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Student Evaluation of Their Postgraduate Courses: A Case Study at the Royal University of Phnom Penh

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កម្រងសំណួរតាមរចនាសម្ព័ន្ធ ត្រូវបានប្រើក្នុងការប្រមូលទិន្នន័យដោយអនាមិកពី 14 វគ្គ សិក្សាតាមប្រព័ន្ធ អនឡាញ ក្នុងកម្រិតថ្នាក់បញ្ញាបត្រជាន់ខ្ពស់សម្រាប់ប្រមូលឆមាស ដោយមាននិស្សិតចូលរួម 270 នាក់។ ការស្ទង់មតិនេះត្រូវបានធ្វើឡើងដើម្បីស៊ើងយល់អំពីវគ្គ សិក្សាដោយពិនិត្យលើវិធីសាស្ត្របង្រៀន សម្ភារៈនិងធនធានចាំបាច់សម្រាប់ការសិក្សា និងទម្រង់បែបបទនៃការសិក្សាតាមប្រព័ន្ធ អនឡាញ។ ការជ្រើសរើសសំណាកតាមបមាណភាគ ត្រូវបានប្រើប្រាស់សម្រាប់ជ្រើសរើសនិស្សិតដែលសិក្សាក្នុងកម្ម វិធីទាំងនោះ។ កម្រងសំណួរចំនួន 181 ត្រូវបានបំពេញហើយប្រគល់ជូនអ្នក ស្រាវជ្រាវវិញក្នុងរយៈពេលមួយសប្តាហ៍។ ការសិក្សាបានរកឃើញថា និស្សិតពេញចិត្តយ៉ាងខ្លាំងលើវគ្គ សិក្សាតាមអនឡាញ។ ទិដ្ឋ ភាពសំខាន់ៗជាច្រើនដែលនិស្សិតភាគច្រើនពេញចិត្ត ចំពោះសាស្ត្រាចារ្យរួមមាន៖ បុគ្គ លិកលក្ខ ណៈ ចំណេះដឹងជ្រៅជ្រះ បទពិសោធបង្រៀន វិធីសាស្ត្រ លើកទឹកចិត្ត ការអនុវត្ត វគ្គ សិក្សា សកម្ម ភាពដែលធ្វើឱ្យនិស្សិតធ្វើការស្រាវជ្រាវដោយខ្លួនឯងបន្ថែ មទៀត ភាពងាយស្រួ លនៃការប្រគល់កិច្ច ការ សរសេរ សម្ភារៈនិងធនធានចាំបាច់សម្រាប់សិក្សា និងការធ្វើវាយតម្លៃលើ លិទ្ធ ផលសិក្សារបស់ពួ កគេ។ តាមរយៈការសិក្សានេះដែរ បានបង្ហាញពីឧបសគ្គ សំខាន់ៗជាច្រើនដែលរារាំង ការចូ លរួ មពេញលេញក្នុង ការរៀនតាមអ៊ីនធឺណិតដែលមានសៅអ៊ីនធឺណិតគ្រប់គ្រាន់ ទម្រង់នៃការសិក្សាអនឡាញ កង្វះទំនាក់ទំនងក្នុងថ្នាក់ និងកត្តាជំរុញទឹកចិត្ត ក៏ដូចជាការចូ លរួ មក្នុងសកម្ម ភាពសិក្សាតាមប្រព័ន្ធ អ៊ីនធឺណិត។ ជាងនេះទៅទៀត មតិយោបល់គុណ ភាព មានតម្លៃ សំខាន់ក្នុងការសម្រេចចិត្ត ប្រកបដោយប្រសិទ្ធ ភាព ក្នុងការកែលម្អ គុណភាពនៃវគ្គ សិក្សាទាំងមូល រួ មមានកម្ម វិធីសិក្សា គុរុកោសល្យនៃការបង្រៀន រង្វាយតម្លៃ និងធនធានសិក្សា។ ការសិក្សាបានបង្ហាញថា ការស្ទង់មតិនិស្សិតថ្នាក់បរិញ្ញាបត្រជាន់ខ្ពស់តាមប្រព័ន្ធ អ៊ីនធឺណិត គឺជាវិធីសាស្ត្រ ល្អ ក្នុងការវាស់វែងប្រសិទ្ធ ភាព នៃការរចនាកម្ម វិធីសិក្សា និងការបង្រៀន។

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Abstract

A structured questionnaire, collected anonymously from 14 master-level online courses for six semesters to 270 students, was examined to explore students' evaluation of their courses, their instructors' teaching performances, the learning materials and resources, and the online learning platforms. A quota sampling was employed for selecting these participants from a large public teaching university located in the city. These students were asked to complete the structured questionnaire within a one-week period. One hundred and eighty-one questionnaires were completed and returned to the researcher. The study found that students highly satisfied their online courses. Various main aspects that students mostly preferred comprising their instructors' personality, instructors' in-depth knowledge of the courses, their teaching experiences, their encouragement and motivation provided to students, the conduct of the course, learning activities that encouraged students to conduct further own research, the easiness of uploading their coursework written tasks and learning materials and resources, and the employment of assessment tasks to measure their learning achievements. It was found that there were various main obstacles being identified to hinder students from fully participating in their online learning including internet connection, learning platforms, lack of physical contacts during class time, and students' motivation and engagement with their online learning activities. It was further found that the qualitative comments were valuable to make informed decisions for improving overall courses quality including curriculum, teaching pedagogy, assessments, and resources. The study concluded that the student course evaluation instrument measured master-level online courses in the areas of course design and delivery effectively.

1. Introduction

After the establishment of the National Program to Rehabilitate and Develop Cambodia (NPRDC) in 1994, a priority was the re-establishment of the higher education sector (Clayton and Yuok, 1997; Sam et al., 2012). In 1994, there were only eight higher education institutions (HEIs) in Cambodia, all public institutions (Tao and Kao, 2023). As such, there is a sudden increase in demand for the capacity of higher education sector to absorb students. Given a small number of HEIs, there was severely constrained regarding student enrollment numbers. The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGoC) therefore responded by enabling the establishment of Cambodia's first private higher education institution (HEI), namely Norton university in 1997. Private sector involvement subsequently rushed to fund the establishment of new private universities (Rath and Tao, 2022). By 2023, there were 132 higher education institutions (48 public and 84 private institutions), and the gross enrolment rate for the sector was 12.43% (MoEYS, 2023). Private higher education institutions accounted for about 60% of the students at all the HEIs.

The trend in recent patterns of the HEIs participation was that total enrolment numbers were declining from 249,092 in 2013-14 to 209,059 in 2021-22 (MoEYS, 2023). The total enrolments dropped from 222,875 in 2018-19 to 198,363 in 2020-21. In particular, a sharp drop in master's degree enrolments from 23,256 in 2018-19 to 9,984 in 2019-20 and to 8465 in 2020-21 contributed significantly to the decline (MoEYS, 2022). The exclusion of student statistics of the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training (MoLVT), the decreased percentage of high school graduates, and the Covid-19 pandemic may have explained the sudden drop in master's degree enrolments. Because of the widespread Covid-19 pandemic in many countries including Cambodia, education in Cambodia had been threaten, in which all schools and HEIs shifted from the physical teaching and learning in the classroom to online teaching and learning modes as an alternative to continue the educational process when the classrooms were closed (Chet et al., 2022).

In responding to the widespread of Covid-19, MoEYS announced the closure of all schools and HEIs on 16 March 2020 and quickly shifted to online teaching and learning modes. The shortages of infrastructure and learning resources were the main challenges due to the abruptly close of all schools and HEIs in Cambodia. To ensure the quality of online teaching and learning modes during Covid-19 pandemic, MoEYS and Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) conducted a joint Covid-19 assessment in 2020 and found that 70% of students engaged in some forms of alternative online learning and only 35% of them had access to online learning materials (MoEYS and ESWG, 2021). Subsequently, MoEYS established a Cambodia Education Response Plan (CERP) to Covid-19 Pandemic to support the implementation of the Educational Strategic Plan 2019-2023 and responded to educational crisis in July 2020. The CERP covered four main objectives comprising (1) staff and students could continue online teaching and learning safely, (2) students and educational staff could return to educational institutions safely, (3) staff and students could teach and learn in an adaptive learning environment, and (4) the national and sub-national levels of MoEYS had increased resilience (MoEYS, 2020). Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, nearly all HEIs programs in Cambodia were implemented physically through offline modes. The teaching and learning through online modes

in Cambodian HEIs had just emerged due to the national lockdown to prevent the spreading of the epidemic in the whole country (Lim et al., 2021). Therefore, online teaching and learning in Cambodian HEIs was still in its infancy stage and needed further development.

The Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC) emerged in 2003 for ensuring the quality of HEIs. The ACC conducted both institutional and program-level evaluations. At the program level, the ACC had criteria comprising six aspects for Foundation Year Course evaluation. These aspects comprised management and governance, strategic planning, curriculum, academic staff, teaching and learning resources, and student admission. At the institutional level, the ACC had criteria including nine aspects for institutional accreditation. These aspects comprised vision, mission and goals, management and governance, academic staff, academic program, student services, learning resources, physical facilities, financial plan and management, and internal quality assurance (Rath and Tao, 2022). In addition, each higher HEI was required to establish an internal quality assurance unit to conduct self-assessment reviews to enhance institutional quality by the ACC (Un and Sok, 2014). However, only a small number of HEIs had established these internal quality assurance units to date.

To ensure the quality in the master programs, it is important to implement student course evaluation at the end of each course. Over the past decades, all master programs in Cambodia were mainly conducted on campus (Lim et al., 2021). However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, all master-level programs were operated through online modes due to the closure of all HEIs and travel restrictions. As such, there was a pressing need for having online student course evaluation tools in order to ensure the quality of teaching and learning through online modes in Cambodian HEIs. Thus, exploring students' evaluation of their online course implementation and the usefulness of the evaluation results for pedagogical improvement and course development were vital. However, the research on students' evaluation of their master-level online courses in Cambodia was still limited.

The current study furthers the research in this online student course evaluation by exploring postgraduate students' evaluation of their master-level courses, their instructors' teaching performances, the learning materials and resources, and the online learning platforms. The study also aimed to examine the usefulness of the open-ended responses for making pedagogical and curricular changes to the online courses.

1.1. Conceptualizing student course evaluation at the HEIs

Student evaluation of teaching was is important for a number of reasons. These evaluations ensured quality in university teaching (Ahmad, 2018), provided an independent method of gauging instructors' teaching effectiveness (Gravestock and Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008), guided in making decisions for major curriculum changes and professional development for faculty members (Hatfield and Coyle, 2013), and helped in establishing a framework to better quantify and reward good teaching outcomes (Ahmad, 2018). Student evaluation of teaching effectiveness was an important aspect of internal quality assurance (Bradley, 2016). Internal reviews concerned the processes of quality assurance employed by an institution for the purpose of its institutional improvement (Rath and Tao, 2022). There was a shift in student evaluation of teaching from paper-based to online surveys (Ahmad, 2018). Paper-based evaluation had been the most common form of student assessment of teaching worldwide. Nevertheless, there had been a shift away from paper-based to online evaluation over the past decade (Ahmad, 2018). Given that the internet was becoming more available and affordable, traditional paper-based data collection methods of course evaluation seemed expensive, time consuming, and less efficient (Calkins and Micari, 2010). There were positives of this shift to online course evaluation. One of the most important positives was efficiency gains in terms of turnaround time from students and significant cost savings (Gravestock and Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008). Moreover, online course evaluations allowed students the time, ease and ability to refine, expand and reflect on responses without the constraint of an in-class time bound environment to complete paper-based course evaluation surveys. This increased student response to open-ended questions which provided qualitative data that was instrumental in improving teaching practices (Ahmad, 2018).

Over than 90.0% of course evaluation instruments comprised both open-ended and closed-ended items (e.g., rating scales) emphasized the quality of teaching and the content of the course (Gravestock and Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008). Students were generally guaranteed anonymity and responses were gathered at the end of the course (Hornstein, 2017). Today, course evaluations were anecdotes ubiquitous part of the HEIs landscape. Course evaluations were so pervasive in HEIs due to the fact that they provided universities with a seemingly objective measure of teaching effectiveness (Ahmad, 2018). Furthermore, they were usually the main aspect in an accountability process in which HEIs gauged the quality of the education they provided (Bradley, 2016). Given the content included in these course evaluations, it was reasonable to assume that course evaluations would provide a valid account of how instructors performed in their classrooms. Nevertheless, there was a considerable number of studies that called into question the validity of course evaluations (Hatfield and Coyle, 2013; Hornstein, 2017; Ahmad, 2018). Most of these criticisms were

associated with low response rates, biases in students' responses, and the ways in which these evaluation results were utilized. Some studies had reported that the instructors' personalities (i.e., likeability and sense of humor) influenced on students' course evaluation ratings (Calkins and Micari, 2010; Hatfield and Coyle, 2013). Despite these concerns, course evaluations were still widely employed by many HEIs in various countries including Malaysia, Australia, Britain, and the United State of America.

Over the past century, student evaluations of their courses had steadily continued to take precedence in HEIs evaluation systems in many countries including China, Malaysia, Australia, Britain, and the United States of America around the world. Since student evaluations were considered as the most influential measure of teaching effectiveness and course improvement, students' active participation and their meaningful input could be critical in the success of such instructors' performance evaluation systems and program developments. Given that the course evaluation surveys were intended to evaluate the performance effectiveness of the instructors within HEIs, faculty members were generally encouraged to make necessary adjustments to their instruction and other aspects of their course based on the evaluation results (Hobson and Talbot, 2001). Furthermore, course evaluations were employed as a summative measure and utilized in various high-stakes evaluations of instructors, including tenure, promotion, and course offerings. However, some HEIs mainly employed course evaluations as only a part of the decision-making process in high-stakes decisions (Dommeyer et al., 2004).

Given its crucial role, there were a number of studies had looked into students' perceptions of the teaching evaluation systems and the use of course evaluation results in various countries including Australia, Britain, and the United States of America. One study employed the expectancy theory to evaluate the main factors that motivated students in the Mid-west university in the USA to participate in the teaching evaluation process (Chen and Hoshower, 2003). The results showed that students perceived instructors' performance improvement to be the most vital outcome of a teaching evaluation system. The second most important outcome was employing teaching evaluations to improve course content and format. Students perceived that it was less vital to utilize the course evaluation results for making decisions on instructors' tenure, promotion and salary rise and on students' decisions on course and instructor selection. Students' motivation to participate in course evaluations was impacted by their expectation that they could provide meaningful feedback/comments for their course improvements (Chen and Hoshower, 2003).

Another study examined the evaluation format by comparing traditional paper-and- pencil methods for course evaluation with electronic methods in Midwestern public university in the USA. There were eleven instructors participating in the study. Each instructor was required to teach two sections of the same course. At the end, an online course evaluation had been provided to one course while a traditional pencil and paper evaluation had been provided to the other course. There were 519 students enrolled in these 22 sections (Donovan et al., 2006). Researchers analyzed both open-ended comments and quantitative rankings for the course evaluations. The study found that there were no significant differences in rating scale results between the two evaluation formats. Nevertheless, differences were found in number and length of feedback, the ratio of positive to negative feedback, and the ratio of formative to summative feedback. Students completing the evaluations online wrote more feedback, and the feedback were more often formative in terms of giving specific reasons for judgment so that the instructor knew what the students were suggesting being kept or changed in nature (Donovan et al., 2006).

A study conducted with four institutions, University of Michigan Ann Arbor, Virginia Tech, University of Maryland located in the USA, and University of Cambridge located in Britain, through their collaboration on an open-source online evaluation system within Sakai. Response rates had a range from 32% to 79% in various pilots. The study found that online evaluations were beneficial in terms of their security, validity, efficiency, cost savings, rapid results turnaround, and higher quality student feedback (Emery et al., 2008). In consistent with the findings from Emery et al.'s (2008) study, Collings and Ballantyne (2004) found that online evaluations had a decrease in response rate but an increase in comments compared to paper evaluations. Collings and Ballantyne then questioned whether an increased response rate online could lead to less valuable comments and reported that this would be likely if the students most eager to participate were also most likely to comment. However, Collings and Ballantyne (2004) found that regardless of when students responded to the survey, the percent commenting and the length of comments were nearly the same, with a slight decrease for those responding near the end of the time period. Collings and Ballantyne (2004) concluded that qualitative feedback was more valuable than quantitative feedback, and increasing response rates was not necessary for quality feedback. Qualitive feedback had been referred to the specific written comments directing towards teaching pedagogy, instructors' teaching performances, curriculum, and resources. In contrast, quantitative feedback was mainly related to only rating scores provided to each rating scale in the survey (Collings and Ballantyne, 2004).

In another study of a team-taught course (enrollment = 169), students were randomly assigned to complete

evaluations online (n= 50) or by traditional, paper-based methods (n = 119) in one Pharmacotherapy course in a university in the USA (Kasiar et al., 2002). Online and traditional evaluations were compared for the Likert scale, quantity and quality of student comments, student satisfaction, and staff and faculty time consumption. Of the 252 questions asked of each student, 72 (29 percent) had a significantly different Likert score. The number of comments was significantly higher in the online group compared to the traditional group. Students, faculty, and staff rated the online process as more convenient and less time-consuming than the traditional method. Kasiar et al. (2002) concluded that an online evaluation system using subsets of students to complete each evaluation could be utilized to obtain representative feedback/ comments. The online process yielded quantitatively and qualitatively superior student comments, enhanced student satisfaction, and more efficient use of faculty and staff time (Kasiar et al., 2002).

Ahmad (2018) reviewed the major literature works over the period 2000-2013 and summarized the main advantages of online method of evaluation comprising more written feedback, refining, reflecting, expanding on responses, richer and higher data collection, providing more comments about instructors, efficiency, cost savings, richer responses, quicker and cost savings. The response rate could be increased if instructors were informed about the timing of when the surveys were sent out, so they could also make a personal appeal (both in class and by email) to the students to complete their course evaluation surveys. In this communication, instructors should explain to the students how their comments would be taken seriously, and how it would be used to improve teaching (Heinert and Roberts, 2016). The key message was to inform students about the purpose of evaluations comprising, let students know that the instructors would use student feedback to make changes in the course and gave students some examples of useful feedback the instructors had received in the past, and how the course/pedagogy had benefited in response.

Diaz et al. (2022) conducted a study to obtain a better understanding of how 317 faculty members used the results of their student course evaluation. The study employed a survey comprising 28 Likert-scale items and two open-ended questions and administered this survey to faculty members teaching in one research intensive university from a Southeastern United States of America. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the quantitative data while the qualitative data was analyzed by using a thematic analysis. Most participants in this study (89%) reported that they used the feedback provided by the course evaluations to make changes in their courses. In the qualitative section, faculty members believed that course evaluations provided meaningful input regarding student learning. In contrast, they stated that they would like to see more open-ended questions within course evaluations. Findings from the study suggested that faculty members valued the information they received from students, but course evaluations needed to be better targeted to the needs of the course and faculty staff using it (Diaz et al., 2022).

Research Design and Study Area

This study was designed to explore students' perception towards evaluation of their master-level online courses effectiveness. The questionnaire consisted of Likert scale with five level of 48 questions and three open-ended items. The questionnaire collected anonymously from 14 master-level online courses for the duration of six semesters in 2020-2021. The study employed a quota sampling to recruit 270 students (i.e., 230 males and 40 females) from the Faculty of Education (FoE) at the Royal University of Phnom Penh. The main criteria for selecting these participants included types of master programs and courses they took (i.e., education, and curriculum and instruction majors), online learning platforms (i.e., Zoom and Microsoft Teams), and the status of the university they enrolled (i.e., public university). These students were asked to complete the structured questionnaire one time within a one-week period. One hundred and eighty-one questionnaires were completed and returned to the researcher, resulting in a response rate of 67.0%. Slightly over 72.0% of them were male. Their ages had a range from 24 to 42 years, with a mean age of 30.7 (SD = 5.1). Approximately 97.0% had full-time jobs, while 3.0% were unemployed. Fifty percent of them were teachers at private schools, while 10.0% were teachers at public schools. About 40.0% worked at local NGOs in Cambodia.

The development of the structured questionnaire of this Online Course Evaluation was based on a thorough literature review related to Online Course implementation comprising course delivery, instructors' teaching performances, learning materials and resources, and learning platforms. The validity of the questionnaire was examined through a consultative meeting with five potential teaching staff working in one large public university in which the survey had been administered to the participants. The Online Course Evaluation Questionnaire had six parts. The first part comprised the participants' demographic information. The second part covered the evaluation of the courses. The third part focused on the evaluation of instructors' teaching performances (i.e., teaching pedagogy, and assessments and feedback). The fourth part emphasized the learning materials and resources evaluations. The fifth section explored the evaluation of online learning platforms. Parts two to five employed a five-point rating scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The last part covered open-ended items related to aspects of the

courses that were most useful, challenges about online learning, and the ways in which to address challenges encountered in online learning. IBM SPSS version 27 was utilized to analyze the quantitative data, focusing on descriptive statistics including percentage, mean scores and standard deviation. The qualitative data (i.e., open-ended responses) was analyzed using both descriptive and narrative approaches by dividing them into three main themes comprising aspects of courses that students considered as the most importance for their learning, challenges encountered for their online learning, and the ways to deal with such challenges.

The present study employed a structured questionnaire to obtain an understanding of research inquiry for exploring students' satisfactions towards their 14 online master-level courses, their evaluation of instructors' teaching performances, their evaluation of the learning materials and resources, and their evaluation of the online learning platforms. The study also aimed to examine the usefulness of the open-ended responses for making pedagogical and curricular changes to the online courses. The study had a limitation due to the fact that it was conducted within only one public university. Therefore, generalization for other universities in Cambodia was limited.

2. Results and Findings

Overall evaluation of the postgraduate courses

According to Table 1, overall, the respondents had highly satisfied with overall evaluation of 14 online courses provided by FoE in the master program. The respondents highly satisfied with activities attached in the courses. They included the conduct of the course and the assessment tasks, assignments, presentations, etc. were consistent with the course expected learning outcomes, the course encouraged them to think carefully about the topics and to form new ideas and understandings, followed by the procedures and guidelines they had to do to succeed in the course. This was followed by the online learning platforms allowed effective communication between the instructors and students. In contrast, they just satisfied the activity that was associated with they felt they could stay motivated and engaged with their online learning tasks.

Table 1: Evaluation of the course of Master program at FoE, RUPP

Attributes	*WAI*	*Overall assessment*
The conduct of the course and the assessment tasks I am asked to do such as reflection papers, assignments, presentations, etc. are consistent with the course expected learning outcomes.	4.28	SA
The course encourages me to think carefully about the topics and to form new ideas and understandings.	4.28	SA
The procedures and guidelines I have to do to succeed in the course, including assessment tasks and criteria for assessment, are made clear to me.	4.26	SA
The course syllabus states clearly the learning outcomes that I expect to acquire after completing the course.	4.22	SA
Marks for reflection papers, presentations, assignments and/or tests in this course are given to me within reasonable time.	4.21	SA
The course has encouraged me to manage my own learning.	4.19	SA
It is easy to find the information and resources I need on the course online learning platforms.	4.18	SA
In addition to marks, I find the feedback provided by my instructor and/or my classmates helpful to improve my work quality.	4.17	SA
I am clearly informed how my online learning will be assessed.	4.14	SA
Overall, I have satisfaction with my online learning in this course.	4.08	SA
The online learning platforms provide me with opportunities to communicate and/or collaborate with my classmates.	4.06	SA
This course helps me to develop problem-solving skills that will be useful to me professionally.	4.06	SA
I feel that I develop a deep understanding of the course topics.	4.02	SA
The online learning platforms allow effective communication between the instructor and students.	4.00	SA
I feel I can stay motivated and engaged with my online learning activities.	3.93	A
Overall	4.13	SA

Notes: Strongly disagree (SD) = 0.00-1.00, Disagree (D) = 1.01-0.200, Neutral (N) = 0.21-0.30, Agree (A) = 0.31-0.40, Strongly agree (SA) = 0.41-5.00

The qualitative data further revealed that students commented that the assessment methods employed in their courses helped them learned a lot. For instance, one student stated,

In this course I had learned three things. First, the two reflection papers provided me opportunity to do the self-reflection related to my teaching performance which I rarely did it. It guided me to see the improving points and kept what good to student learning. In addition, Peer editing which I had to consult various sources and worked to help correct each other's papers. It helped me improved my work better before the final submission. Last but not least, Project design that have covered all the lessons, brought them together in one project. [P1]

Students attributed their learning with the use of various activities in their online classes. For example, two students stated,

What I like the most about the course is the ways that the lecturer gives a lot of videos to watch before the session and after the session… Plus, the lecturer usually gives us time to exchange ideas before she explains the lesson, which helps the students build their communication skills and lesson comprehension…I also like the forum discussion board. Before I could express my points of view about the questions, I had to read at least a journal paper about the questions assigned. [P2]

The course helps me explore many new things related to getting knowledge from different sources and how to use the knowledge to helps the others learning more. Moreover, the lecturer provides some work and lets the students discuss to build a collaborative team work. The sources are so good for my learning and I can learn and practice doing exercises there. It allows me to learn any time, any place as possible as I can. With such learning situations, I could see that I have acquired sufficient knowledge. [P3]

Nevertheless, students reported that there were several challenges that they had encountered during their online courses learning. A lack of providing students with detailed information about the courses such as course syllabus and its learning outcomes had been attributed as a challenge for their learning. As one student expressed:

…The most challenging thing is I have no idea about course syllabus and learning outcomes, so I do not know exactly what I could achieve at the end of each session and the term. [P4]

To deal with these challenges, students made various suggestions associated with their online learning courses comprising providing pre-requisite courses or subjects to prepare them taking complexed courses, and giving them more time and practices. For instance, one student suggested,

… Before each difficult course, students should be given some pre-requisite courses or subjects required reading books…The lecturer should also give us more time in each session or give us more practices as I am one of the slow learners, so I need more practices. [P5]

2.1. Instructors' teaching performance evaluation

Table 2 illustrates the evaluation of the instructors' teaching performances reported by the respondents. The most highly satisfied teaching performance was being friendly and approachable of the instructors, followed by having in-depth knowledge of the subject, fully committed to the delivery of the course, encouraging student interactions, organizing and preparing for every class, challenging students to do their best work, managing classroom time pace well, employing a variety of instructional methods to reach the course learning outcomes, and explaining how to use the online learning platforms at the beginning of the course. This was followed by being enthusiastic in teaching and explaining, having knowledge on using the learning platforms, promoting of soft skills, providing fast feedback to queries in the online discussion forum, and solving emerging problems efficiently.

The qualitative data also revealed that students considered the most importance for their learning were associated with the instructors' knowledge of the courses taught and their teaching experiences as well as their encouragement and motivation provided to students. As one student expressed,

Lecturers are the most useful to me for their help and encouragement. Because they have rich knowledge and have read a lot of relevant books for their courses and they also recommended these books to us… they help me improve critical thinking skills and share what I understand to the class by doing a short summary and do the reflection. [P6]

Another student added that:

My lecturer has a clear understanding of this course and rich research experience. Through her teaching, I have a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of quantitative research. For me, I think the content of the course itself is very complicated, but the lecturer can make students gradually understand and finally achieve a comprehensive understanding through the overall introduction of quantitative research and in-depth explanation and training. [P7]

However, students reported that their instructors' unclear explanations about the lessons were a challenge for them to fully comprehend their lessons. For example, one student pointed out,

It is hard to follow the lesson because the explanation from the lecturer is not clear, not specific as I have expected. Writing course is the most challenges subject for students, so it requires the lecturer providing clear explanations. Most of the time after the lesson, I am doing more research myself for what it's really mean and what to do. If so, why should I bother to pay money for

Table 2: Evaluation of the instructors' teaching performances of Master program at FoE, RUPP

Attributes	*WAI*	*Overall assessment*
The instructor is friendly and approachable.	4.44	SA
The instructor demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the subject.	4.43	SA
My instructor is fully committed to the delivery of the course (i.e., the class starts on time, material is well-prepared etc.).	4.38	SA
The instructor encourages student interactions.	4.38	SA
The instructor is organized and prepare for every class.	4.34	SA
The instructor challenges students to do their best work.	4.33	SA
The instructor manages classroom time pace well.	4.32	SA
The instructor uses a variety of instructional methods to reach the course learning outcomes (i.e., group discussions, presentations, etc.).	4.32	SA
The instructor explains how to use the online learning platforms at the beginning of the course.	4.28	SA
The instructor is enthusiastic in teaching and explaining	4.26	SA
The instructor's knowledge on using the learning platforms affects efficiency of online learning.	4.25	SA
Promotion of soft skills (i.e., team work) is encouraged by different means by the instructor in this course.	4.23	SA
The instructor provides fast feedback to queries in the online discussion forum.	4.18	SA
The instructor solves emerging problems efficiently.	4.16	SA
Overall	4.31	SA

Notes: Strongly disagree (SD) = 0.00-1.00, Disagree (D) = 1.01-0.200, Neutral (N) = 0.21-0.30, Agree (A) = 0.31-0.40, Strongly agree (SA) = 0.41-5.00

my study because YouTube is free. [P8]

To address the challenges associated with their online learning courses, students suggested their instructors providing detailed information about the courses such course syllabuses, learning outcomes, and assessment tasks at the beginning of the semester/term of their studies. As one student expressed,

Please make sure there is a clear course outline/ syllabus, learning outcomes and assessments made available for students at the beginning of the term…[P9]

Students also recommended their instructors to be well-prepared for their teaching and spending time training them to conduct presentations as well as asking them some critical questions related to the assigned reading articles in class to motivate them learn better. Two students described,

… Lecturer needs to train students how to make a presentation, not just gave tasks and content, and also needs to give some ideas and notices before students' presentations. [P10]

… I admit that sometimes I am discouraged to read the articles because the lecturer will not talk about them in class. Though it is helpful for us during the class discussion, I wish the lecturer talks, emphasizes or asks more provoking questions that are related to those articles, so personally I would be motivated to read them. [P11]

2.2. Teaching and learning materials and resources evaluation

Table 3 shows the evaluation of the materials and resources reported by the respondents. The most highly satisfied materials and resources was associated with learning activities that encouraged students to research for additional materials, followed by the range of online course resources helped them to carry out the online activities, the learning activities that encouraged them to use the available learning materials and resources, the course materials that were available in a format that suits them, and the electronic resources that were easily accessible by clicking on related links in the internet. This was followed by the materials in virtual library that were relevant to the course, the course materials that were easy to navigate, being able to access sufficient online virtual library resources, and the course that was supported by adequate virtual library resources.

The qualitative data further revealed that a number of reading articles had been provided to students prior to participating in each class session to enrich their comprehension of each weekend session topic. Two students stated,

My lecturers always provide me with various good journal articles that are relevant to each session lecturing topic through uploading them in my Microsoft Teams class,

Table 3: Evaluation of the materials and resources of Master program at FoE, RUPP

Attributes	*WAI*	*Overall assessment*
Learning activities employed by my instructors encourage me to seek for additional materials.	4.25	SA
The range of online course resources (i.e., power point slides, video, etc.) helps me to carry out the online activities.	4.14	SA
Learning activities encourage me to use the available learning materials and resources.	4.10	SA
Course materials are available in a format that suits me.	4.04	SA
Electronic resources are easily accessible by clicking on related links in the internet.	4.04	SA
Materials in virtual library is relevant to the course.	3.94	A
The course materials are easy to navigate.	3.93	A
I am able to access sufficient online virtual library resources.	3.92	A
The course is supported by adequate virtual library resources.	3.82	A
Overall	4.02	SA

Notes: Strongly disagree (SD) = 0.00-1.00, Disagree (D) = 1.01-0.200, Neutral (N) = 0.21-0.30, Agree (A) = 0.31-0.40, Strongly agree (SA) = 0.41-5.00

so that I can have sufficient time to read these articles prior to joining each of my weekend session. I strongly believe that these articles can help me have an in-depth understanding of each session topic. [P12]

A number of good journal articles related to my course have been provided to me through my class Telegram Chat Group. I think these learning materials can enrich my comprehension of my instructors' lectures in each session. [P13]

Another student added that:

The weekly reading articles that are sent by the lecturers are very informative and interesting to read. [P14]

2.3. Online learning platforms evaluation

Table 4 displays the evaluation of the online learning platforms reported by the respondents. The most highly satisfied online learning platforms was related to easy uploading coursework, followed by being able to ask questions and receive answers, having discussions with classmates via online learning platforms, sharing knowledge through online discussions, having online discussions enabled students to exchange ideas and comments, and the screen layout and design of the online learning platforms were appropriate. This was followed by browsing classmates' works helped improve the quality of own work, the workload for the online activities was manageable, and the online activities made studying the course interesting and engaging.

The qualitative data also revealed that students considered the forum discussion board to be beneficial for their interactions and discussion with their classmates. One student described,

The forum discussion provides me with an opportunity to share information and knowledge with my classmates weekly. [P1]

Nevertheless, students attributed various challenges associated with their online learning including internet connection, learning platforms, and lack of physical contacts during their class time. For instance, three students stated,

… Students study in a complete physical isolation, where they can't see each other faces, and they can only hear each other voices... This way of communication can ensure that the transmission of sound is not affected. However, this way of interaction also makes it impossible for people to see each other expressions and body movements when talking, and a lot of effective information will be lost because they cannot see these things. [P8]

… The platform we were using, Microsoft Teams. It was pretty new for me and I needed to spend a lot of time to get used to it… [P9]

Internet connection is one of the problems during learning and practicing exercises. Another one is about Google Classroom. It is a bit complicated… [P10]

To address these challenges, students recommended that the university should provide them with fast speed internet connection and their online classes be conducted through the blended teaching and learning mode. For instance, two students suggested,

The university should provide students with fast speed internet to support our online learning as the internet connection at my home is so slow which has an impact on my learning. [P10]

…Moreover, some sessions in physical class should be provided to students in addition to the online learning class. [P8]

3. Discussion

Student course evaluations were the most common method in higher education institutions to measure

Table 4: Evaluation of the online learning platforms of Master program at FoE, RUPP

Attributes	*WAI*	*Overall assessment*
Uploading coursework is easy.	4.35	SA
I am able to ask questions and receive responses.	4.28	SA
I have discussions with classmates via online learning platforms.	4.24	SA
I think sharing knowledge through online forum discussion is a good idea.	4.24	SA
Online discussion enables students to exchange ideas and comments.	4.21	SA
The screen layout and design of the online learning platforms are appropriate.	4.14	SA
Browsing classmates' works helps improve the quality of own work.	4.08	SA
The workload for the online activities is manageable.	4.01	SA
The online activities make studying the course interesting and engaging.	3.88	A
Overall	4.16	SA

Notes: Strongly disagree (SD) = 0.00-1.00, Disagree (D) = 1.01-0.200, Neutral (N) = 0.21-0.30, Agree (A) = 0.31-0.40, Strongly agree (SA) = 0.41-5.00

teaching effectiveness. Therefore, it was vital to research student evaluations of their master-level online courses to fulfill their needs and satisfaction. All participants in this study reported they had high satisfaction with all their 14 master-level online courses. They indicated that they were highly satisfied with various activities comprising the conduct of the course and the assessment tasks that matched the course's expected learning outcomes. They further reported that they had satisfaction associated with their motivation and engagement with their online learning activities. In alignment with the quantitative data, the qualitative data revealed that the participants attributed various challenges associated with online learning, including internet connection, learning platforms, and lack of physical contact during class time. This result aligned with the finding of Al-Araibi et al.'s (2019) study regarding technological issues associated with online learning.

With regard to the evaluations of their instructors, they indicated that they highly satisfied their teaching performances in terms of the instructors' personality being friendly and approachable and having in-depth knowledge of the courses taught as well as the instructors' encouragement provided to students, and their full commitment to the delivery of the courses. In consistent with the quantitative data, the qualitative data revealed that students perceived that the aspects of courses that they considered as the most importance for their learning including their instructors' knowledge of the courses taught and their teaching experiences as well as their encouragement and motivation provided to students. This result supported Park and Choi's (2009) findings that student's motivation was one of the critical elements that directly influenced the success of an online learning system. When students had motivation, they tended to put their efforts in learning and cooperated with their instructors by means of actively participated in all teaching and learning activities. Furthermore, the participants reported that they had high satisfaction with their instructors' performances such as providing fast responses to their queries in the online discussion forum and solving emerging problems efficiently during their online learning.

In relation to their evaluations of the learning materials and resources, the respondents reported that they had high satisfaction with their learning materials and resources associated with learning activities that encouraged them to research for additional materials. Nevertheless, they indicated that they just had satisfaction with the materials in their course virtual library, the easiness to navigate their online course materials, their access to sufficient online virtual library resources, and their courses that were supported by adequate virtual library resources. These results indicated that their online course library resources were still limited and needed to be further developed to fulfill the needs of students learning. This result supported the findings by Al-Araibi et al. (2019) that online learning resources provided by HEIs in developing countries were still limited.

With respect to the evaluations of their online learning platforms, the participants indicated that they highly satisfied with the easiness of uploading their coursework written tasks and learning materials and resources. However, they just had satisfaction with their online activities made studying the course interesting and engaging, indicating that there was a lack of full interactions and engagement among students during their online learning. In consistent with the quantitative data, the qualitative data showed that the participants suggested various activities during class time including providing them with fast speed internet connection, giving them more time and practices, having some sessions in physical class, and asking them critical

questions related to the assigned reading articles to enable full interactions and engagements among students as well as between students and their instructors. This result was consistent with the findings by Al-Araibi et al. (2019) that online learning in developing countries had various issues associated with slow internet connection and a lack of interactions and engagement between instructors and students and among students.

In relation to the open-ended responses, it was found that they were useful to make informed decisions for improving overall course quality such as curriculum, teaching pedagogy, assessments, and resources. These results were consistent with the findings from previous research (Collings and Ballantyne, 2004; Donovan et al., 2006; Ahmad, 2018; Diaz et al., 2022). The qualitative feedback provided more useful highly quality formative feedback/comments for pedagogical improvement and course development. They helped to clarify issues with the course or teaching style and provided a medium for students to provide suggestions for improvement which were useful for their course development and pedagogical improvement.

Overall, the findings from the current study were in alignment with Donovan et al.'s (2006) study and Ahmad's (2018) reviews of the major literature works over the period 2000-2013. It was found that there were various main advantages of online method of student course evaluations including more written formative feedback, refining, reflecting, expanding on responses, richer and higher data collection, providing more comments about instructors, efficiency, cost savings, richer responses, and quicker and cost savings. With regard to the response rate, the present study received 67% which was in consistent with the findings by Emery et al.'s (2008) study obtaining response rate in various pilots ranged from 32% to 79%. The low response rate obtained in this study was also in alignment with the findings from previous research (Collings and Ballantyne, 2004; Ahmad, 2018) with regard to a decrease in response rate and valuable qualitative formative feedback obtained through student online course evaluations.

Conclusion and policy implication

The findings emerging from this study show that students highly satisfied their 14 master-level online courses in relation to the evaluations of overall courses, instructors' teaching performances, teaching and learning materials and resources, and online learning platforms. The study further revealed that the open-ended responses were useful to make informed decisions for improving the overall courses quality. They provided more useful highly quality formative comments/feedback for pedagogical improvement and course development. The open-ended responses helped to clarify issues with the course or teaching style and provided a medium for students to provide suggestions for improvement which were useful for their course development and pedagogical improvement. The study highlighted various main aspects that students mostly preferred comprising their instructors' personality (i.e., friendly and approachable), instructors' in-depth knowledge of the courses, their teaching experiences, their encouragement and motivation provided to students, the conduct of the course, learning activities that encouraged them to conduct further own research, the easiness of uploading their coursework written tasks and learning materials and resources, and the employment of assessment tasks to measure their learning achievements. Unfortunately, they reported a number of aspects that they just had preferences, including the materials in their course virtual library, the easiness to navigate their online course materials, their access to sufficient online virtual library resources, and their courses that were supported by adequate virtual library resources. Several obstacles had been identified that hindered them from fully participating in their online learning courses, such as slow internet connection, learning platforms, lack of physical contact during class time, and students' motivation and engagement with online learning activities. In addressing such challenges, they suggested various activities during class time, including providing them with a fast internet connection, offering them some sessions in a physical class, giving them more time and practices, and asking them critical questions related to the assigned reading articles to enable them having full interactions and engagements between instructors and students, and among students. The results from the current study also revealed that the qualitative comments were valuable despite the response rate seemed to be low. There were various main advantages of online student course evaluation: more written feedback, refining, reflecting, expanding on responses, richer and higher data collection, providing more comments about instructors, efficiency, cost savings, richer responses, and quicker cost savings. Based on these findings, it could be concluded that the student course evaluation instrument used for measuring the teaching effectiveness of their instructors in this study measured online instruction as far as course design and delivery went toward student satisfaction.

The findings of the current study have various implications for policy and, implementation and practices with respect to students' evaluation of their online learning courses. In relation to policy regarding student course evaluation, the program administrators should have utilized the information collected from students' evaluation of their courses to improve their online courses and learning materials and resources as well as their learning platforms to fulfill their students' needs. The administrators should have also considered adopting

the blended learning model to design the master program courses to enable two-way communications between instructors and students and among students in order to offer students a rich learning environment that was more relevant to students' needs and satisfaction. It had been recommended that the onus of blending learning model be placed on professional development, so that instructors were well-prepared for teaching online prior to doing so. Both instructors and students should have been provided with sufficient training with regard to how to utilize the online learning platforms (i.e., Microsoft Teams and Zoom) prior to starting their teaching each term/semester in order to increase the effectiveness of blending learning approach practices.

Furthermore, the administrators should have considered integrating more open-ended questions in the student's course evaluation to obtain rich qualitative feedback from students for their future course development and pedagogical improvement. Given the validity and bias concerns with students' course evaluations, the evaluation results should not have been employed as the sole measure of teaching effectiveness and should not have been used to make considerations for instructors' tenure, promotion, and salary rise decisions. The findings from this study suggest that given that there was valuable qualitative feedback obtained from students' course evaluations, the master program course evaluations needed to emphasize more actionable open-ended responses and be targeted to the needs of the courses and instructors for future course developments and pedagogical improvements as opposed to employing teaching evaluations for instructors' tenure, promotion, and salary rise decisions. Students' motivation to participate in course evaluations was impacted by their expectation that they could provide meaningful feedback for their course improvements (Chen and Hoshower, 2003). Student course evaluations can tell administrators vital things about teaching effectiveness and what happens in the classroom. Thus, given the complex literature on student evaluations, the opportunity to develop the course evaluation process should be taken as a part of the internal quality assurance.

Regarding implementation and practices, it was important to ensure the effective implementation of the student's evaluation of their online learning courses. In addressing the low response rate concerning the implementation of student online course evaluation, it was recommended that several main strategies should be employed to increase the response rate. One main strategy was to motivate students to participate in their course evaluations. Research had shown that students' motivation to participate in their course evaluations was impacted by their expectation that they could provide meaningful feedback for their course improvements (Chen and Hoshower, 2003). Another main strategy was to involve instructors in communicating with students about their course evaluations. Heinert and Roberts (2016) suggested that instructors should be informed about when the student online course evaluation surveys were sent out so they could personally appeal (both in class and by email) to the students to complete their course evaluation surveys. In this communication, instructors should have explained to the students how their comments would be taken seriously and how they would be utilized to improve teaching. The key message was to inform students about the purpose of evaluations, letting students know that instructors would use their feedback to make changes in the course and giving students some examples of useful feedback instructors had obtained in the past and how the course/pedagogy had benefited in response. To effectively utilize student feedback for courses and program improvement, there should be better use of the student evaluations of the courses and instructors' pedagogy. At the end of each term, the student feedback needed to be converted into a format that was easily accessible to both the instructors and the leadership. This feedback should be utilized to inform instructor practice and programmatic progress. The data about individual instructor practice should be given to the instructors who were evaluated by the students each term and the program coordinator then should meet with each instructor to review the information and discuss implications for the instructor's practice. Furthermore, the programmatic feedback from the student evaluations should be sent to all instructors and that data should had served as the main topic of discussion in at least one if not two, program meetings. The program should be asking questions like, "What are the students telling us about the courses?" "What are they asking us to change?" "What are they saying they like about the courses?" and "What are we going to do to improve our courses?" This follow-up to the student evaluations would make the whole process more than just a perfunctory activity. It would make the student evaluations a genuine, authentic assessment. The purpose of all of this follow-up activity is mainly to inform the program about what it is doing that serves its students well and what needs to be changed. Such activities will surely result in the program's improvement and development in the future.

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The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

Credit authorship contribution statement

TAO Nary: Conceptualization, Writing-original draft, Writing-review & editing. The author has read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Appendix: List of students interviewed

Code	*Student's detail*	*Gender*	*Cohort*
P1	Master student at FoE, RUPP	Female	13
P2	Master student at FoE, RUPP	Female	13
P3	Master student at FoE, RUPP	Female	13
P4	Master student at FoE, RUPP	Female	14
P5	Master student at FoE, RUPP	Female	14
P6	Master student at FoE, RUPP	Female	14
P7	Master student at FoE, RUPP	Female	15
P8	Master student at FoE, RUPP	Male	15
P9	Master student at FoE, RUPP	Male	15
P10	Master student at FoE, RUPP	Male	16
P11	Master student at FoE, RUPP	Male	16
P12	Master student at FoE, RUPP	Male	16
P13	Master student at FoE, RUPP	Male	17
P14	Master student at FoE, RUPP	Male	17