

Post-COVID-19 Students' Remote Learning Experiences from the Discipline of Tourism and Hospitality Management at The University of the South Pacific

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the perceptions and feelings of belonging to a community, country, or world. The increase in worldwide mobility and travel has affected many in recent decades. Pacific Island mobility is focused on education, employment, migration and maintenance of familial ties, with travel for leisure relatively uncommon except for visiting friends and relatives. However, the abrupt pause on travel within Fiji on 30th March 2020 left many with unanswered questions and a lingering sense of uncertainty and fear. This intensified with increased COVID-19 cases in Fiji and The University of the South Pacific (USP) moving to online learning. While the transition from the physical learning environment to virtual platforms highlights the potential of online learning in Pacific Island Countries, it is important to understand student experiences and perceptions to assist with the planning and development of academic curricula.

This study investigated students' online learning experiences in the Discipline of Tourism and Hospitality Management at the USP post-COVID-19, using an online survey and Zoom to conduct interviews. The study aimed to understand the effects of the different core components of the online learning environment on the students'

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experiences and perceptions. In addition, the study investigated the coping measures students used to deal with self-isolation, maintaining relationships, and the sudden change from onsite to online classes caused by COVID-19. It explored the extent to which students have been affected by the pandemic. Findings revealed that while students found online learning difficult, they reported a generally positive attitude towards this mode of study. Online learning allowed students to spend more time with their families and friends. Students also found new and innovative ways to utilise technology to facilitate their learning. However, students did miss the socialisation aspects of attending face-to-face classes and faced mental health issues such as anxiety, stress and depression. This study will contribute to research in online education in tourism and hospitality literature and help educational institutes, including USP, with future curriculum planning and development.

Keywords: COVID-19, online learning, remote teaching, South Pacific, student learning experiences, tourism and hospitality education