

Adventures in Hotel Recreation: Unraveling Students' Experience and Online Learning Challenges

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has catalyzed a significant shift in education, compelling educators across all levels, including community colleges, to explore alternative teaching methods. Online learning has emerged as a prominent solution, yet it presents a unique set of challenges, particularly for students in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs within community colleges. These students engage in practical activities that demand demonstrations, visual aids, and hands-on practice to develop essential skills. The paramount importance of addressing these challenges to enhance the learning experience in TVET programs cannot be understated. This research endeavors to shed light on the experiences, challenges, and potential avenues for improvement for students enrolled in the hotel recreation subject. With a specific focus on Chenderoh Community College, the study engaged 29 students who were actively pursuing the Hotel Recreation curriculum. To elicit comprehensive insights, participants were tasked with responding to three open-ended questions related to their learning journey: their experiences, the issues they encountered, and their suggestions for enhancements. The methodology employed in this study centers on thematic analysis, a robust approach that facilitates the extraction of recurring patterns and themes from qualitative data. This analysis method provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the nuanced perspectives of students navigating the challenges of online learning within the TVET context. The findings of this investigation illuminate crucial dimensions of students' experiences with the hotel recreation subject. The emergence of four overarching themes—learning satisfaction, skills acquisition, active learning, and knowledge attainment—offers valuable insights into the positive aspects that students associate with the subject. Concurrently, the study uncovers three pivotal themes—technology and internet limitations, issues within the teaching and learning process, and concerns regarding health and environment—that encapsulate the challenges these students encounter during their online learning journey. In response to the identified challenges, students proactively propose strategies for improvement. Among the salient recommendations is the call for a balanced

approach to learning that combines indoor and outdoor activities. Additionally, the integration of experiential learning through field trips is underscored as a pivotal mechanism to enhance the efficacy of the hotel recreation subject. In summation, this study casts a spotlight on the multifaceted landscape of online learning experiences within the TVET domain, particularly in the context of the hotel recreation subject. The amalgamation of insights from students underscores the significance of tailored approaches that accommodate the practical and experiential nature of TVET programs. As a next step, further research could delve into the implementation and evaluation of blended learning models, resonating with the perspectives of students and educators alike, to holistically enhance the quality of TVET education.

Keywords: Students' Experience, Students' Satisfaction, Active Learning, Indoor and Outdoor Activities, Online Learning Challenges

Introduction

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Hotel Recreation subject was conducted in face-to-face classes at Chenderoh Community College. The Hotel Recreation subject is a compulsory module for Semester 1 students pursuing the Certificate in Hotel Operations program at Community Colleges in Malaysia. Moreover, the Hotel Recreation subject provides knowledge and guidance on the daily operations of the Recreation Department in hotels that offer indoor and outdoor recreational services. Students are exposed to the scope of duties in the Recreation Department, the types of managed recreational activities, the management of recreational equipment, the introduction to first aid equipment, and basic first aid for hotel guests, as well as recreational activity management. All these activities were conducted in face-to-face classes involving both indoor and outdoor activities.

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has greatly impacted the education sector, including the teaching and learning processes. Many countries had to take steps to close educational institutions, including schools, colleges, and universities, to reduce the spread of the virus (UNESCO, 2020). This situation prompted educational institutions to seek alternative solutions to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning in any possible way. Various new initiatives were formulated and implemented, especially in the world of education, whether offered for free or on a paid basis. Consequently, the traditional face-to-face teaching and learning method has shifted to online learning. In this situation, online learning has become the primary choice and has been widely implemented by educational institutions, including community colleges, to ensure the learning process continues.

The use of technology and the internet in online learning has brought many benefits, such as flexibility in time and location, access to a wide range of learning resources, and the opportunity for self-paced learning (UNESCO, 2020). However, online learning also poses some challenges, such as limited access to technology and the internet (Aboagye, Yawson, & Appiah, 2020; Doraisamy, 2021; Yeap, Suhaimi, & Nasir, 2021) and limited social interaction among students (Aboagye et al., 2020; Doraisamy, 2021; Ferri, Grifoni, & Guzzo, 2020).

Problem Statement

The online learning process was introduced to meet the limited learning needs due to the widespread COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020. Therefore, the teaching and learning process of the Hotel Recreation subject at the Polytechnic and Community College Education Department (JPPKK) was directed to be conducted fully online. For the implementation of the subject, Chenderoh Community College selected Microsoft Teams as the e-learning platform,

and online teaching and learning for the Hotel Recreation SOP 10123 subject were introduced to both lecturers and students. Hence, this study was conducted to explore the experiences of students regarding the Hotel Recreation subject. Specifically, this study has the following research objectives

- i. To explore students' experiences while studying the hotel recreation subject.
- ii. To explore the issues and challenges faced by students while studying the hotel recreation subject.
- iii. To explore the improvement suggestions provided by students to lecturers or the college regarding the hotel recreation subject.

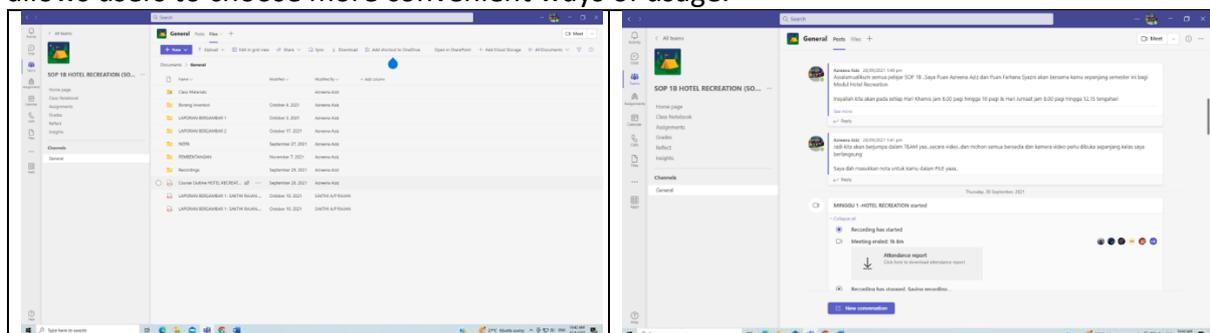
Challenges in Online Learning

Online learning has become increasingly popular in recent years, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, several specific challenges to online teaching and learning can hinder successful learning outcomes for TVET students. Some of the main challenges identified in previous studies include: accessibility (Aboagye et al., 2020), connectivity and lack of suitable devices (Aboagye et al., 2020; Doraisamy, 2021; Yeap et al., 2021), and social issues such as lack of communication and interaction with teachers and peers (Aboagye et al., 2020; Doraisamy, 2021; Ferri et al., 2020), low motivation due to fatigue from online learning (Doraisamy, 2021; Yeap et al., 2021).

In the study by Karani and Mary (2022), they also stated that digital imbalance, the required proficiency in demonstrations being limited, and ICT proficiency were major challenges in their research. Although online learning brings many benefits as stated by Katam and Otieno (2021), it has also resulted in some students dropping out of school and others suspending their studies directly due to their inability to access ICT and related tools (Karani & Mary, 2022).

Microsoft Teams and its Use in Teaching and Learning for the Hotel Recreation Subject

Microsoft Teams is an application provided by Microsoft that facilitates online communication, video meetings, file storage, app integration, and group activities, regardless of the distance between participants. The accessibility of the Microsoft Teams operating system includes Windows, Linux, macOS, iOS, and Android. The versatility of this application allows users to choose more convenient ways of usage.



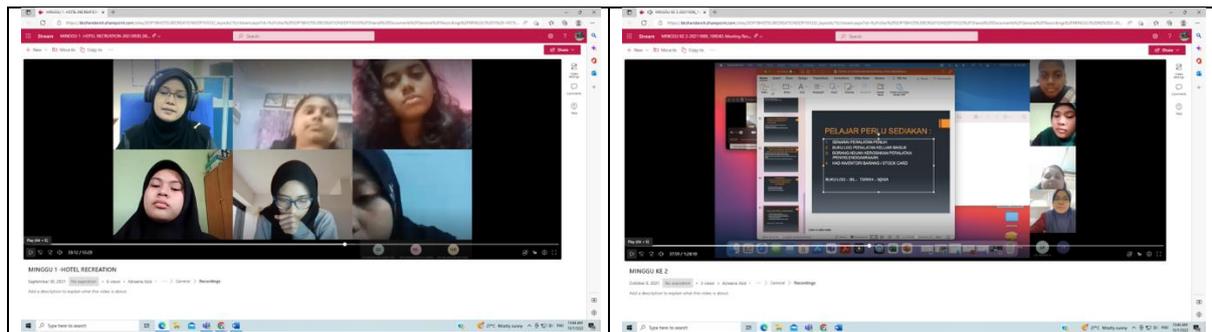


Fig. 1 Microsoft Teams Usage in Teaching and Learning for the Hotel Recreation Subject

Methodology

This study was conducted using a qualitative research approach. It involved 29 students from Chenderoh Community College who were taking the Hotel Recreation subject. Each respondent was given a pseudonym code from R1 to R29 to protect participant confidentiality and adhere to research ethics. A questionnaire with open-ended questions was applied. There were three questions used in the questionnaire distributed as follows:

- Question 1: What experiences did you gain while studying the hotel recreation subject?
- Question 2: What are the issues and challenges you faced while studying the hotel recreation subject?
- Question 3: What improvement suggestions can you propose to lecturers or the college regarding the implementation of the hotel recreation subject?

Findings and Discussion

Theme analysis was used to derive codes and themes based on the open-ended questions posed to the study participants.

Question 1: What experiences did you have while studying the hotel recreation subject? Respondents contributed their opinions regarding the experiences gained while studying the hotel recreation subject. Figure 2 shows statements from some respondents for Question 1.

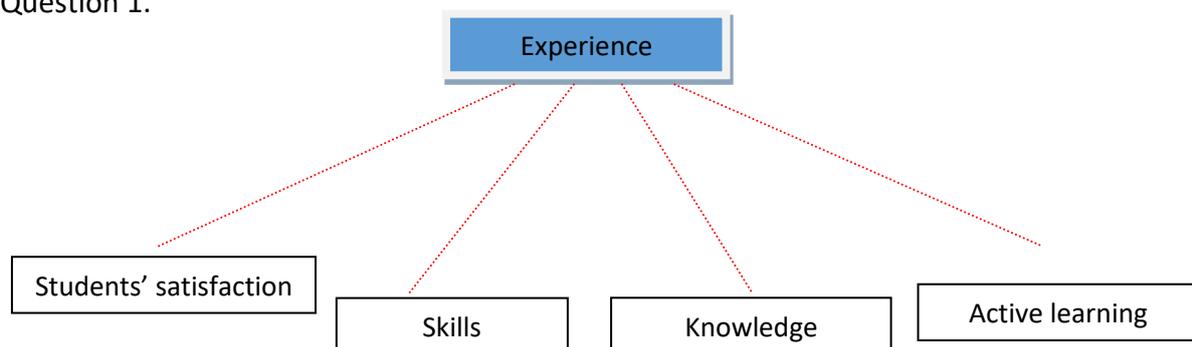


Fig. 2 Students' Experiences Gained While Studying the Hotel Recreation subject

Based on theme analysis, four main themes were generated from the experiences stated by the students in this study. They are as follows:

- i. Students' satisfaction
- ii. Skills

- iii. Active learning
- iv. Knowledge

Twelve informants expressed that they felt joyful and happy while studying the hotel recreation subject because they could learn various things such as first aid, handling recreational equipment, and conducting indoor and outdoor activities.

"I really like and am very interested in hotel recreation because I learn a lot about games and outdoor activities like jogging and traditional games." - R6

"...I prefer the hotel recreation subject because we get to do many outdoor activities." - R25

"...get to know the names of the equipment and their functions..." - R26

Next, for the second theme, skills, twelve informants mentioned that they acquired various skills through the hotel recreation subject. Some of them include:

- i. Basic first aid skills
- ii. Handling recreational equipment
- iii. Communication skills
- iv. Managing sports activities

"...learned basic first aid with JPAM" - R4

"...Learned about basic first aid, such as making a stretcher." - R7

"I learned about equipment drainage." - R10

"...conducting sports activities in college without the help of lecturers... learning how to perform CPR, extinguish fires." - R13

Furthermore, for the third theme, active learning, nine informants stated that they learned the hotel recreation subject through indoor and outdoor activities.

"...Indoor games like indoor congkak, dam haji, sahibba, and so on. Outdoor games like kayaking, swimming, ATV riding, and so on..." - R1

"...for indoor, we played chess, congkak, saiba, and the like. For outdoor activities, we played hide-and-seek and organized JPAM programs..." - R5

For the final theme, knowledge, based on the codes and themes from the participants in Table 1, four informants had opinions related to acquiring knowledge while studying the Hotel Recreation subject. The participants also agreed that they learned about recreational activities and emergency kits.

Table 1

Statements of Respondents Regarding the Implementation of Online Learning for the Hotel Recreation Subject

Respondents	Statements
R18	"I gained a lot of new knowledge about hospitality."
R19	"I learned the hotel recreation subject which I have never studied before."
R21	"While studying this subject, I acquired many things, such as knowledge about recreation and learning about first aid kits."
R24	"...is knowledge about hotel recreation."

Question 2: What issues and challenges did you face while studying the hotel recreation subject?

Referring to question 2, the feedback from the informants is depicted in figure 3.

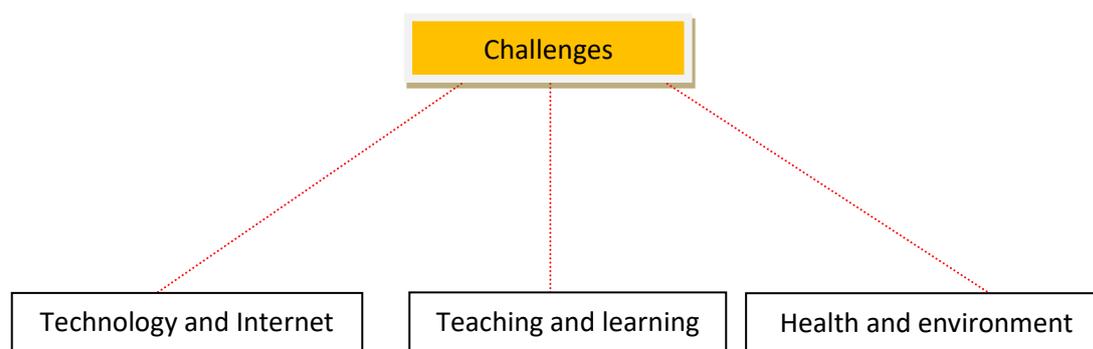


Fig. 3 Issues and Challenges Faced While Studying the Hotel Recreation Subject

Based on theme analysis, three main themes were derived from the issues and challenges stated by the students in this study. They are as follows:

- i. Technology and Internet
- ii. Teaching and learning
- iii. Health and environment

Thirteen informants mentioned that they faced technology and Internet-related problems while studying the Hotel Recreation subject. Challenges faced by students during online classes include Internet quality, as stated by respondents R14, R15, R16, R18, R19, R20, R21, R24, R25, and R29. Additionally, informant R14 stated, "The Internet in the dorm is very slow," and informant R21 mentioned, "Internet speed issues hinder my ability to focus on online learning."

Technical issues with laptops also posed a challenge for students, as mentioned by informant R29. Moreover, there were technical problems with the usage of learning platforms like Microsoft Teams, as stated by informants R27, R28, and R29.

The second challenge faced by students while studying the Hotel Recreation subject was difficulty in understanding the question requirements provided by lecturers, as expressed by R17 and R26. However, this challenge could be overcome with the assistance of lecturers and classmates who make an effort to comprehend concepts through assignments and quizzes.

The third challenge faced by students during online learning for the Hotel Recreation subject is related to health and environment. Informant R18 mentioned, *"There are disturbances from siblings,"* while informant R21 stated, *"Disturbances from noises like siblings crying, mom calling for meals, and so on."* All these disruptions indirectly affected the online learning process.

Question 3: What suggestions for improvement can you propose to the lecturers or college regarding this Hotel Recreation subject?

Referring to question 3, feedback from the informants is depicted in figure 4.

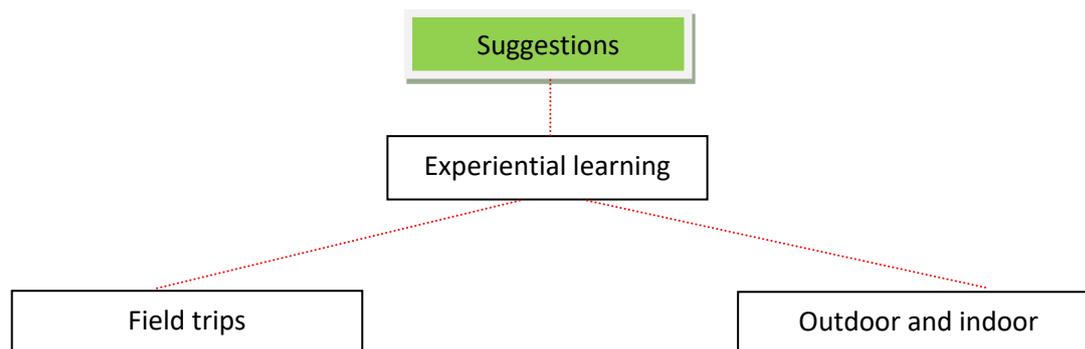


Fig. 4 Suggestions for Improvement Regarding the Implementation of the Hotel Recreation Subject

The study findings indicate that 11 informants suggest increasing both indoor and outdoor activities in hotel recreation to attract students' interest and avoid boredom during learning. Below are some examples of statements from informants:

"Increase outdoor and indoor activities to attract students and make learning more engaging so that they won't get bored with the learning process." - R1

"Add more outdoor and indoor activities and reduce theoretical learning." - R25

Additionally, 10 informants recommend organizing visits to interesting places and engaging in recreational activities outside the college. Below are some examples of statements from informants:

"... increase visits to interesting places." - R6

"... make visits to interesting places." - R17

Based on the theme analysis generated in this study, there are four main themes derived from the students' experiences in studying the Hotel Recreation subject: learning satisfaction, skills, active learning, and knowledge. Students' satisfaction emerges as the most prominent theme, with 12 respondents expressing that they feel excited and happy while studying this subject because they can learn various things, such as first aid, handling recreational equipment, and conducting indoor and outdoor activities. Kotuwegoda (2020) also found that students are interested in studying hospitality based on Field Attractiveness

and Curriculum Attractiveness. They prefer working in this industry and desire to learn related subjects. Moreover, the study findings also indicate *"I can have a more enjoyable learning experience compared to other curricula"* with a mean value of 4.29. Therefore, student satisfaction has become a major theme in thematic analysis.

The second theme is skills, which include basic first aid skills, handling recreational equipment, communication, and managing sports activities. Respondents consider the Hotel Recreation subject helpful in learning useful skills not only in the hospitality field but also for their lives.

The third theme is active learning, where respondents state that they learn through indoor and outdoor activities such as indoor and outdoor games, as well as JPAM programs. This learning strategy can enhance student satisfaction and motivation to study the subject. As stated by Chau and Cheung (2017), active learning can connect students to real-life situations they will encounter in their future jobs. Their study identified 18 essential aspects of active learning in hospitality education through comprehensive literature review and in-depth personal interviews and focus group discussions with 19 hospitality educators and eight hospitality students in Asia. The results showed a connection between active learning and student engagement (seeking knowledge and improving skills). Additionally, in the study by Ruhanen et al (2021), they state that using authentic activities reflecting real-world practitioner experiences can strengthen student engagement and develop stronger employability skills, including problem-solving, decision-making, communication, cooperation, and creativity.

The fourth theme is knowledge, where respondents state that they acquire knowledge about recreation and learn about first aid kits through the Hotel Recreation subject. Such knowledge cannot be obtained from any other subjects in the hospitality field. This indicates that the hospitality subject allows students to learn specific operational knowledge related to the hospitality industry. As indicated by Kotuwegoda (2020), the study findings show an item *"I can gain knowledge of the operations of this industry"* with a high mean value of 4.39. This suggests that when students decide to take this subject, they expect to learn operational and industry-specific knowledge in hospitality.

Meanwhile, three main themes emerged from the issues and challenges faced by students while studying the Hotel Recreation subject: technology and internet, teaching and learning, and health and environment. Technology and internet challenges, such as slow and unstable internet connections, disrupt the learning process. In the study by Hassan et al (2020), a weak internet connection was found to affect students' motivation in using e-learning. Similarly, a study conducted by Quah and Suid (2021) at Sungai Petani Community College (KKSP) yielded similar findings. Unstable internet and insufficient data are among the challenges faced by KKSP students. Additionally, findings from existing studies indicate that students face technical challenges related to the use of learning platforms, such as Microsoft Teams. UNESCO-UNEVOC's report also states that access to data, devices, and the internet remains a challenge for students, especially in rural areas (Neal, 2020). The third challenge, health and environment, also contributes to difficulties in students' focus on learning. In the study by Barrot et al (2021), their findings also indicate that the biggest challenges are related to the learning environment at home with a minimum value of 3.49, particularly concerning home disruptions, limitations in fulfilling specific subject requirements, and difficulties in selecting study areas and schedules.

From the thematic analysis for improvement suggestions, one main theme can be identified: experiential learning through two learning strategies: i) increasing indoor and

outdoor activities and ii) conducting visits. Students suggest increasing indoor and outdoor activities and conducting visits so that they can learn through experiences. The study conducted by Azar et al (2020) also states that experiential learning is considered more effective compared to traditional classroom learning, according to responses from hospitality lecturers and industry professionals. Similarly, Sebby and Brown (2020) state that teaching visits provide students with opportunities to gain hands-on experience in managing programs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study shows that the Hotel Recreation subject offers many benefits to students, including learning satisfaction, valuable skill development, and knowledge acquisition. While online learning can facilitate overall learning, as stated by Al Rawashdeh, Mohammed, Al Arab, Alara, and Al-Rawashdeh (2021), challenges still exist, such as technology and internet problems and an unfavorable learning environment. The challenges of online learning for TVET students can significantly impact their academic success. Therefore, it is essential for TVET institutions to take steps to address these challenges.

Some steps that TVET institutions can take to address the challenges of online learning include

- Providing students with the technology and connectivity they need for online learning. This may involve providing students with computers, tablets, or other devices, as well as ensuring they have access to reliable internet.
- Offering technical support to students to assist them in using online learning platforms. This may involve providing students with training on how to use the platform and offering help if they encounter any issues.
- Motivating students to stay engaged in online learning. This may involve providing students with incentives to complete their coursework and creating a supportive learning environment.
- Providing students with opportunities for social interaction with peers and instructors. This may involve using online forums, chat rooms, or video conferences to connect students with each other and with their instructors.
- Assisting students in developing self-directed learning skills. This may involve providing students with training on goal setting, time management, and staying motivated.

By taking steps to address the challenges of online learning, TVET institutions can help their students succeed in their studies. Further research can be conducted to examine the relationship between learning satisfaction and academic achievement in the Hotel Recreation subject. Additionally, further studies can consider the perspectives of lecturers and support staff to understand the issues and challenges faced during the teaching and learning of this subject.

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