



Enhancing the Experience of Online Students

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Abstract

Asynchronous online learning has become a central component of higher education provision, offering flexibility for diverse student populations. However, maintaining a high-quality student experience at scale remains challenging. This presentation reports early findings of a SoTL project evaluating the experience of online students in a fully asynchronous, tutor-supported online learning model for Master's courses in Business, Computer Science, Nursing, and Psychology, implemented at Sheffield Hallam University in partnership with Higher Ed Partners (HEP). This study examines online students' perceptions of course design, delivery, and engagement. These students are typically mature learners, balancing study with work and personal commitments, and tend to prioritise flexibility and accessibility. Understanding their experiences is therefore critical to sustaining engagement and reducing dropout rates. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, this project draws on student surveys, focus groups, and learning analytics to examine patterns of engagement, satisfaction, and attainment across and between courses. The aim is to identify key strengths of our provision, which may include flexible learning structures and modular design, alongside challenges like feelings of isolation, varying levels of peer interaction, and differing expectations of tutor support. This presentation will also identify priority areas for enhancing student experience, considering how these improvements can be implemented as the provision scales. By focusing on the student perspective, this study contributes to emerging evidence on effective asynchronous learning design for intensive online models and offers practical recommendations for developing flexible, inclusive, and engaging online provision.

Keywords

Asynchronous online learning, distance learning, flexible learning, online pedagogy, student experience

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