




Learning in Covid-19 Pandemic: Phenomenological Study on Student's Experience

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Article History</p> <p>Received: September 27, 2022</p> <p>Revised: November 17, 2022</p> <p>Accepted: November 29, 2022</p> <p>Published: November 30, 2022</p> <p>Keyword: Covid-19; Online Learning; Pandemic; Phenomenology; Student Experience.</p> <p>Copyright (c) 2022 Muhammad Atmadio Ceisario, Saiful Amien, Dina Mardiana</p> 	<p>The Covid-19 pandemic changed the learning atmosphere in Indonesia and over the world, from offline to online. Lecturers and students inevitably had to accept the change in learning direction imposed by the government to avoid the ferocity of the pandemic. This study aimed to describe the online learning experience of three Islamic Religious Education students through a phenomenological approach. The authors collected the data through in-depth interviews, transcribed it verbatim into a solid description, and analyzed it through descriptive-psychological phenomenology procedures. This research showed that online learning was an interesting experience at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, it ended up disappointing because it was not optimal and ineffective, constrained by many obstacles, and expensive. More than that, the fatal impact for students was learning loss characterized by stress, loss of learning motivation and decreased knowledge/skills due to learning outputs. The results of this study recommended that educational policymakers, education practitioners, and parents should make efforts to assist students so they can get out of the learning loss phenomenon after the pandemic has passed.</p>
<p>How to Cite: Ceisario, M. A., Amien, S., & Mardiana, D. (2022). Learning in Covid-19 Pandemic: Phenomenological Study on Student's Experience. <i>Progresiva : Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pendidikan Islam</i>, 11(02), 117–131. https://doi.org/10.22219/progresiva.v11i02.22745</p>	

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world order, including the education sector. Learning carried out directly and face-to-face, like it or not, has to switch to online. In Indonesia, online learning became mandatory on March 24, 2020, based on the circular of the Minister of Education and Culture of Indonesia, Number 4 of 2020. Practically, all educational institutions, including universities, have since organized learning through the internet (Oktaviani et al., 2017; Pratama et al., 2020) with applications that are widely used in the form of *Google Classroom*, *Google Meet*, *Zoom*, *Video Conference*, *Live Chat*, and *WhatsApp Group* (Aprianti & Sugito, 2022; Awalia et al., 2021; Lufung, 2022; Ningsih, 2020; Purwasih & Elshap, 2021; Zhafira et al., 2020).

According to various earlier research, the transition from learning habits to online has significantly influenced. On the plus side, online learning can: (a) reduce the spread of COVID-19 in educational clusters, (b) force lecturers and teachers to increase their information-communication technology literacy, (c) make learning easier to do whenever and wherever, and (d) allow parents to supervise or be directly involved in their children's learning (Iqbal & Sohail, 2021; Khairunnisa & Ilmi, 2020; Syarif & Mawardi, 2021).

While on the negative side, online learning raises several obstacles: (a) Lack of effectiveness in achieving goals due to the low mastery of teachers on ICT (Asmuni, 2020; Crawford & Cifuentes-Faura, 2022; Haryadi & Selviani, 2021; Khairunnisa & Ilmi, 2020; Putri et al., 2020; Wahyono et al., 2020), (b) Limited supervision of students (Asmuni, 2020; Oliveira et al., 2021), (c) Limited learning styles that can be applied in online learning (Coman et al., 2020), (d) Unpreparedness to learn due to bad perceptions of technology (Kalimullina et al., 2021), (e) Limited time for teaching, (f) Limited alternative learning methods that can be applied in online learning (Oliveira et al., 2021; Putri et al., 2020), (g) Fatigue due to eye tiredness that looks at the screen continuously (Oliveira et al., 2021; Putri et al., 2020), and (h) Giving students excessive independent study assignments (Wahyono et al., 2020).

In the context of higher education, online learning also raises various conditions felt by students, such as: (a) Learning tends to be less active (Asmuni, 2020) and less productive (Argaheni, 2020), (b) Limitations of the internet network (Haryadi & Selviani, 2021; Lestariyanti, 2020), or slow internet connection (Iqbal & Sohail, 2021; Kurniati et al., 2020; Mengistie, 2021), and the inability to prepare internet quota continuously (Lestariyanti, 2020; Ningsih, 2020) (c) Cultural shock online learning (Haryadi & Selviani, 2021), (d) Stress due to excessive independent learning tasks (Di Pietro et al., 2020; Händel et al., 2020) or the large number of tasks collected in a short time (Lufung, 2022; Oliveira et al., 2021) (e) Decreased motivation to learn (Di Pietro et al., 2020; Hadjeris, 2021), (f) Lack of online learning media (Khairunnisa & Ilmi, 2020; Lestariyanti, 2020; Mengistie, 2021) (g) Decreased learning discipline (Fitriyani et al., 2020), and (h) The loss of intense communication between students or with their lecturers (Putri et al., 2020).

In this study, the authors examined student experiences during online learning through a first-person psychological perspective to explore and synthesize them into meaningful essential structures. The first-person perspective provides psychological insight from experiences such as worry, pleasure, understanding, perception, anticipation and so on (A. Giorgi et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2018). Therefore, this study examined the online learning experiences of direct actors, namely three students of the Islamic Religious Education study program at a private university in Malang, East Java.

The authors selected participants based on their experience and willingness to involve in this study. They considered the educational background in the same study

program, Islamic Religious Education, assuming the participants are familiar with developing educational discourses, including online learning. In addition, they also considered the final stage of their coursework, assuming that the participants are mature in age and thinking to be able to articulate their experiences into easy-to-understand descriptions.

All of these participants experienced online learning for two years during the Covid-19 pandemic, whereas the previous two years, they studied face-to-face and never imagined distance learning would occur. This psychological situation makes the authors interested in examining it phenomenologically descriptively in the question: What is the meaning of online learning for students of Islamic Religious Education?

Research Method

The authors designed this study using a descriptive-psychological phenomenology method (A. Giorgi et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2018). Jackson et al., 2018). The online learning experience, which is the main focus of this study, is relevant to the main concern of phenomenology, namely returning to the meaning behind concrete, fresh, complex and detailed experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Three Islamic Religious Education students were willing to participate in this research. In phenomenology, the number of participants does not matter because the main consideration is the depth of the experience studied (A. Giorgi & Gallegos, 2005; Langdrige, 2008). Here, the authors limited the number of participants to three because, beyond that, they would have difficulty describing participants' experiences (Amien et al., 2022; Broomé, 2013; A. Giorgi & Gallegos, 2005; B. Giorgi, 2011).

The first author of this paper has a close relationship with the three participants due to the similarity of their almatamater background. This closeness made it easier to recruit them as informants. However, the authors still try to maintain objectivity throughout the research. The second and third authors, who are not burdened with previous knowledge related to "online learning," always supervised the process of this study, especially in doing observation. Starting from preparing interview question forms and transcribing to analyzing data.

The authors collected data through in-depth interviews. As suggested by psychological phenomenology-descriptive, they conducted this interview in an unstructured, flowing, and undirected way to the participants. They interviewed all participants online through the Zoom application according to the agreed time, except for participant 1 (P1). In addition to interviews, they did it face-to-face due to technical problems while online. Each interview took 30-40 minutes, and all participants agreed to be recorded so that the authenticity of the data was maintained. Furthermore, the data were transcribed verbatim (A. Giorgi et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2018).

The authors tested the validity of the data by member-checking by sending a transcript of the interview results to each participant to be read and corrected if they found errors. Next, the participants back the corrected transcripts for the authors to use as raw data. Subsequently, the authors analyzed the data through the seven phenomenological-descriptive psychological steps developed by Jackson et al. (2018), as follows:

First, compose a concrete description. The authors changed the results of the interviews from audio to text verbatim so that they became definite descriptions that explained the participants' experiences.

Second, sense of the whole and bracketing. There are three steps the authors take here:

1. Read the interview transcripts repeatedly to get an overall feel for the phenomenon of “online learning” being studied.
2. Attempted to suspend our knowledge of the phenomenon, including personal experience, to accept whatever is described by the participant without any consideration of value.
3. Strengthened special sensitivity to the phenomenon being studied by listening carefully to what the participants said.

Third, determining the unit of meaning. The authors broke down the transcripts into natural sentences or paragraphs by intuiting each shift in meaning. In subsequent analysis, they marked each shift in meaning with a red slash for convenience. They carried out this process spontaneously by trying to read the transcript continuously from beginning to end and involving sensitivity to the phenomenon under investigation.

Fourth, doing transformation-reduction and intuition. The authors changed the meaning in the description in a phenomenological-psychological sensitive way. That was, interrogating each unit of meaning to find and express the psychological implications of the descriptions of everyday experiences that participants conveyed.

Fifth, formulating constituents and structures. The authors sought to derive a general structure from experience by reviewing all transformations of units of meaning. Here, they carried out a reflective process to determine the essentials of each description through two stages: (a) Identifying constituents by categorizing several smaller and separate subjects from meaning units, then synthesizing them using imaginative variations; (b) Identifying intra-inter structural similarities and differences between constituents, then trying to find the general structure of the “essential” constituent parts by moving away from the table to reach generalizations.

Sixth, communicating the findings. It was, communicating the constituents and their structural relationships through (a) a figure that visualized the nature and relationships among the constituents and (b) a detailed narrative that formed an important part of the findings using a genuine voice from the participants.

Lastly, interpreting the structure and its constituent parts. Here the authors discussed the structure of the experience studied and its constituents with the relevant academic literature.

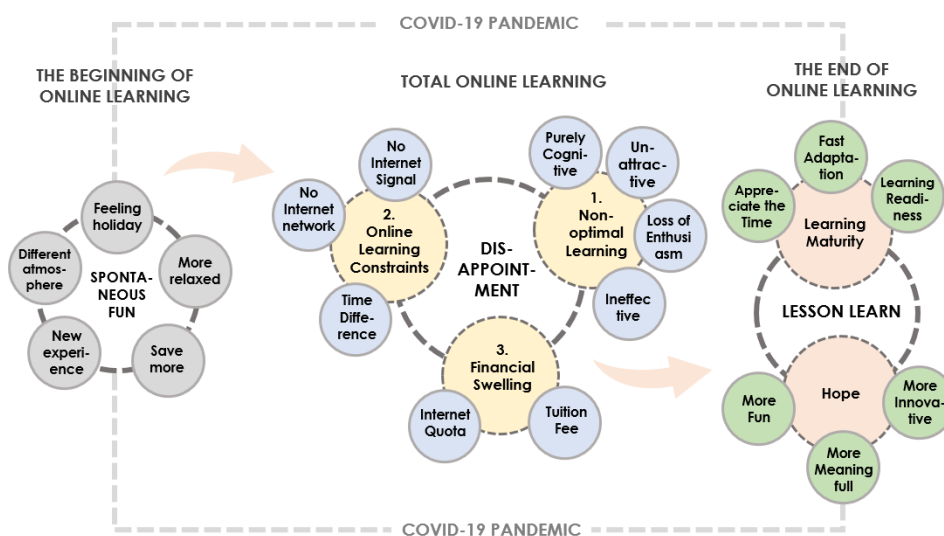
Result and Discussion

In presenting this finding, the authors integrated the transformation of the meaning unit of the three participants' descriptions into one essential structure that described their online learning experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. Next, they described the constituents of the structure as evidence found in the data.

The Essential Structure of the Online Learning Experience

The authors visualized the essential structure of the participants' online learning experience in Figure 1, where the identified constituents appeared to be interconnected and influential. Overall, the participants' experience was divided into three phases: The beginning of the implementation of the online learning policy, the total online learning, and the end of the online learning.

Figure 1: The Essential Structure of the Online Learning Experience



At the beginning of online learning, the participants seemed to feel spontaneous happiness. However, when total online learning was implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic, where they were fully involved in learning from home by always facing the computer screen, they felt disappointed with the distance learning. Nevertheless, they did not lose hope and could take the best lessons from this abnormal condition.

The Beginning of Online Learning: Spontaneous Fun

When online learning was begun, all the participants spontaneously felt joy. P1 felt happy because it made him more relaxed in studying. He always enjoyed vacations at home and could save on transportation. Likewise, with P2 and P3, both felt happy because online learning would provide a new and different experience from learning before the pandemic. Something new for P2, in particular, would provide more exciting learning conditions because he could take advantage of new things.

Table 1 shows each constituent of the experience with empirical examples of participants' expressions.

Table 1: The Constituents of Spontaneous Fun with Various Empirical Variations

The Constituent	P1	P2	P3
Spontaneous Fun	P1MU1. <i>“So, my experience when I first started studying online, it was just over a year ago... at first, I was automatically happy. Holidays, study from home. Save on gas, save on this and that.”</i>	P2MU1. <i>“The first one is happy because I will have a different experience, and a new experience too.”</i> P2MU3. <i>“However, the fun is in the online class because there are new things. I can use [many</i>	P3MU14. <i>“There’s also a feeling of joy because it’s like not going to [class] like that so that I can relax. But over time, it doesn’t feel good. How come online learning has become like this?”</i>

*apps] like Microsoft Team,
Google Meet, and Zoom.
So, the fun is there, and I
can make something new."*

Total Online Learning: Disappointment

As online learning was implemented, the participants began to feel disillusioned with distance learning. There were three sources of disappointment that they mentioned:

First, learning was not optimal or ineffective. Here, the participants felt that:

1. Learning became less meaningful because it was all cognitive and lost its affective-psychomotor dimension. P1, for example, showed that there were courses that should be practised in the field, but because of online, they were difficult to implement optimally;
2. The learning atmosphere was not exciting. According to the participants, this was due to several reasons, such as the presence of a lecturer who was illiterate about technology, so he could only share PowerPoint slides or give too many independent study assignments. Also, learning methods were monotonous, boring and not innovative.
3. The participants lost their enthusiasm for learning and tended to underestimate it. Learning was not serious, or it was not the main task of a student. They participated in online learning while lying down, playing games, or helping with parental work. Reading literature became unimportant. Accessible only, like reading comics.
4. Learning outcomes were not optimal. For example, in every structured exam using Google Forms, P1 ensured all low results. However, in the exam with assignments (take-home), he ensured all good results because he just needed to search for answers on Google.

Second, there were many obstacles to online learning. For example, the loss of internet signal, the position of the house in the islands where it was difficult to get an internet network, and the difference in the Indonesian time zone. *Third*, financial costs are increasing because the participants still had to pay tuition fees, even though they could not take advantage of campus facilities. In addition, they must also provide an internet quota that was costly.

Table 2 shows each of these constituents of experience with empirical examples of participants' expressions.

Table 2: The Constituents of Disappointment with Various Empirical Variations

The Constituents	P1	P2	P3
1. Learning is Not Optimal			
1.1 Purely Cognitive	P1MU2. <i>"Because the system is online, the transfer of values and knowledge is less than optimal. For example, courses that are supposed to be experimental or</i>	P2UM25. <i>"Learning requires meeting people. Meet lecturers, meet friends. Physical, psychological, and spiritual. From there, we can learn socialization, learn values, not just increase</i>	P3MU1. <i>"Online learning is less effective because many things are lost compared to face-to-face."</i> P3MU15. <i>"For example, if the material is practical, it</i>

participate in the field, but are carried out online, are not suitable and do not get anything."

knowledge. So, in online learning, we can interact. Still, it feels empty and foreign, especially if the participants are on off-cam. Its human touch is gone."

can't be done through lectures. Practicum online? It's not funny. What skills are strengthened?"

The Constituents	P1	P2	P3
1.2 Unattractive Learning Atmosphere and Methods	P1MU14. <i>"So, the [learning] method is monotonous, just like that. The lecturer sends the PowerPoint first; then we are told to read it and discuss it via zoom. Moreover, often send the material the day before Zoom day."</i>	P2MU2. <i>"Some class atmospheres are rigid, some are not fun, and it depends on the lecturer."</i> P2MU5. <i>"Lecturers arbitrarily determine the learning time. Some lecturers take time outside the supposed class hours, which is less effective for us."</i>	P3MU7. <i>"Oops, at that time, the lecturers just walked away. Also, not all of the lecturers understood Zoom or Google Meet. Like technology stuttering. However, some of them understand technology."</i> P3MU8. <i>"So, just use the lecture method."</i>
1.3 Loss of Enthusiasm	P1MU13a. <i>"Yes [I tend to] make it easy because the lecturer does not directly supervise me. So relax, [like] there is no enthusiasm for learning, I see."</i>	P2MU17a. <i>"Because of that, so take it easy [just] when studying online. For example, [I] turned off the camera, kept walking everywhere, and didn't listen to the lecturer's explanation. Then, [in] doing the task, [just] asking [answer from] a friend. [Doing] the exams also cooperatively. Learning is not serious, you know."</i>	P3MU10. <i>"Paying attention to [learning materials], yes, paying attention, but not so seriously. For example, while lying down. What is it? Anyway, very relaxing."</i> P3MU12. <i>"Yes, it's like that, [I] have my HP on. Later, for example, if the lecturer wants to [read] the attendance sheet, then [I] will take the HP seriously."</i>
1.4 Not Optimal Learning Outcomes	P1MU19. <i>"It is of little value if the exam is oral [interview] or structured via Google form. The value is small because I didn't read it. But if the exam is a take-home assignment, I automatically search on Google and guarantee good grades."</i>	P2MU17b. <i>"In offline [learning], the exams are in class, closely monitored; like it or not, [I] have to study right. Can't cooperate. However, in online learning, [I] relax and study only for exams. So the absorbed knowledge is under 50%."</i>	P3MU18. <i>"The downside of online [learning] is that everyone has a cell phone or laptop. Of course, you can search for answers on the internet. In contrast to offline [learning], we can't hold anything. So, the results of online learning seem fake."</i>
2. Online Learning Constraints			
2.1 Loss of Internet Signal	P1MU10. <i>"Uh, there was one time when I was giving a presentation, and the signal was cut off. It is a problem with online</i>	P2MU24b. <i>"Online learning is like that; when I was enthusiastic about following the discussion but suddenly</i>	P3MU13. <i>"I always try to turn off the camera during online learning to save my internet data. That way, who</i>

learning. It depends on the facilities and the place too.”

off. The signal is lost or disconnected.”

knows, the internet signal will be connected.”

Continued Table 2...

The Constituents	P1	P2	P3
2.2 No Internet Network	P1MU22. “My house is in the upper [mountain] area. The internet network becomes less than optimal when it is afternoon or evening. In the morning, usually, the network is still good.”	P2MU14. “Well, it’s more of a network problem. Moreover, at that time, there was only a Telkom network at home. At that time, there was a [network] disturbance throughout Kalimantan, and Telkomsel also broke. So I can’t join the lesson.”	P3MU20. “Yes, for me, network problems too. That’s one of the drawbacks of online learning that I face. I live in the village. So, only some are facilitated with a good internet network for online learning.”
2.3 Time Zone Difference	P1MU4. “There is also the disadvantage of online learning, namely the difference in time zones in Indonesia. Especially when the lecturer changes learning hours without an agreement, we can be late for class if we don’t pay attention to this trivial thing.”	P2MU8. “...especially in the eastern zone, which is two hours different. It’s a pity for friends in Central or East Indonesia. Because of that, we often tell lecturers: “Mom, here the clock is pointing at..., there is another agenda, there is another class...”	-
3. Financial Swelling			
3.1 Tuition Fee without Facilities	P1MU3. “Apart from that, I also feel at a loss because I still have to pay tuition, but learning is offline, and I have never used campus facilities.”	P3MU23a. “There is a financial policy from the campus that makes it easier for students, but still not a tuition deduction. To be precise, the student can pay in instalments.”	P3MU21a. “I still pay tuition, which is quite expensive during the pandemic. It isn’t easy. I have already paid my tuition, did not go to campus, and did not use campus facilities.”
3.2 Internet Quota/Data	P1MU23. “While studying online, I didn’t receive internet quota assistance from the government, even though I had already applied. Like it or not, I have to buy it myself. Expensive too. When online learning is about to end, I get internet quota assistance.”	P2MU23b. “How else. I have to provide my internet quota. Otherwise, I cannot participate in online learning. Additional financial expenses.”	P3MU21b. “Then, I also added to buying my internet quota. Fortunately, I got quota assistance from the Ministry of Education and Culture. It was also near the end of online learning. So, only a little help.”

The End of Online Learning: Lesson Learnt

Online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic provided valuable lessons and raised hope for participants. P1 felt that this experience required him to become more mature in learning. He quickly adapted by strengthening his skills using technology and self-study. P2 became more prepared for unpredictable changes. Meanwhile, P3 became more capable of appreciating the available time, including time together.

The participants believed that the pandemic would pass and that learning would go offline again. However, if the pandemic continues, they hope online learning can be more fun, exciting and meaningful.

Table 3 shows each constituent of the experience with empirical examples of participants' expressions.

Table 3: Lesson Learnt Constituents with Various Empirical Variations

The Constituents	P1	P2	P3
Learning Maturity	P1MU20a. <i>"I become more mature. In other words, like it or not, I have to adapt by following the [development of] technology. Then, [appreciate] more time with family. Also, I have become more independent because, in online learning, the knowledge transfer process is not optimal. Automatically like it or not, I have to learn independently."</i>	P2MU25. <i>"Like it or not, I must be prepared for change and unforeseen circumstances. That's what it means to me. Because of this online learning time [in effect], there are unknown conditions, it seems impossible to do it, but I still have to be prepared."</i>	P2MU27b. <i>"During online, we are forced not to meet face to face or virtual. From that, I have to understand and appreciate the time available, especially the time of togetherness. The point is, [I have to] value our time together and not waste it."</i>
Hope	P1MU20b. <i>"I'm sure we'll be back offline. But if it continues, online learning needs improvement to make it more meaningful."</i>	P2MU26. <i>"It can be more exciting and innovative with the development of technology."</i>	P3MU25. <i>"At least not boring. More fun and foster enthusiasm for learning."</i>

The findings above indicate that the participants' spontaneous fun at the beginning of the implementation of online learning shows a human tendency to switch to new conditions, although not necessarily better. This phenomenon emphasizes the human instinct that prioritizes emotion rather than reason in responding to what is being faced, especially in uncertain conditions (Nicholson, 1998; O'Keeffe, 2011). Whether realized or not, it is one of the capitals towards positive change (Kehoe, 2022).

Based on this, the participants had at least started online learning in these chaotic times with positive emotions. Namely, the joy of existing and the hope of goodness from it. However, in practice, it turned out that the participants felt disappointed because the

learning process needed to be more optimal, was hampered by many obstacles, and required a large amount of money.

The experiences of these participants further strengthen the findings of previous research about the ineffectiveness of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is because, among other things: a) Lecturers lack knowledge of information-communication technology (Asmuni, 2020; Crawford & Cifuentes-Faura, 2022; Haryadi & Selviani, 2021; Khairunnisa & Ilmi, 2020; Putri et al., 2020; Wahyono et al., 2020) so that they tend to give excessive assignments (Di Pietro et al., 2020; Händel et al., 2020; Lufung, 2022; Oliveira et al., 2021) and cause students severe stress (Argaheni, 2020; Kurniawati & Noviani, 2021), b) Monotonous learning methods (Argaheni, 2020; Putri et al., 2020) make learning inactive and unattractive (Argaheni, 2020; Asmuni, 2020), c) Loss of communication intensity between lecturers and students or among students (Putri et al., 2020) so that learning becomes "tasteless" and cognitive overload (Kurniawati & Noviani, 2021).

In addition, the experiences of the participants in this study which indicated a decrease in motivation or enthusiasm for learning, low learning discipline, a tendency to underestimate the learning process, and low learning outcomes emphasized the findings of previous studies (Di Pietro et al., 2020; Fitriyani et al., 2020; Hadjeris, 2021) which indicates that there has been a learning loss phenomenon in students during the pandemic (Andriani et al., 2021; Patrinos & Donnelly, 2021). It was the most feared impact of remote schools when the Covid-19 lockdown was first imposed (Brown et al., 2020; Haser et al., 2022; Wahyudi, 2021).

The term learning loss is used to describe a decrease in knowledge or skills in students. In other words, learning loss refers to a situation where there is no progress in learning for students. It can be seen from the not increasing knowledge or not increasing skills, both general and specific (Pier et al., 2021; Pratiwi, 2021).

Usually, learning loss occurs in students at elementary school age, especially during long holidays (Blaskó et al., 2021). However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, all learners, including university students, experienced the same thing. Some characteristics of learning loss that can be seen are emotionally disturbed or stress (Adi et al., 2021; Händel et al., 2020), difficulty/loss of concentration while studying (Andriani et al., 2021), low absorption (Händel et al., 2020), lack of preparation for online learning (Adi et al., 2021; Haser et al., 2022), and a lack of good interaction between lecturers and students as well as between students (Khan & Ahmed, 2021; Mardiana et al., 2022; Yeomans et al., 2021). It appears that all of these characteristics were found in this study.

Conclusion

Online learning at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic became an experience that participants felt with positive emotions: fun and hope of getting something new or different. However, they were dissatisfied when distance learning took place because it turned out to be not optimal and ineffective, limited by numerous barriers, and expensive. They experienced learning loss, characterized by stress, a loss of learning exciting, and a decline in learning output. However, they learn self-study and never lose hope through their online learning experience.

This phenomenological finding further strengthens the results of previous research on the impact of online learning during a pandemic which has significant implications for educational policymakers, education practitioners and parents to make efforts to assist students so they can get out of the learning loss phenomenon after the pandemic has passed.

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