Part-Time Learners' Perceptions of Success During ERT

SUSAN FLYNN, JOSEPH COLLINS, AND LINDSAY MALONE

Abstract

The Faculty of Lifelong Learning at South East Technological University's Carlow campus, is one of the largest providers of part-time learning in the Irish Higher Education sector. A large majority of our lifelong learners, 88%, are adult learners over the age of 23, therefore the perspectives of our part-time learners offer us valuable insights into adult learner experiences in the Irish Higher Education sector. The outbreak of COVID-19 saw us pivot our provision to an emergency remote teaching (ERT) model in the first wave of the pandemic. The faculty undertook an extensive study of its learners in 2021 to examine the impacts of ERT on learners, and this article takes a qualitative approach to the findings of this study, looking specifically at learners' comments about success, and the barriers to success which ERT posed. Our study provided an opportunity to learn about our learners' conceptions of student identity, and how they interpret success as part-time learners.

Keywords: Part-Time Learning, ERT, Online Pivot, Success

Introduction

The changes in delivery for many Higher Education Institutions (HEI) during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21 included an 'online pivot' to ERT (emergency remote teaching). The Faculty of Lifelong Learning at South East Technological University's Carlow campus is one of the largest providers of part-time learning in the Irish sector, with 6,114 lifelong learners enrolled in 2020 (see *Table 1* and *Figure 1*), of which 88% were adult learners over the age of 23. A 2015 definition provided by the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 (Higher Education Authority [HEA], 2015, p.35) states that adult learners are defined as 'those aged 23 years or over on 1st

January of the year of entry to higher education'. Defining the lifelong learner is seen to be a complex issue due to the wide diversity of studies that are available however the authors identifies that the definition provided by the HEA (2015) correlates more specifically with the aims of this research.

The faculty undertook a wide-scale study of part-time learners in early 2021, to examine learners' experiences of ERT. This article foregrounds the voices of learners, taking a qualitative approach to highlight learners' needs, feelings and lived experiences. As such, this research adopts a Freirean approach, acknowledging that learning and teaching are an ongoing dialogue. Such a dialogue is critical to the future of part-time learning in Ireland, as the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 suggests that higher education participation amongst adults will increase almost two-fold from 2015 to 2030.

Institute	**% of Lifelong Learning Students (i.e. % part-time students of total students)**
Technological University Dublin	29.5%
Institute of Technology Carlow *(now SETU)*	52.0%
University College Dublin	16.2%
University College Cork	19.5%
IT Sligo	54.6%
National University of Ireland Galway	15.8%
Munster Technological University	18.8%
Dublin City University	15.3%
Limerick IT	23.9%
University of Limerick	11.0%
Maynooth University	12.3%
Trinity College Dublin	8.7%
Royal College of Surgeons	33.8%
Waterford IT	17.0%
Dundalk IT	20.3%
Mary Immaculate College	19.1%
Letterkenny IT	20.1%
Athlone IT	16.9%

Galway-Mayo IT	11.0%
St. Angela's College	34.0%
Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology	16.0%
National College of Art and Design	12.0%
All Irish HEIs	20.2%

Table 1. Percentage of Lifelong Learning students (i.e. part-time students) based on HEA enrolment headcount data from all Irish HEIs for 2020/2021. Note: HEA enrolment data excludes certain categories of students including apprentices and incoming Erasmus students. (Source: HEA.ie)

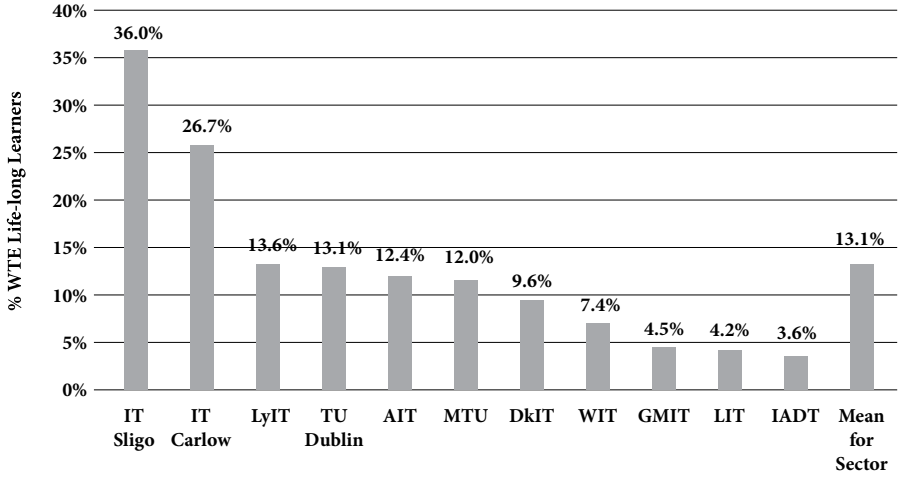

Figure 1. Percentage of Lifelong Learning students (i.e. part-time students) based on Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) in the technological higher education sector in 2020/2021 (Source: HEA RGAM 202)

The onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 necessitated a transition to online delivery for teaching and learning from primary to third level education in Ireland and across the developed world. A wide range of studies have emerged on the impact of this pivot on teachers and learners (Kessler et al., 2020; Lemay and Doleck, 2020; Quezeda et al., 2020) and at South East Technological University's Carlow campus we studied the effects on lecturers (Flynn and Noonan, 2020; Flynn, 2021). While much research is emerging to examine the myriad effects of ERT on teachers and learners, there is a dearth of research on part-time learners' experiences. The pandemic has

brought uncertainty, isolation, and stress to many, not least to learners who must learn to navigate new technologies to keep pace (Flynn, Collins and Malone, 2022).

COVID-19 has clearly disrupted the academic life of students (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2020; Chaturvedi et al., 2021). Studies examining the impact of COVID-19 reported decreases in study hours and increases in academic procrastination among students in higher education [HE] (Aucejo et al., 2020; Biricil and Sivrikava, 2020; Jia et al., 2020). In addition, the nature of online learning at home further encourages procrastination as students not only need to exert higher levels of self-control to overcome isolated learning and the challenges of online learning (Drumm and Jong, 2020; Rasheed et al., 2020; Hong et al., 2021), they must also resist interruptions present at home, e.g., family, television, work, social media (Meiier et al., 2016; Pan, 2020). Taken together, these studies evidenced that uncertainty was at higher than average levels during the pandemic.

It is recognised that online interaction in adult educational settings has not been widely examined (Diep et al., 2018). Part-time learners have been affected by the change in mode of delivery in a unique way. For the purposes of this article, Lifelong Learning is taken to mean 'on-going part-time learning as an adult that takes place in a higher education context'.

At South East Technological University's Carlow campus, we have a faculty devoted to Lifelong Learning which operates across three of our academic campuses: Carlow Campus, Wicklow County Campus and Wexford Campus, as well as on site in industry and with sectoral partners. Lifelong Learning programmes are offered in business, humanities, social sciences, law, engineering, computing and science discipline areas, offering programmes leading to major award qualifications at Levels 6, 7, 8 and 9 on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, our educational technologists and instructional designers along with our Teaching and Learning Centre supported our teaching staff to deliver remotely. They worked assiduously to ensure a smooth transition to remote teaching. Online teaching was delivered to all learners through the development of synchronous and asynchronous teaching modes. Additionally, revised assessments for online use were created as well as training for all staff. Departments at all levels worked to

ensure that students were not disadvantaged at the point of assessment, while preserving the academic integrity and standards of their award. In so doing, we have been mindful of the principles and guidelines set out at a national level by Quality and Qualifications Ireland and the academic rigour required for all programmes of study.

Study of part-time learners

From January to March 2021, the invitation to participate in this study to gather and analyse data from our learners, to better understand their needs and to learn about how the shift to ERT affected them was extended to all part-time learners. The study aimed to gather and analyse information from our learners, to better understand their needs and the effects of ERT on their studies, identities, and lives. The input of our learners is always a critical element in the design and delivery of our courses. However, the pandemic and ERT have necessitated an urgent consultation with learners so that we may consider and acknowledge best practice going forward. We were interested in learners' perceptions of their own learning journey, especially during the pandemic, as one of the most reliable predictors of gains in learning is active student involvement. Involving learners at all stages of our planning will ultimately benefit both our institution and our learners, it will help to assist us in achieving student success and retention (Tinto, 1997). Astin's Student Involvement Theory (1984) further elucidated that desirable outcomes for HE institutions are viewed in relation to how students change and develop as a result of being involved. He argued that involvement requires an investment of psychosocial and physical energy which can vary from student to student. Critically, Astin argues that academic performance is correlated with the student involvement.

Our teaching is centred on Social Learning Theory (SLT) which suggests that persons learn through the observing the behaviour exhibited by others, referred to as 'role models', and the consequences of this behaviour (Payne and Walker, 1998). Coupled with this, it focuses on Freirean principles and so we recognise that dialogic encounters are an essential element of our work through which our interpretations can be tested and developed further (Fung, 2017).

> the practice of remaining open to being wrong and recalibrating one's understandings in the light of new evidence, or of new interpretations of existing evidence, needs to be reasserted. Dialogic encounters are vital; they test our assumptions and extend our knowledge (Fung, 2017, p.14).

Our Faculty of Lifelong Learning is built on a platform constituted by a dynamic dialectical approach toward the world, a praxical view of knowledge and a deep commitment to engaging and learning with and from our learners. This represents a specific approach to understanding Lifelong Learning students and the social world, from which general principles for teaching and learning can be generated.

Methodology and Methods

The COVID-19 pandemic caused students across the globe to transition from in-person classes to remote learning and this unprecedented change to HE saw institutions adopting multiple online teaching modalities and instructional platforms (Nguyen et al., 2021). We sought to understand students' experiences with, and perspectives on, those methods of remote instruction in order to inform pedagogical decisions for our future development of online courses and virtual learning experiences. The research design was a mixed method approach which encompassed a qualitative and quantitative approach in order to examine the impacts of ERT on learners. The questions were chosen in order to gather information and understand the impacts of ERT on learners, which included the challenges and the benefits. The challenge for institutional leaders is not only student engagement, but how to engage the different student populations on campus (Wyatt, 2011). By targeting all learners enrolled within the Faculty of Lifelong Learning, we were able to engage directly, offering the opportunity to volunteer participation in a survey and focus group. By examining statistics and comments in the survey and by gaining further rich detail in conversations in the focus groups, we successfully utilised a mixed methods approach which was grounded in an emancipatory framework. After a rigorous ethical approval process, we launched our anonymous online survey, receiving over 400 responses. The response rate is not unexpected as responses to surveys can be lower than other survey types. In addition, one third of the Faculty students are studying on short certificate/micro credential programmes and many may have completed these before the survey was carried out. A range of closed questions provided us with quantifiable data about the challenges of remote learning, while open-ended questions allowed respondents to provide richer detail and descriptions of their experiences. Two optional focus groups followed, which allowed respondents to discuss salient topics relating to the online pivot and their experiences of learning remotely. This emancipatory approach means giving learners a voice in identifying matters of concern, and identifying ways to address them, which will encourage autonomy and self-determination (Wals, 2020). It also empowers learners to be active in the design and delivery

of their education. The combined mixed method approach and emancipatory approach enabled us to gather information and understand the impacts of ERT on learners, which included the challenges and the benefits whilst also ensuring that the learners had a voice in the process which was central to the study.

While one limitation of this survey is that it examines only one HEI, the findings may be considered generalisable in the sense that they provide us with a rich picture of the contextual effects of this emergency situation on part-time learners in Ireland. For this reason, we also engaged the learners in focus groups so we could explore their experiences in a more open and interpretivist approach. All of the learners who engaged in the survey were invited to take part in these subsequent focus groups.

Findings

In line with the extant literature on mature learners in Irish HE, this study found that part-time learners, most of whom are mature learners (88% of our part-time learners are over 23), have different social and pedagogical needs to younger learners. It is important to consider the decision-making process that the mature student undertakes when deciding to pursue HE, as their deliberations are likely to provide the individual psychological context in which they interpret their experience as a mature learner since the vast majority of part-time students are mature students (Daly, 2015; Lee, 2017; Wood and Cattell, 2014). The prospect of going to HE or returning to education can be intimidating. Mature students may suffer from self-doubt, isolation and a feeling of being an outsider (Jacoby, 2015; Lee, 2017; Mooney, 2015). Osborne et al. (2004) examined how mature students weigh up the advantages and disadvantages associated with HE. Both negative and positive factors associated with the pursuit of further education are acknowledged and considered by the potential student. The students are categorised according to their main motivation for returning to education.

Negative factors impacting on the decision to become a student	Categories of mature student	Positive factors influencing decision to become a student
• **Fear of debt** • **No confidence due to old attitudes, school experience – 'not for me'** • **Unwelcoming institutions** • **Worries re juggling job/ study**	**Delayed traditional**	• *Interest in the subject to be studied* • *Long-term requirement to be equipped for career* • *Time to settle down* • *Parental support for some*
• **Some financial concerns** • **Lack of confidence – 'can I cope?'** • **Attitudes of family/social group**	**Late starter**	• *Cathartic experience as stimulus* • *Current opportunity – 'time for me'* • *Self-belief – 'If they can do it so can I'* • *Altruism*
• **Lack of self-belief** • **Financial 'Catch 22'** • **Timetable difficulties** • **Childcare problems** • **Juggling family, work, study**	**Single parent**	• *Need a good job to support family* • *Want to be a role model for family* • *Enjoy learning*
• **Need to work so time for study limited** • **Family pressures – never at home**	**Careerist**	• *Better long-term career prospects* • *Self-respect* • *Interest in studies* • *Employer support and sometimes requirement*
• **Lack of confidence** • **Costs difficult to manage** • **Need to work as well as study** • **Timetable issues** • **Doubts about job market when finished**	**Escapees**	• *New career with better prospects* • *Better pay* • *Need a change in direction – stuck in a rut*
• **Lack of confidence**	**Personal growers**	• *Interest in the subject* • *Opportunity presents itself now* • *Prove that I can do it*

Table 2. Influences (both positive and negative) on the decision to become a part-time mature student (Source: Osborne et al., 2004, p.2)

The discussions in our focus groups, as well as the 'open text' responses in the survey, indicated that a large proportion of our part-time learners have family commitments and part-time employment, so they are required to juggle a set of needs along with their learning. Though their educational backgrounds varied, their psychosocial needs broadly aligned, with many of the same concerns and requirements repeated in responses.

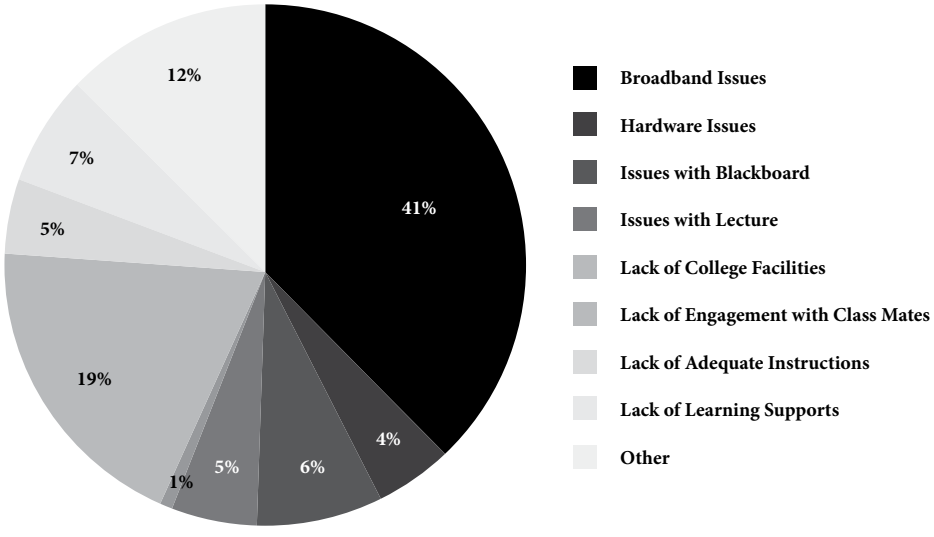

Figure 2. Survey data indicating barriers to participation in learning experienced by learners

Skills deficits are often perceived as the driving force of part-time learning and adult education and 'the skills agenda has dominated the discourse with the major funding focus on providing programmes to up-skill the unemployed to (re-) enter the workforce' (Moreland and Cownie, 2019, p.61). Rapidly changing labour markets and multiple challenges, such as digitalisation and its consequences for the future of work, technological changes, the environment, ageing societies and social inclusion, require strong skill foundations and constant updating and acquiring of new skills, knowledge and competences. Knowledge, market trends and new processes are being created at such a pace that businesses can barely keep up. Employers need employees with up-to-date product and market knowledge. They also need them to have the skills, capabilities and mindset to succeed in their specific job role.

Despite this perceived focus on skills deficits, our study concluded that for many part-time learners, the idea of being a student was very attractive, and the student identity was a motivating factor in enrolling for a course. Similarly, Kearns (2017) noted that mature students are a highly heterogenous group whose motivations for taking up HE study differ from the demands of the job market or 'narrow market fundamentalism'. Our findings illustrated that whilst part-time learners have been facilitated to complete their studies via ERT, many of their concerns are centred on psycho-social issues rather than employment opportunities.

Our study concluded that a majority of part-time learners prefer online delivery, for reasons of flexibility, time and cost. However, many of the comments in our online survey and focus groups indicated that they felt the loss of face-to-face interactions affected their perceived success, because the respondents consider success to include active student life, including interactions, being in campus buildings and informal contact with peers.

Attitudes to success

The survey asked a range of closed and open-ended questions about learner success and engagement with learning during the first year of the online pivot, and the focus groups which followed provided rich descriptions of learners' attitudes, experiences and feelings. The information garnered from our study illustrates the complexity of Lifelong Learners' attitude to success. This complexity is also explored in the National Student Success Strategy which suggests that student success 'requires a culture in Irish higher education that values inclusivity, equity and meaningful engagement between students, staff, their institutions and the wider community' (National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 2019, p.3). We take success to mean the accomplishment of one's aims, be that completion, graduation or attendance at a third level institution. The challenges and affordances presented by remote teaching and learning over the past academic year and a half have caused many learners to reconsider what success as a student means to them. Here we have employed an empirical approach to deeply consider the real-life context and consequences for our part-time learners. This paper focusses on one specific theme which emerged through analysis, based on the survey data and learners' comments in focus groups: lack of interaction as a barrier to success.

Lack of interaction as a barrier to success

In our survey we asked the open question: 'what are the drawbacks or challenges of remote learning?' The range of answers showed that our learners believe that

lack of interaction, with peers in particular, has been a barrier to their success. Many answers illustrated that the lack of support from peers and face-to-face connection was keenly felt, and that the loss of peer support was a severe drawback of ERT:

> I definitely miss the interaction with class members and the support felt by peers is missing.
>
> Not being able to get immediate help if needed from colleagues.
>
> You don't get to interact with your peers and know who is in your class.
>
> Lack of opportunities to chat to classmates meet for study groups etc.

The respondents' concerns were centred on the lack of opportunity for informal exchange and support from peers:

> Positive engagement with classmates and support was no longer available on a face-to-face basis.
>
> I miss the interaction of people.
>
> No face to face at work most of the time due to COVID, [I'm] spending way too much time in front of laptop.
>
> [Lack of] interaction with college classmates is definitely the biggest challenge. The social aspect of meeting people from a personal perspective.

This recognition of the learning lost through ERT illustrates a deep awareness by learners of the construction of learning through interaction. Peer group interactions have powerful socializing effects, and bring important socializing experiences (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2018). Our learners demonstrate good levels of metacognition in this regard:

> [It's] harder to learn outside of a class environment, harder to get to know classmates.
>
> Sometimes feel as though I don't have the full support of classmates. [It would be] nice to be able to show someone what you are doing and if you are going in the direction.

Cooperative learning is one of the cornerstones of a constructivist approach to learning, and positive interactions with peers can lay solid foundations on which to explore and contextualise new learning (Jolliffe, 2007). Our learners' responses acknowledged this in numerous responses which lamented the loss of engagement:

> [There is a] lack of human interaction with the rest of my class, difficult sharing ideas, etc. due to the sound and connection issues. As I learn from others, I enjoy being in the classroom environment. Difficult to join in on discussions online.

> You do not get to grow your connections as all classes are online and you won't meet any of your classmates.

These responses from our survey illustrate a level of frustration at the lack of opportunity for face-to-face class interaction. The loss of interaction as a sense-making or meaning-making activity was deeply felt. This tallies with earlier research (Leithwood and O'Connell, 2004; Kearns, 2014) which acknowledges that the complexity of mature student's motives for pursuing HE or Lifelong Learning are qualitatively different to their traditional age counterparts. Enhanced career options sit alongside intrinsic motivations, personal histories and past encounters with education (Kearns, 2014). Essentially, from Kearns (2014) work it is evident that no one size fits all in terms of Lifelong Learning and what it means to the learner. Lifelong Learning, offered as part-time qualifications, can not only offer improved employment opportunities, but also the potential to re-shape learners' own notions of education and the ways in which we can test knowledge to respond to new and complex problems. This is reflected in some of the responses below which demonstrate the learners' ability to engage in active learning in an online environment:

> [I felt] isolation and lack of classmates to check on assignments queries or if not sure on something. In physical classroom, can ask person beside you. Also, [you] can meet new people and [make] connections.

> Working alone can be more difficult without a study buddy to bounce ideas off of or compare work with.

> Interaction. There's nothing quite like being able to show an error on one screen, while seeing the solution on another & someone scribbling the method on a piece of paper in front of you.

> [I felt the] lack of engagement, learning through the questions of others. the group discussions in class, peer support.

In his seminal work 'What the Student Does', John Biggs (1999) illustrates how educative conceptual change takes place when 'students can work collaboratively and in dialogue with others, both peers and teachers. Good dialogue elicits those activities that shape, elaborate, and deepen understanding' (Biggs, 1999, p.61). Fung (2017) acknowledges the importance of socially constructed learning for the full development of the learner:

> Each of us has our own horizon, in any given moment, as we look out on what we know. However, through encounters with others we can start to share what we see and our horizons can begin to broaden, even to merge (Fung, 2017, p.14).

The study in this way provided rich details about learners' perception of success, part of which was related to their sense of identity as inter-relational students, or in other words peer learning. Social connectedness has been recognised as an important outcome on the basis of its link to subjective well-being and course satisfaction (Diep et al., 2018):

> No pure objectivity can be obtained as we are all subjects but, as we hold ourselves open to new possibilities, we advance knowledge through intersubjectivity. This philosophical position does not rest on a single research paradigm, method or learning theory, but on a disposition, a way of being, which precedes and can underpin a wide range of methods of enquiry into the world (Fung, 2017, p.14).

Collaborative Work

This study shows that learners miss the sociality of learning and the informal support gained from 'working problems out with the class' as one focus group participant mentioned. This is further supported by another who noted that:

> Never meeting my classmates but having to engage in group assignments is quite challenging. It has worked out well so far for me by using online platforms to meet but I'm aware of some students having difficulties in this regard - I think that different people approach assignments differently, some do work early on, others have a last-minute attitude, and this is difficult to organise when everyone's online. It's also a slow process doing a group assignment online.

Another focus group participant mentioned that:

> [I] miss the social aspect of walking to the canteen during the break and just getting everyone else's take on the day's material.

Some of the respondents discussed the practical difficulties of doing collaborative project work when asked the open question 'what are the drawbacks or challenges of remote learning?'

> [Being online meant] difficulty getting to know classmates, group projects are very difficult to do remotely.

> The social side and social interaction is never the same online.

The social aspects of remote learning, and the resultant lack of ability to model themselves and their behaviour on others in the class was apparent in responses:

> Lack of peer connection. A lot of opinions going unheard because of the use of the keyboard instead of being able to speak face to face.

> Can feel a bit alone as it's much harder to bounce ideas and questions off classmates, especially when we have never met.

Observing Peers

Social Learning Theory (SLT) suggests that persons learn through observing the behaviour exhibited by others, referred to as 'role models', and the consequences of this behaviour (Payne and Walker, 1998). The decision to imitate the behaviour of others is determined by whether a person sees someone else benefitting from their actions, known as 'vicarious reinforcement' (White, 1995), and the individual's self-assessment of his or her ability to reproduce a behaviour, termed 'self-efficacy' (Coolican et al., 1996; Coleman, 2003). This social aspect of learning is visible in some of the responses, as learners indicated the fear of being the first to ask questions in the online environment:

> If you have a question you feel silly to ask as no one else is [asking].

> It can be nerve wracking asking questions etc on big online platforms e.g. teams, WhatsApp etc.

As observation and imitation are key processes in informal learning (Coleman, 2003) one of the effects of ERT is that it is more difficult to observe the behaviour of classmates. The loss of the critical interactions with peers led to de-motivation:

> [I lost the] feeling of belonging to a group and even college, [I] lost interest in study.

> [Not being in college] meant a lack of motivation to do college work and lack of connection with the college group.

Locale

Learners' responses indicated that the Institute buildings themselves contribute to the learners' success as students. The changed locale of learning contributed to the sense of loss and isolation felt, as part-time learners appear to appreciate the 'escape' offered by campus. The campus buildings appear to play a significant part in the learners' student identities. In the focus groups, participants discussed the sort of learning that happens in the canteen; the informal sense-making conversations about the session's material and the shared understandings or problem areas that are 'worked out over coffee in the canteen'. Furthermore, campus buildings seem to bring an increased focus for learners:

> Lack motivation due to not having the building to go to. Studying in isolation.

> Home becomes a place of business, [with] many distractions.

> Being at home you unfortunately have background noise from the wider family. You are trying to juggle items at home while online doing classes.

Research by Stedman (2011) has emphasised the social construction of places, but less attention is paid to the potentially important contributions of the physical environment to place meanings and attachments. In this case the Institute campus itself instils significant emotions, reactions, and motivations among part-time learners. Locke (2015) argues that classroom structures and the physicality of teaching spaces are not benign, but rather the teaching space and the built environment confer their own pedagogical value. In this way, buildings 'convey their own messages, solidified and materialised through physical walls and demarcated spaces' (Locke, 2015, p.596). Similarly, Gieryn

(2002) writes that buildings 'stabilize social life. They give structure to social institutions, durability to social networks, persistence to behaviour patterns:'

> Buildings don't just sit there imposing themselves. They are forever objects of (re)interpretation, narration and representation - and meanings or stories are sometimes more pliable than the walls and floors they depict. We deconstruct buildings materially and semiotically, all the time (Gieryn, 2002, p.35).

The sociality which a campus offers has been highlighted in numerous studies, (Stedman, 2011; Bernardo and Palma-Oliveiro, 2013) and here, our learners also discussed the feelings brought about by being on campus. Our focus groups discussed the importance of the library for a student identity, and for a dedicated space to perform that identity, as opposed to the conflicting identity that they perform in the home. Several of our focus group participants highlighted that as their families were also working and learning at home, there was great difficulty in finding somewhere quiet where they would be 'left alone'.

Conclusions

This study has informed our approach to delivery as we move through the public health emergency. In this paper, we have focussed on how learners feel about ERT and its impact on their success, however it is important to highlight that overall, our learners concluded that ERT was more convenient for them than face-to-face delivery. The findings discussed here are centred on the often-surprising comments from respondents about the barriers to success that they felt. Success itself incorporated being an active 'student' and that encapsulated all of the activities traditionally associated with studenthood including being on the physical campus, rather than merely passing exams. Sociologists have long discussed how spatial arrangements influence social life, as:

> the connections between time-space location and physical milieux of action, are not just uninteresting boundaries of social life, but inherently involved in its constitution or reproduction (Giddens, 1984, p.127).

Our learners' views corroborated this, confirming that the campus buildings offer a psycho-social element to the learning experience, and contribute to the identity of 'students' which part-time learners enjoy.

Our findings have also underscored the value part-time learners place on informal peer-to-peer learning, and their own metacognition of the learning

process. Respondents showed in-depth and self-reflective awareness of the importance of the exchange of ideas and understandings amongst their cohorts. In this way the learners displayed 'high order cognitive level processes and activities' (Biggs, 1999). Further work is needed on lifelong learners' self-reflexivity and their needs for psycho-social stimulation. There is a delicate balance between the flexibility of remote teaching and the need for engagement with peers (Flynn, Collins and Malone, 2022).

As we move through the different stages of the public health emergency, our findings from this study continue to influence best practice in our delivery. We are in ongoing dialogue with programme teams and class representatives to find optimal teaching methods, which increasingly include opportunities for informal discussions, and online chat forums, as well as blended approaches to delivery. We are attentive to the need of access to campus buildings even when remote delivery takes place, and to a flexible supportive library and learning resource centre.

Our motivation for this study was to have an active dialogue with our part-time learners, and to understand their motivations, and reactions to remote delivery during a pandemic. We continue to consider the best means of delivery that will attend to all learners' emotional and psycho-social needs, and to put their interests to the forefront of our decision-making. In this sense, we are interested in maintaining a relational approach as 'it is important to establish a pedagogy that is critical, emancipatory and relational' (Wals, 2020, p.825).

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