

## **Female students' view on the imposed virtual learning environment: evidence from the UK HEI**

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### **Abstract:**

COVID-19, the pandemic has seen an unprecedented disruption to education for all students. For female students, from both international and domestic backgrounds, who have additional responsibilities, such as childcare, disabled parents and/or relatives, who live in a single parental home, or who have added other burdens, this has been more particularly a challenging and difficult experience. International students, studying in the UK, faced further difficulties in relation to a wide range of issues, and those females who also faced the additional burdens were hit the hardest. The data for this paper were collected during the first lockdown in the UK. The sudden imposition of a lockdown in the UK also led to the need for rapid changes to be made to the learning, teaching, and assessment approaches used by the universities and other higher educational institutions (HEI) in the UK. This added more stress and anxiety to these female student groups. This paper used an online questionnaire to assess the impact of the changes on female students at the UK's universities. The approach takes both their qualitative and quantitative responses to identify the key issues female students faced and in learning from their experiences, allows this small piece of research to make recommendations to the universities and other relevant academic bodies, on, how to improve and how they can support these student groups during uncertain times. The recommendations closely follow those that these female students suggest themselves.

**Keywords:** Covid19, Pandemic; Female Students' Perspectives; Virtual Learning; Technology

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### **I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

In January 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared a novel coronavirus (Covid-19) infection as a public health emergency (WHO, 2020). The pandemic that followed, led to the closures of educational institutions across the world, and an unprecedented impact on the education of millions of students (Azorín, 2020; Cao et al., 2020; Majanja, 2020; Peterson et al., 2020). In the UK, in common with many other countries, this led to the closure of universities and other educational establishments (Watermeyer et al., 2020). In dealing with this emergency and the impact of the closures, the UK universities rapidly had to adapt their learning, teaching, and assessment methods to the changing circumstances. This has turned various online learning platforms to deliver their educational output. This outbreak of COVID-19 further has resulted in a digital revolution within the higher education system, such as online lectures, teleconferencing, digital open books, online examinations, assessments, and interaction in virtual environments, which has now become a commonplace (Strielkowski, 2020).

The rise in the number of female students in HEIs globally has been a feature across the world, with many countries including the UK among those successfully promoting equality and inclusion (Pilkington, 2020). In addition to attracting domestic students to the UK's HEIs, equality and inclusion have resulted in higher numbers of female students from diverse backgrounds, including international students from EU and non-EU countries and adult female students returning to education (HESA, 2020). The events that ensued have been unparalleled and this study considers the impact on female students, both domestic and international, and tries to assess their perspectives on the digital transition of learning, teaching, and assessment, at a time when

the balance of their responsibilities was upturned. This pandemic has challenged everything in its path leading to increased uncertainties and fears for all students, but most obviously for those domestic and international female groups with added responsibilities, and has been affected by lockdowns and social distancing measures introduced by authorities to counter the virus (Azorín, 2020). Students, academics, and information technology interactions have been fascinating and have been characterised by major challenges (Almaiah et al., 2020). As millions of global citizens have been isolated in their homes, frustrations have been strongly felt by all age groups and all socio-economic groups, with students featuring strongly in this regard (Baloran, 2020). The impact on female students with added responsibilities will be the main focus of this paper.

The impact that COVID-19 has had on the student experience has been unprecedented and has resulted in increased anxiety and stress, as witnessed by some recent studies (Acharya et al., 2018; Bao, 2020; Cao et al., 2020; Kaparounaki et al., 2020). Although these studies have been quick to respond and to observe the impact on students, there remains limited evidence that highlights the issues, challenges, and difficulties may have felt by female students, in particular international and mature female students, who are potentially vulnerable groups. Besides being students, these females often have multiple roles such as parents, spouses and employees, just as men do, but even in this modern age, many women are still expected to bear the brunt of the 'traditional' woman's role of child care and general domestic responsibilities (Lin, 2016; Morales, 2008), which are likely to have added further stress and anxiety during the pandemic, particularly in a lockdown situation with children now at home and needing to be schooled. The pandemic, for many, has changed the equilibrium had been established. The balance of roles was no longer manageable as it may have brought a variety of new barriers and challenges to female students in particular, and may have negatively influenced, or unexpectedly complicated, their academic lives.

Furthermore, the online transition may have also revealed inequities regarding the learning and teaching experience of different types of students, in particular female students. With online learning, it is, therefore, necessary to understand female students' perspectives and what policies and plans need to be put in place to assist in serving and addressing the needs of such students now, or whenever future unforeseen circumstances occur. Given this backdrop, the present study aims to identify the issues faced by female students in relation to the imposition of a virtual learning environment-based education, rather than the traditional learning, teaching, and assessment methods that students expected at the start of their academic year. To achieve this aim, the study attempts to identify the challenges which UK female undergraduate and postgraduate students have faced as a result of COVID-19's interruption to their education and to provide recommendations on how, in future, such interruptions can be managed more effectively.

This study makes contributions by offering a fresh debate on the teaching and learning issues faced UK HEI's female students by examining the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the student learning experience. It also offers a perspective from the female student community and highlights to educators and other relevant parties several potential strategies for dealing effectively with the issues they identify as key to the success of online learning, teaching, and assessment.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Emergencies like pandemic also appear to highlight inequalities that may have been invisible or concealed before the crisis. Research by Code et al., (2020) identifies a number of concerns about the move to emergency remote teaching (ERT), including: 1) the switching to emergency remote teaching affecting the ability of teachers to support a hands-on competency development; 2) inequitable access to learning tools, materials and resources in turn affecting both the motivation and engagement of some students; 3) some teachers expressing concerns about the overall effectiveness of online approaches; and 4) some expressing fears about the future sustainability of teaching establishments in the event of post-pandemic education being offered only via online platforms. Bao (2020) suggest that not only do some students lack ability, but some also lack self-control when face to face teaching is not available. They suggest that the overall autonomous learning impact is far from satisfactory. Finally, Demuyakor (2020), although referring to China, highlights a common global issue that where students with poor internet service relied on their university's on-site provision, this was no longer available. The Covid-19 pandemic enforced changes in HE and this has highlighted gaps and inequalities in marginalised groups (e.g. ethnic minorities, low socio-economic backgrounds, and women have a much more serious effect on work-related and economic factors) all over the world as well as in the UK. Individuals from disadvantaged or oppressed communities, educational systems, labour markets and the workplace often sustain systems of inequality, power and privilege, resulting in marginalisation and discrimination within these systems and poor educational and vocational results (Flores et al., 2019). As education and day-care centres across the UK were forced to close to foster social distancing measures, as a result, parents are now being forced to work while concurrently educating and offering 24-hour care to their children (Kantamneni, 2020). Since women are more involved in childcare and household duties than men, a

higher proportion of this burden is being borne, which has the potential to increase women's multiple roles as well as could result in mental health issues.

The prolonged duration of school closures that began on 23 March in the UK (BBC, 2020) and is unlikely to be over for many children during the current school year risks making these disparities much more important as families assume a much greater share of the responsibility for educating their children (Blundell et al., 2020). They also argue that it is likely that these pressures and enforced measures might deepen already substantial difference in educational achievement in students from poorer backgrounds and this may leave a permanent gap in educational attainment in the UK. In a study by (Bilodeau et al., 2020) women were more concerned about COVID-19 and showed more tension concerning new teaching approaches and new methods of teaching were also indirectly linked to more depressive symptoms among women by more work interfering with family. They further found that in comparison to males, having children was associated with significantly more depressive symptoms among women. Another study by (Craig and Churchill, 2020) highlighted that Before COVID-19, more mothers than fathers were unhappy with their work-family balance and partner's share. The pandemic has increased satisfaction rates for some, but they have become worse for others. A study pointed out a different perspective in terms of the impact of online education on students' perception, (Ramos-Morcillo et al., 2020) stated that a particular style of teaching (online) has been used to mark their entire academic life, and the pandemic has introduced new ways of learning with which students still do not feel secure, and its causing confusion and little protection. A recent study has reported a terrible incident of suicide that took place in India. (Moghadas, 2020) report that an educationally talented 15-year-old girl in Grade X (who won an award from her school for her "academic brilliance") committed suicide because she was unable to attend online classes or watch television lessons due to a non-functioning television set in her family home and because she did not have access to a smartphone. Her father was a day labourer but had not received any money for two months due to lockdown, and her family was now in severe financial poverty. Although this incident did not report in the UK yet, it does highlight the increased inequalities and burden, particularly that is now exacerbated due to Covid-19 pandemic. In regards to burden (McLaren et al., 2020) highlights that although pre-disaster gender burdens are well known as to be high, the pandemic shows that women's burdens are growing and they estimate that women will endure a worsening of their burden until the pandemic is well under control and for a long time to come.

Some early studies have observed issues relating to female students as can be seen above, with some of these focussing on the psychological issues (Cao et al., 2020; Kaparounaki et al., 2020); however, there remains a gap in evaluating how they have perceived being forced to use a virtual learning environment and previously untried technology which has forced an educational transition from a face to face to an online experience. Covid-19's likely impact on the educational institutional marketplace and the clinical and post-lockdown perspectives for individual educational institutions need to be investigated.

### **III. Methods**

To date, there has been little evidence of research in this area, in particular in the UK HEI context (Watermeyer et al., 2020). This study aims to add to what little research exists. The study consists of findings from the quantitative responses made by students from a questionnaire and is also accompanied by qualitative comments which they provided on their experiences. The data is taken from a questionnaire created for this purpose which was conducted in April and May 2020, during the lockdown, at a time when the UK government had announced stay-at-home orders (BBC, 2020), and the educational process has been thrown into turmoil. The questionnaire included multiple opportunities for female students to submit relevant examples of their experiences in terms of qualitative discussion. The survey was sent through a variety of communication methods, including university email accounts, university websites, and social media, and was open for one month. The survey took about four minutes to complete, and all responses were anonymous. The questionnaire's anonymous character-maintained data confidentiality and dependability.

Female university students from any subject and on any course degree programme were among the respondents, however universities were not particularly specified in the questionnaire. Table 3.1 below sets out the characteristics of the questionnaires' results. The questionnaire was developed by the author (s), informed by previous studies (Baloran, 2020; Cao et al., 2020; Khan, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d; Peterson et al., 2020; Raaper and Brown, 2020) and some recent rapid reviews that investigated the impact of COVID-19 on HE (Rajkumar, 2020).

**Table: 3.1 Sample characteristics**

Characteristic	Group	n (%)
Sample	Sum (females)	238
Age	Under 25	108 (45.38)
	25 to 34	84 (35.29)
	35 to 44	27 (11.34)
	45 to 54	13 (5.46)
	55 and over	4 (1.68)
	Prefer not to say	2 (0.84)
Degree	Undergraduate e.g. BA, BEng, BAcc, BSc etc	153 (64.2)
	Postgraduate e.g. MBA, MSc, MA, MEng etc	51 (21.4)
	Doctorate e.g. PhD, DBA etc	34 (14.3)
Student Domicile Status	Domestic UK student	161 (67.7)
	EU student (including Erasmus students in the UK)	19 (8)
	Non-EU (not UK) student	58 (24.3)

This study employed a structured online questionnaire to collect information such as: (a) technical concerns; (b) students' perspectives on the experience of online classes, as well as their perspectives on stress and anxiety induced by the online learning environment. Questions were also added to provide observations and suggestions on relevant steps that higher education institutions should take to better promote future online learning.

Based on previous research (Altintzoglou et al., 2018; Smyth et al., 2009), open-ended questions were included in the study's questionnaire to explore diverse perspectives on the VLE-based transition to online LTA during the lockdown. These questions were created to capture the perspectives of students, regardless of whether they had favourable, bad, or mixed experiences. Some changes may have increased students' stress, anxiety, and other pressures, and recording their opinions may help universities enhance the support they provide to these students, particularly the most vulnerable, in the future. Simple statistical analysis (mean, percentage) was utilised to display the quantitative data, while thematic analysis was employed to provide the qualitative comments.

#### IV. Results

**Table: 4.1 Negative Aspects of Lockdown (by age) – most to least important**

The negative aspects of the lockdown has been studied with varied age group that has been categorized into four like (i) under 25; (ii) between 25 and 34; (iii) between 35 and 44 and (iv) between 45 and 54. Amongst the various factors that has prompted most negative were (i) Under 25, Moodle or other relevant platforms has found to be least important whereas alternative assessments and online examinations were found to be the most important negative aspects, (ii) between 25 and 34, Moodle or other relevant platforms found to be the most important and online group work seems to be least important; (iii) between 35 and 44, lack of additional support found to be most important and there were three aspects that has equally found its least important position, that is, alternative assessments, Moodle or other relevant platforms and online presentations, and (iv) finally between 45 and 54, the most important aspects was found to be not being able to go to the campus and alternative assessments along with Moodle or other relevant platforms have formed the least important aspects.

Aspects	Under 25	25-34	35-44	45-54
Alternative assessments	1	5	9	10
Digital lectures	4	3	7	9
Lack of additional support	2	9	1	7
Lack of face-to-face support	6	7	2	5
Lack of interaction with fellow students	9	2	5	8
Lack of interaction with tutors	7	8	3	4
Moodle or other relevant platforms	10	1	9	10
Not being able to go to the campus	8	6	6	2
Online examinations	1	11	8	6
Online group work	3	10	4	3

Online presentations	5	4	9	4
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**Table: 4.2 Change in teaching delivery and assessments**

Select up to THREE aspects of this change in teaching delivery and assessment have you NOT enjoyed.	No. of students	Percentage (%)
Lack of face-to-face support	135	25.86
Lack on interaction with tutors	127	24.33
Not being able to go to the campus	81	15.52
Digital lectures	46	8.81
Lack of interaction with fellow students	96	18.39
Online presentations	24	4.60
Alternative assessments	13	2.49

The teaching and assessments were gone on stake during the pandemic, eventually has created a low morale among the stakeholders including student and the faculty. The stake holders were found missing the peer group interaction and also the student faculty support. In a way the digital support has compensated the requirements to an extent.

**Table: 4.3 Missed University life**

Select up to THREE aspects of university life that you missed due to NOT being able to be on campus.	No. of students	Percentage (%)
Library resources	190	20.13
Face to face teaching	207	21.93
Gym facilities	55	5.83
Computer labs	64	6.78
Working with other students	163	17.27
Socialising	164	17.37
Student union	21	2.22
Sport activities and/or clubs	32	3.39
Coffee shops	48	5.08

The students were found missing in the University campus life during the historical situation came along for a long time. The student has missed the F2F teaching followed by utilization of library resources that can be accessed physically. Of course, student union sports activities club were found as least interest among them.

**Table: 4.4 Challenges faced outside university**

Select up to THREE personal challenges faced outside of the university	No. of students	Percentage (%)
Increased stress and anxiety	239	29.36
Not being able to meet people	114	14.00
Worried about career	115	14.13
Internet provider issues	47	5.77
Health issues	47	5.77
Nothing - everything was fine	29	3.56
Child and family care	61	7.49
Personal IT and software issues	43	5.28
Financial pressures	119	14.62

Whilst analysing the things being missed inside the campus, there were a few aspects that found to be missing from outside the University Campus in the meantime. They were facing unimaginable pressures which they have not prepared for that has increased their stress and anxiety, financial pressure was unavoidable that they have not prepared for, amongst others a few found nothing lacking, it was quite normal.

**Table: 4.5 Technological issues in resolving assessment**

<b>State up to THREE technology related issues that you faced during the COVID-19 assessment period.</b>	<b>No. of students</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Slow internet connection	203	29.94
Slow computer/laptop	142	20.94
Lack of knowledge of how to use certain programmes	136	20.06
Lack of IT support from the university	76	11.21
Not used to IT equipment	30	4.42
Moodle (or other relevant platform e.g. Blackboard, Google Scholar etc).	91	13.42

A new kind of situation they have come across during the pandemic that was more relevant to the academics were (i) slow internet connection, (ii) the lower configuration of the computer or laptop that was not performing at the required pace, and (iii) lack of technical skill to use certain programmes that might have optimized the situation and turned to be better. Of course, a few were not exposed to such as technological aspects as expected.

Qualitative comments by female students

Here, we present some of the qualitative responses from the female students. These responses show diverse range of opinions from different female student groups.

Positive aspects

- In general, it has been rather enjoyable not being on campus as not only did it cut out the hours of train journeys, either way, to get to and from class, I am someone who much prefers to work alone, so not having other people as a distraction was good.
- The good thing about digital lectures is that I am free to type in my questions and comments instead of face-to-face interactions due to my social anxiety, it is a bit hard for me to speak in class and be the centre of attention when I'm asking questions. So, typing my comments and questions give me more freedom to think about what I want to say and how to stay it.

Struggles – Technology / VL

- Virtual learning, I guess will be the new normal, then the older generation needs to be better prepared technology wise.
- I really felt I missed out on help with a particular computer program I wanted to use for my dissertation.
- My computer broke. It's always been in a state but workable but unluckily enough it broke on me like the first week of lockdown. Maybe having laptops or allow people in who don't have the equipment. Costly I guess but it seems if you don't have a laptop you will struggle to pass.

Communication issues

- And third, my supervisors are also having a hard time coping with this pandemic, especially when our university is struggling, so they aren't very helpful and reliable as they were supposed to be. After all, they're just humans that undergo stress like other students or researchers because of their heavy duties. So, communication with them has been hard.
- Huge lack of communication and support at stressful times is not good for individuals.
- More/better communication, more online lectures, faster replies, better empathy, I felt abandoned by professors - they could have supported more we paid for tuition for the assistance, not to "figure it out alone".

Challenges in Exams

- The online exams for me were a test in themselves. I struggled even with the extended time. One exam was over 9 hours late in being accessible. One exam was so badly worded I didn't know what they were asking. I never finished any papers and luckily, I scraped through. In my opinion, support was non-existent.
- Friends who were sitting exams and encountered problems when their internet provider crashed for extended periods during the 24 hours allowed to sit the exam. They found this incredibly stressful.

#### Challenges in Teaching

- This term has been a complete shambles and I won't be surprised if we all fail. The university should be trying to help us, not deliberately making things tougher than they already are.
- I feel if online course is going to be available then they should be fit for purpose and also still include actual teaching from the lecturers/co-ordinators. The modules I've had this semester have seriously lacked any teaching to the extent I had to escalate the matter. There is still no teaching however I don't want to prolong my course so I'm trying to get through it. The teaching element being non-existent is extremely stressful and unnecessary.
- Actually, teach us instead of uploading slides with no information, and providing no online lectures or video resources.

#### Confronting challenges at home

- I feel that the university hasn't been very good with students who have a family. I had exams with a toddler hanging off my hip. It would have been fine if I was a student with no children, but I feel like nobody really addressed the challenges we faced as students with a young family at home. It really was not an ideal situation for an exam, and I feel there should have been other options in place. Nobody even asked if we were coping okay either, student's mental health has not been on the agenda at all.
- Finding the time to do university work in a full, busy and noisy household.
- I am a person that can't work in my bedroom, even before the pandemic, I used to go to university and work there all day. A bedroom is for sleeping and chilling only, and now that I am locked up here, I feel very unproductive working from my bedroom. And we don't have study spaces in my accommodation.
- To also appreciate that not every individual has the same home life and that not being able to physically go into university and learn face to face can be daunting for some people and it can be stressful.

#### Face-to-Face learning

The finding also indicated that the participants favoured face-to-face education than e-learning. When asked about the possibility that a certain percentage of online courses will be offered with traditional courses over the next several academic years, they don't believe this is a very important or necessary choice. The traditional educational system is the one, students prefer and used to it, and changing it is difficult:

*My feeling is that this has become more like Open University if everything moves online, which is not what I'm looking for. I like the social aspect of going to university and the face-to-face teaching. The results took longer in comparison to other universities. I feel like I'm not learning anything just memorising information.*

*I would still like to stress that going fully online would not benefit many students otherwise we wouldn't have chosen the option to come to a traditional university. I am speaking from experience as a previous distance learner both at university level and when I tried to study a professional course, in both I struggled to manage and quit both.*

*Though the university will do everything to support students, human relationships and face to face interaction remain the unique trait which online world cannot reach*

#### Stress and Anxiety

- Another point, I am an international student, and being away from my family caused me so much stress and depression, I can't focus clearly on my studies because I'm always worried about them.
- Visa issues such as those of international students. Mental health issues.

#### Challenges of mature students

Mature students tend to be the most vulnerable category, and multiple issues are found. First, since they are at home, they all have more responsibility at home, and some digital abilities that they also lack or feel less comfortable using the newer and rapidly changing online education technologies.

*As an older student, I find the online mode of learning and exams extremely tough. I work better taking notes in a face-to-face lecture and a paper exam, I am hoping we will at least have one day per week on campus. If this can't be done, I will need to have a year out.*

*I would ask to be deferred. Due to my mental health, I struggle to work remotely*

These responses from the female students were portraying the challenges faced in teaching and learning across HEI's in the UK. This could be the case elsewhere during the pandemic and more could be explored in different places with a diverse student group. These results both from questionnaire and the qualitative responses show there is a lot more to be done during emergent situations like the Covid19 pandemic. The discussion section focusses on some of the key areas that need attention during and post-pandemic in the HEI's in the UK and in the other similar contexts.

## **V. Discussion**

### **5.1 Earlier life and the drift due to pandemic**

The entire academic life has been characterised by a particular style of teaching, and they have been organised to continue it. But the pandemic has introduced another new method, that they do not yet feel comfortable with, which is causing confusion, and it has less security. Life cannot be taken as such that has been experienced or imagined based on the current circumstances, rather the preparedness in every aspect is what the education contributes to lead a successful life. The University students, especially female, have underwent many situations for which is routine. But it also requires a key skill, that has been a part for the last few decades, where the world is witnessing such as, upgrading their technical skills along with the knowledge improvement, and learning through smarter ways has also emerged during this period. Whereas they were not able to adapt to the situation, due to their current infrastructure facilities or they have been using the facility all the more that are not relevant to their professional growth.

### **5.2 Teaching – Learning Curve**

Some circumstances of disadvantage have been illustrated by the importance of adapting this method of teaching. As a result, older students, relative to younger students, and in large part women and mothers, do not have the most basic digital skills. This result is robust, as both the older students themselves and the younger ones are able to point this out in agreement with each other. They point out that a small proportion of students do not have the internet or technological tools required to follow the teaching adequately. In any event, after this initial phase is over and the absence of permanent short-term solutions for the pandemic, distance learning methods with a robust concept must be proposed with time to build well-thought-out and sustainable research plans.

The situation has also enabled the teaching – learning curve to be more viable with newness in adapting various methods. Looking at the need of the situation, the present education system goes through many business models, have spent a good amount of knowledge, and innovated many supportive tools. Microsoft's Teams, Google's google meet, Zoom's video conferencing facility, even WhatsApp have increased the accommodation of more members into their bandwidth to enhance the meeting or interacting facility. The YouTube has substituted the teaching–learning experience on one side delivery. We should be aware that we are being informed on "emergency," a temporary transition of education to alternative distribution mechanisms due to crisis situations. We must be aware of this fact. The reality is that under such circumstances this shift to e-learning is nothing to do with a design which makes the best of both the online format and its possibilities. We need to focus on the variations in rhythm, relationships between students and teachers, pedagogy, instructor position, student role, online contact synchronism, role of online assessments and feedback source. The study has applied a divergent focus to capture how far the female students have tackled the primary situation in their student life. Many syndromes were found to be new that they might have realized that could have been learnt in the due course in the past. The pandemic has changed the way of life and it has to be focussed to the changing needs.

### **5.3 A New-Norm**

It is not by the invitation the culture and civilization get changed but due to the paradigm shift happens whilst the world witnesses a phenomenon or in need of to continue to a greater extent. (i) The irony is that the student has to quickly learn the concepts that they left in the past found not useful or not very important and urgent. (ii) The University have to implement swiftly altogether a new infrastructure which they haven't budgeted in the past, but it has become primary. (iii) The female students have to be more self-sufficient than in the past, self-dependency is the firewall, non-dependency the protecting sword in the varied situation they go through. (iv) A new course that is clustered with personal psychology, medicinal knowledge to care their immune system, self-defensive program not the martial arts, but the intellectual vibrance enhancing program, a



relevant high end technical skill not the knowledge must be developed without any compromise must be inculcated and finally a social skill has to be imbibed in everyone to support each other not necessarily through the social media but a physical kind. The University may include the programs of computer-based learning, face to face learning system with a right blend to enhance the teaching – learning curve and in a way they can go beyond borders to propagate their benchmark.

## **VI. Suggestions/ need for support**

I think during this Covid-19, similar uncertainties, and emergencies, the teacher must give more attention to the students, because they are facing many problems, and they are worried about many things. Some students are very far from their parents and relatives so teachers can support them so that they can feel secure. More/better communication, more online lectures, faster replies, better empathy, I felt abandoned by professors - they could have supported more we paid for tuition for the assistance, not to “figure it out alone”. Ensuring that supporting staff contact and communicate with students to prevent stress and anxiety. To ensure that students are provided with the relevant information, support and technology/equipment to complete tasks instead of assuming everyone has access. More digital lectures that are pre-loaded and not live. Having had a hard day at work, it can be difficult to then get into doing university work mentally. Pre-recorded lectures would help with this. The lecturers will need to be more available and school facilities such as mental health facilities should be available through other means like skype, zoom or phone calls. The university should now focus on online lectures when necessary, as this can not only reduce travel fees but also allow people to feel comfortable learning in the space of their own home.

## **VII. Conclusion**

COVID-19 has caused significant disruption to academic activities. The present study assessed how the learning experience of female undergraduate and postgraduate students during this pandemic has changed. Also, it deliberately focussed on its limited qualitative discussion on their views on the impact it has had on their studies. Further, it has been suggested of how this could have been better handled now, or how it may be handled better in the future. Although a substantial proportion of students have been used to working with digital platforms for learning and learning in the UK's HE educational establishments, many faced huge challenges in studying online, in particular some of the more vulnerable female students. Based on their feedback, this study has made recommendations to the relevant bodies that are involved in educational provision. Higher Education Institutions have learned and improved their teaching learning system to a new level of upgradation in the due season. The female students were made to realise the very need that is required to lead the normal life and the right investments. Specifically, into the infrastructure from that they already have to the new that supports their routine. The pandemic has given a sea-level of change in the entire system, a paradigm shift in the personal and professional life of the teaching and student community.

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