to work remotely and many classes are held online (Times Higher Education, 2020). Students were no longer exposed to the buzzing university cultural life and 'life on campus'. The sudden change in teaching-learning methods that need to be

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delivered online has made many lecturers and students' struggle. For example, lectures struggle to finish the curriculum as online teaching makes the learning slower, while the students are getting used to absent online classes, and most importantly, they could be falling behind because of a lack of internet access and technological devices that can aid their learning online (Schwartz, 2020). COVID-19 is still present on our planet at the end of 2021. That means students who were left behind because of the pandemic have lost nearly two years of education. Furthermore, a university is not just a place for education due to its unique ecosystem (Times Higher Education, 2020). It is also a place where university students, especially undergraduates, develop themselves as young adults. According to Sirotová (2015), students develop their personalities based on how lecturers provide the learning experience in class and at university in a large setting. The author describes how the learning experience in class, which is, of course, provided by the lecturer, can affect a student's way of thinking, emotions, and developing creativity. Nonetheless, activities outside the classroom (extracurricular) were perceived as the biggest influence in terms of developing students' personalities and soft skills (Yew, 2010). For example, students can participate in student club activities, become students' representatives, participate in interfaculty competitions, conferences, or charity events. Astin's theory of student development discusses how students' involvement in a university environment might help them develop their personalities (Astin, 1984).

Students' involvement in both academic and extracurricular activities is emphasised in the Astin theory. In a nutshell, the theory states that the more students who participate in university, the more likely they are to produce favourable outcomes, such as excellent academic performance, strong personalities, and skills (Astin, 1984). Aliu and Aigbavboa's (2021) study found that students' involvement in university, particularly extracurricular activities, helps to develop their personalities and enhance graduate employability.

Indeed, there are students who are now living on campus due to the recovery plan phases in Malaysia. Malaysian higher education has started to open to all students who wish to live on campus starting in October 2021 (Suhaidi, 2021). Nonetheless, the teaching-learning is still being done online. Therefore, all of the academic and extracurricular activities must be done virtually, although students can still experience "living on campus" and meet up with their friends. All these developments are because of the successful vaccination programmes. Specifically, in Malaysia, more than 80% of the adult population has been vaccinated, and most states in Malaysia are now facing the fourth phase of their recovery plan (Kaos Jr, 2020). Hence, all economic sectors that include education have been allowed to reopen as usual but with COVID-19 standard operating procedure (SOP). With this positive progress, we may be able to fully open the education sector starting early next year in 2022. Students and lecturers may commence physical teaching-learning experiences. Thus, the teaching-learning issues due to the pandemic context may disappear once the students are able to experience 'life on campus' fully.

Nonetheless, we are still facing COVID-19, and students have not been able to attend class physically since early 2020. Indeed, some students can live on campus starting in October 2021, as mentioned previously. However, not all students are able to come back to university for various reasons, and they must experience remote learning back at home. The research issue now becomes, "how do students engage in university while dealing with a remote learning situation at home?" Therefore, this research will shed light on how students can get involved with university activities while facing a remote learning situation. The research will examine how Astin's theory of student involvement may hold and help to describe students' involvement at university during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result, this study contributes to the literature in at least various ways, which are identifying the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' involvement in and out of the classroom; exploring students' experience of engagement during the COVID-19 epidemic; exploring how the experience enhances or hinders their life development as individuals and university students; and using Astin's (1991) involvement development theory was used to describe their student involvement struggles during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Section 2 of the literature review, the research report expands on how Astin's theory development may influence students' development. The research plan/design and data collection methods are presented in Section 3.0 of the methodology. The study's findings and discussion will be detailed in Sections 4.0 and 5.0, respectively. Finally, in Section 6.0, a summary of the study and its implications for practise will be discussed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Astin's student involvement theory emphasises the importance of student investment of physical and psychological energy at a higher education level to student development and learning (Astin, 1984). Astin (1984) suggested that the amount of student learning and personal development is directly related to the quality and quantity of student participation; the more academically involved students are in the life of the institution, the more likely they are to continue. A highly involved student, is one who invests a significant amount of time in learning, spends a significant amount of time on campus life, is active in student groups, and communicates often with the instructors and other students (Astin, 1999). According to Astin (1993) and Strayhorn (2008), active learning in the classroom, such as making presentations, taking essay tests, and working on independent research projects, has been demonstrated to have considerable favourable impacts on student retention and personal/social learning outcomes. The study added that peer connection and interactions with school administrators were also found to have a good impact on students' social and personal learning achievements (Astin, 1991). Thus, effective interaction appears to be an important factor in engaging students in order to increase learning and establish a link between engagement and student achievement.

This study will use Astin's (1991) *Inputs-Environments-Outcomes* (I-E-O) conceptual model (see Figure 1). This concept was chosen because it allows exploring the effects of the university environment on student educational outcomes while observing the student's background characteristics or growth (Astin, 1984; Astin, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Among others, the demographic background, characteristics, academic and test scores, talents, skills, goals, and other potential for growth and learning of a student when he or she first enters a college or university are all considered student inputs in the model (Astin, 1991; Lundberg, et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2008; Popkess, 2010). In addition, the environment refers to the college or university setting in which students are involved through interaction with peers, faculty management members, classroom participation, and other educational or curriculum programmes (Astin, 1991; Strayhorn, 2008; Popkess, 2010; Raia, 2012). It can also be treated as a student's actual educational experiences, practices, programmes, or interventions (Astin, 1991). The student's behaviour changes as a result of exposure to the environment over time, and these changes are referred to as outcomes. Cognitive, psychosocial, personal/social, cognitive psychological, cognitive behavioural, and affective psychological outcomes are among the types of student outcomes (Astin, 1991; Popkess, 2010; Strayhorn, 2008).

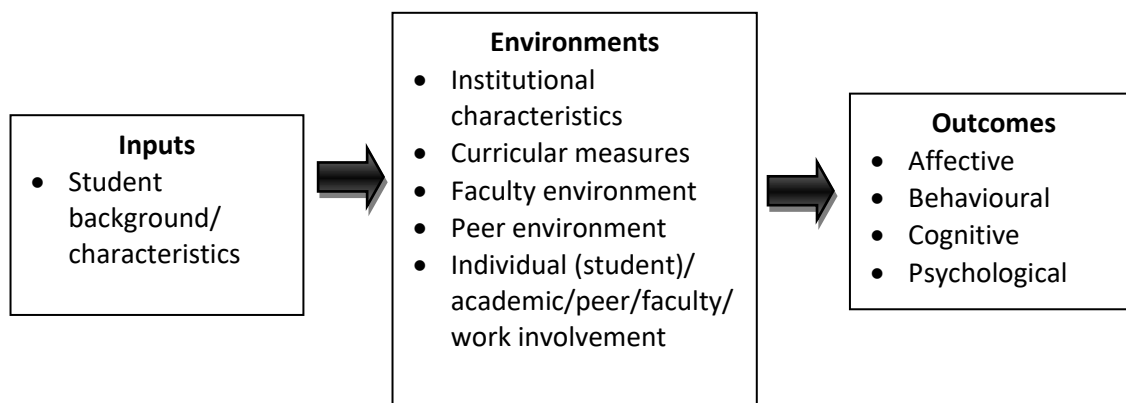


Fig. 1: Astin's Theory of Involvement: Inputs-Environments-Outcomes (IOE) Model (Astin, 1991)

As affirmed by Astin (1984) and Kahu (2013), learning success is determined by students' participation in learning as well as includes online learning (Akbari et al., 2016; Farrell & Brunton, 2020). Thus, this I-E-O model helps higher education professionals understand how specific interventions, such as academic advising or the university eco-system of learning, affect learners' outcomes like grades, satisfaction, and development. Furthermore, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted that Astin's concept of involvement balances the responsibilities of institutional environment and active student engagement in promoting student development. Research reveals that one's interactions with the environment have an effect on behaviour (Barker, 1968) and self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which in turn has an impact on the final achievement outcome.

Existing studies that analyse student involvement using the I-E-O model under the disruption of COVID-19 are more focused on social, cognitive, behavioural, collaborative, and emotional engagement¹ introduced in an online accounting module, it was beneficial in improving their learning experience (Malan, 2020). In addition, Perez (2020) and Colclasure et al. (2021) conducted research on the effects of mental health on student involvement on campus. On the other hand, Comeaux & Harrision (2007), Cole (2007), Hu (2010), Ahmad, Anantharaman & Ismail (2012), Hu & McCormick (2012), and Kim and Kutscher (2021) also conducted studies analysing student involvement on campus during non-epidemic periods using Astin's I-E-O framework.

Based on the above studies, most of them using quantitative analyses, while qualitative research work, particularly comparison studies on inside and outside classroom students' involvement, almost non-exists. The most common function of qualitative research is to understand the how and why of an experience, and it adds humanistic value to a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, the earlier studies omitted the change in the university environment in outlining students' current life struggles during this COVI-19 pandemic. Thus, this study aims to address these gaps by concentrating on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and online learning to provide a new dimension for student academic performance. In addition, the comparison studies between student involvement inside and outside of the classroom are explored. Not only that, but this study also aims to address these gaps in student involvement theory by using the I-E-O model.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study sought to answer the following research questions: (1) How do students struggle inside and outside of the classroom during this COVID-19 pandemic? (2) In what ways do these experiences help or hinder their development as university students? (3) How can the university eco-system of learning further enhance these learners' development?

3.1 Research design

To answer these research questions, data collection took place via qualitative in-depth interviews to enable the researcher to identify and explore the students' characteristics, the challenges they faced with remote learning, and how these challenges affected their development as students. The purpose of the investigation was to establish the effect of the pandemic on student development and to suggest ways the university could play an active role in making things better for students in these trying times. To achieve this, the researchers interviewed the respondents through the Microsoft Teams Meeting Platform, which was conducted on 9th November 2021 at 8.30 pm until 10.00 pm. The interview questions were based on the academic literature, and participants were asked to give their perspectives on their campus participation experiences through open-ended questions. The details of the research plan could be summarised as below:

- 1- Interviewee: Eight (8) undergraduate students from various courses in the undergraduate programmes were interviewed. The profiles of interviewees are outlined in Table 1.
- 2- Interviewee selection: A group of potential active students (ranging from semester 3 to 7) are selected. They hold positions in various college and university-level programs.
- 3- An interview protocol was outlined in Appendix A.

Table 1. Profiles of Interviewees

Name of student	Course/Semester	Position in Student's Club
Student 1	Bachelor of Accounting/ Sem 5	President
Student 2	Bachelor of Tourism Management/ Sem 7	Secretary
Student 3	Bachelor of Accounting/ Sem 7	President
Student 4	Bachelor of Tourism Management/ Sem 7	President
Student 5	Bachelor of Business Management/ Sem 9	Member
Student 6	Bachelor of Business Management/ Sem 9	Vice President
Student 7	Bachelor of Communication/ Sem 3	President
Student 8	Bachelor of Communication/ Sem 5	Treasurer

¹ Redmond et al. (2018) engagement framework.

3.2 Data analysis

The recorded video of the interview session was first transcribed and then analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Thematic analysis organises and describes the data in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher followed iterative coding process by O’Dwyer (2004) and Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014) where they suggested the qualitative data analysis embraces three linked subprocess which are data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, which O’Dwyer (2004) refers to as data interpretation. After all interviews, transcriptions were uploaded into the Atlas.ti software to aid coding process. Deductive coding was utilized where preliminary codes was created from research questions and sub codes are then added into the main category until all relevant statements in the transcripts are covered. Table 2 below shows the sample of how transcripts were coded into the category pertaining to research question 1.

Table 2. Sample of category 1 - RQ1

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON STUDENTS INVOLVMENT INSIDE AND OUTSIDE CLASSROOM: RESEARCH QUESTION 1	
<p>Inside Classroom Category: Impact Sub-category: Inside Classroom Code: IMPACT: IN</p> <p><i>“Honestly speaking, I am one of the students who always focused in the class and jot down every single thing. I will make sure to stay consistent during a class and get things done properly. But after pandemic, online classes do not really give me the same degree of understanding which then makes me feel down.” [Student 8]</i></p>	<p>Outside Classroom Category: Impact Sub-category: Outside Classroom Code: IMPACT: OUT</p> <p><i>“I think I am not developing, it’s a waste, I feel guilty because I can’t feel the enjoyment as a university student”.</i> <i>[Student 5]</i></p>

4. FINDINGS

The students interviewed were mostly top organising committee members of students’ organisations, undertaking president, treasurer, and secretary roles, while others were regular members of the clubs.

4.1 Challenges during the pandemic and the effects on student development

4.1.1 Outside classroom

Most students reported various issues and challenges during the pandemic, and from the perspective of the organising committee, a lot of the issues revolve around effective teamwork that they must overcome. They reported being unable to gauge the team members’ working pace, which causes work delays, inability to connect and communicate effectively among each other, and a lack of understanding of their team members outside commitments, which leads to overall weak team spirit and a lack of overall engagement.

From the regular members’ point of view, the pandemic has caused them a lack of involvement because, with all the programmes being conducted online and mostly revolving around talks and seminars, it draws their attention away from participating because they find it boring, non-engaging, and most of them look the same as each other. It is interesting to note that students did find that there was an abundance; in fact, too many programmes were conducted, but they were demotivated to join because of a lack of variety, and they were hoping for more than just talks, as explained by one of the students:

“As a regular member, the challenges would be there’s too many events but they all look the same that it gets a bit boring at times. There are talks that interesting, but I hope they actually gives us more than just talks” [Student 4]

Alas, the challenges they faced during the pandemic have also negatively affected their development. Their development is hindered as they cannot experience the full university environment and embrace the joy of being a university student, as illustrated by Student 5:

“I think I am not developing, it’s a waste, I feel guilty because I can’t feel the enjoyment as a university student”. [Student 5]

However, interestingly, these challenges also posed some positive effects on the students’ development rather than negative effects. Students reported that now they have learnt to become more understanding and patient, and even though they did report that the extra workload has made them very stressed, they are now able to overcome the stress and extra tension effectively. This has been illustrated by one of the students:

“It really affects me in a positive way. It was enhancing my tolerant level to people and also help me in insist on stress level. I’m becoming more accept with stress and can overcome it”. [Student 2]

Furthermore, students also reported being able to see things from different perspectives than their own. Plus, the challenges they were facing developed them to be more resilient and open to drawbacks, and they reported a sense of accomplishment when they successfully navigated through these trials.

“I believe it enhances my life development as I become more prepared to face many potential drawbacks. It makes me more flexible in a good way. For instance, I do not easily give up when things don’t go according as planned as I am always optimistic and open to the idea of a Plan B.” [Student 7]

4.1.2 Inside classroom

Each student has mentioned a few challenges and problems relating to how the pandemic has impacted their classroom learning. To begin with, switching from a traditional classroom to an online classroom appears to have a beneficial or bad impact on students' learning behaviours. As a result of the shift in the learning environment, some students who were previously active in class are now passive in the online learning environment, while others who were once passive are now active.

It's fascinating to discover that both (a) student personality and (b) changes in the learning environment have an immense impact on student participation in class. As Student 4 described, an introverted student felt more at ease in the online setting, which encouraged her to engage more frequently in class and to improve her skills through conversation. In her own words, Student 4 explained:

“I was never the one to talk in the classroom before the pandemic. I am a passive student. Just kind of blend in. But surprisingly I am able to talk more in online class. The reason is probably because no one can see my face. I could see the different though. I become more confident to talk about some topics. There are times I did not talk though but I do see changes in my speaking skills.” [Student 4]

Extrovert students, on the other hand, had the opposite situation, with the atmosphere making them feel less engaged in the class and demotivated in the classroom due to the poor internet connection and indirect interaction between student and professor. As Student 2 points out, such an environment adds to the stress of learning for students.

“I am feeling less motivated because the environment is not suitable for study. Most of the time I will having classes in my own room, or at my home. The environment was cause me feeling too comfortable and not create a situation that can make me study.” [Student 2]

Due to the unpredictable internet connection, the most common issue noted by most students, regardless of personality type, during the pandemic is getting engaged in the conducted online classes, instructional material, and activities throughout the semester. In other words, they felt that whatever they learned in the online class was not as effective as in the physical class. They also felt that their workload had been increased as compared to the physical class, as explained by Student 8:

“Honestly speaking, I am one of the students who always focused in the class and jot down every single thing. I will make sure to stay consistent during a class and get things done properly. But after pandemic, online classes do not really give me the same degree of understanding which then makes me feel down. It takes much more effort for me to concentrate and much of the connection that came with learning has been lost until that I don't have the mental bandwidth to sit down and take notes.”
[Student 8]

The majority of them were under a lot of stress as a result of the workload, which appeared to be difficult to manage both (a) individually and as a (b) group task. Firstly, the influence on individual health is determined by how stress and anxiety grow among students as a result of "fear of missing out" (FOMO) in an online learning class environment. The excessive reliance on technological gadgets, such as computers and smartphones, has resulted in an unhealthy relationship with these items. As illustrated by Student 1:

I became very stressed up to a point where I can only sleep for 3-4 hours a day. And I have somewhat separation anxiety with my phone in fear of missing an important message from lecturers [Student 1].

Secondly, group assignment workload is another significant issue that has a negative influence on students' health. Students encounter more difficulties in keeping their group members engaged and dedicated to completing class group work. They believed that the efforts required to keep the group together were enormous, and that this added to their stress. To compensate the "free rider" group members, they end up having to exert more effort. As Student 4 explained:

Group presentation, group assignments, group videos - everything that related to groups. If this was before pandemic, if any of my group mates aren't available or not participating in the discussion, I could always find them in the next class. But during the pandemic, they suddenly missing in action, even when there are classes, they might nor might not be available. We see them online, but they still didn't reply. This kind of communication is hard during pandemic and because we are unable to contact them, we need to cover for their work, which make our works even more than we should have. Not to mention people that are sending their part late because of other assignments. We do understand but at the same time, we also have a lot of assignment too. [Student 4]

4.2 Suggestions on how university eco-system of learning can further enhance the learner's development

4.2.1 Outside Classroom

Respondents used a variety of means to characterise their learning experiences. Additionally, they also outline how activities and experiences outside of the classroom help or impede their personal development. One student expressed concern about whether or not he was doing a good job of leading society. Hence, students have expressed their expectations of the university environment in improving the university system, whether in terms of administrative or online learning systems. They require prompt assistance when they encounter problems online, whether they are related to their academic studies or a club activity. They also expect that the procedure of approving the programme to be held at the club might be streamlined to make the preparation easier. Student 4, 7, and 8 made the following constructive suggestions:

The university can improve administrative and computer system accessibility so that students can reach out when they are having problems, whether academic or club-related. [Student 7]

It is hoped that the university could improve the university system to make it more organised and efficient as there are many issues regarding the application and student portal. [Student 8]

It is difficult to obtain approval to conduct a programme. And if the TNC is late in approving it, we'll have to start over and change the deadline. I believe that if university can enhance this, it will make things much easier for others. [Student 4]

Students proposed conducting a survey to determine the types of programmes or club activities that they are interested in, in order to enhance participation rates and stimulate students' interest in university programmes. Before enforcing the new rules, their thoughts and feelings should be considered. Student 2 recommended that:

Use the university site to create a section for the club to promote club activities, registration, and so forth. Aside from that, a club or society could conduct a poll to determine student demand for the type of programme they are interested in. It can assist in motivating students to participate in a programme since the content or type of programme may be of interest to them. [Student 2]

4.2.2 Inside Classroom

Although there have been several difficulties raised by students in regard to the online learning environment. Students have suggested that lecturers be more sympathetic to students' difficulties studying at home due to varying internet connection speeds and personal issues. Furthermore, students value lecturers who can be more innovative in their delivery of lectures and incorporate asynchronous activities. They do not believe that extended hours of teaching through WebEx are sufficiently interesting. As Student 7 succinctly mentioned:

“In my opinion, I think lecturers should be more considerate towards their students' situation during online classes as not everyone is privileged with good internet connection. Some of them also have personal problems at home which they do not talk about that might affect their performance in class so I think it is crucial for a lecturer to be more understanding towards the students. In terms of teaching style, maybe lecturers can balance between having lectures and also asynchronous classes to spice things up a little. Long lectures may cause a student to be disinterested so asynchronous classes could maybe give the students something to new to focus on.” [Student 7]

Students, on the other hand, felt that maintaining a positive student-lecturer relationship would certainly boost their intellectual accomplishments and allow them to study more efficiently. Last but not least, students enjoyed engaging in class activities that sparked their interest in learning.

In terms of the lecturers, it is good to have a positive relationship among students. When students are nurtured in such surroundings, they are likely to increase their intellectual accomplishments and learn more effectively. Also, some lecturers need to allow students to participate actively in a student-centric environment and have constructive feedback. The lectures must create a stimulating environment to make her students thirst for knowledge. [Student 8]

5. DISCUSSION

This study outlines the students' involvement in university inside and outside of the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic. Astin (1991) described outcomes as the changes in a student's behaviour as a result of exposure to the environment over time. Students in our study confirmed this prediction. They described how the pandemic has resulted in their lack of participation outside the classroom because all of the programmes are held online and primarily revolve around speeches and seminars. They draw their attention away from partaking because they find it non-engaging and most of the programmes look similar. Students' development has been hindered as they cannot experience the university environment and enjoy being a university student. These findings demonstrate that students' behaviours are changed after the COVID-19 pandemic and when things all go virtual.

The I-E-O model of Astin (1991) emphasised the importance of a student's characteristics in determining their educational success. However, the COVID-19, which caused a transition in the learning environment from face-to-face to online classes, has had an impact on students' participation in the classroom. According to the findings of this study, our students have been experiencing anxiety and stress since the COVID-19 outbreak. Students claimed that their personalities had changed and that they were once active in face-to-face classes but were now passive in online learning classes. They perceived that what they learnt in an online class was less effective than what they learnt in a physical class. Astin (1977, 1982) identified that student place of residence (environment factor), which is on-campus living, would lead to academic persistence in all types of institutions and among all students, regardless of race, gender, academic ability, or family background. As a result, when students' mobility is restricted and they study from home, it can affect their learning abilities.

In comparison to the physical class, many also felt that their burden had increased and spend more effort on their assignments due to the changed of assessing modes by lecturers. Students have a harder time keeping their group members engaged and committed to finishing class group work. They believed that the amount of effort required to keep the group together was immense, which added to their anxiety. This outcome is consistent with Astin (1993) and Strayhorn (2008) studies that suggest peer interaction tends to have great impacts on students' social and personal learning accomplishments.

Nevertheless, as the lockdown continues and time passes, students begin to exhibit positive behaviours. They learn to be more understanding despite the fact that the increased workload has left them highly stressed. They are now able to successfully manage the stress and tension. This means that the practise of online programmes or classes after a long period will have favourable impacts on student retention and personal learning improvement. Furthermore, students indicated that they were able to see things from several perspectives and that their problem-solving skills had improved. They are improving psychologically and mentally as a result of the happiness they get after successfully overcoming the challenges. This supported Astin's (1991) theory that students' actual educational experiences and practises will influence their mindset and emotional psychology.

6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICES

Generally, the objective of this study is to identify the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' involvement inside and outside of the classroom. Student involvement theory by Astin (1991) was used to describe student involvement struggles during the COVID-19 pandemic. A qualitative interview was used to collect data for this study. Eight students from undergraduate programme who are highly active have been interviewed to know their current lives (student involvement in-and outside classroom activities) during this COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, their experience of student engagement, especially during the COVID-19 epidemic, in enhancing or hindering their life development as individuals as well as university students, is also being explored.

This study found that students who want to learn online, either inside or outside of the classroom, need a supportive university system. The most significant issues among students were a lack of social connection, housing conditions inappropriate for home office activities, including limited data bandwidth, and an overall feeling of diminished enthusiasm and concentration. Therefore, the university must guarantee that students have a solid system for interacting with lecturers, club advisors, administrators, course mates, and peers. For instance, the university needs a better distributed server system that plays a vital role in providing web users with a fast and efficient internet experience by reliably delivering web-based content regardless of geographic location. Furthermore, Live Chat should be introduced in every school administration, not just non-school administrations like the library, IT department, or bursary. When students face academic difficulties, they will be more engaged with school.

On the other hand, the way instructors offer the learning experience in class and at university in general shapes students' personalities, thinking styles, emotions, and rising creativity (Sirotová, 2015). As a result, a good lecturer must also be an active listener, besides being a knowledgeable and skilled teacher. Good listening skills are required to establish empathy and understanding with students and to determine if they understand what they are being taught. On the other hand, maintaining a pleasant student-lecturer relationship would undoubtedly improve their academic achievements and allow students to study more effectively (Klem & Connell, 2004). For example, lecturers should express their concern and care for students by providing meaningful feedback and conveying the notion that they are supported in their learning.

The limitation of this study is that the sample size is based on a small number of students at a university degree programme as part of an exploratory research study, hence its generalizability is restricted. Therefore, this study can be improved by using quantitative studies that yield generalisable results for a wider sample using surveys or experiments.

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