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# A Cross-Period Study on Learning Literature Online Among Teacher Trainees in a Teacher Training Institute: Yay or Nay?

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## ABSTRACT

Learning literature online became a practical necessity during the COVID-19 pandemic, but its continued place in teacher education and the classroom requires a more considered judgement. This study revisits teacher trainees' experiences of online literature learning to examine what worked, what remained difficult, and what those experiences can tell us about post-pandemic practice. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed at a Malaysian teacher education institute. Fifty-seven trainees completed a 28-item, seven-point questionnaire, and interviews with 15 trainees provided contextual explanations. Overall satisfaction was high (M = 6.55, SD = 0.46). Instructor characteristics received the highest domain rating (M = 6.76), particularly lecturers' responsiveness to questions (M = 6.84), while technology characteristics scored lowest (M = 6.36). Interview accounts nevertheless indicated difficulties with motivation, self-discipline and social interaction. Read alongside recent research, these findings suggest that the value of responsive teaching has endured, but favourable ratings alone cannot establish meaningful engagement or literary understanding. We argue that online literature education should be judged by the quality of interaction, interpretative work and equitable access, not convenience alone. Further multicampus and longitudinal research across different cohorts and teaching contexts should examine these outcomes directly and test whether improvements in instructional design translate into better learning.

**KEYWORDS: online literature learning; teacher education; post-pandemic pedagogy; instructor responsiveness; student satisfaction**

## Introduction

In an ideal teacher education programme, prospective English teachers learn to read literature closely, question interpretations, use textual evidence and experience the kinds of discussion they will eventually facilitate in schools. Digital learning can support this work by widening access to literary texts, annotations, recorded explanations and conversations that continue beyond scheduled class time. The aim is not to make literature easier to distribute, but to make interpretation more accessible and intellectually demanding. Evidence from online English literary studies suggests that asynchronous provision can widen participation when it retains purposeful reading and dialogue (Douglas et al., 2026; Shi et al., 2024).

The pandemic disrupted this ideal. In March 2020, teacher education institutions in Malaysia, like institutions elsewhere, had to move rapidly from campus instruction to virtual classes. Such emergency remote teaching preserved educational continuity but offered little time to redesign activities built around discussion and shared reading. Adedoyin and Soykan (2023), Jaafar et al. (2022), Bond et al. (2021) and Turnbull et al. (2021) demonstrate why the existence of online lessons is not equivalent to a well-designed online education. Many students welcomed convenience while also experiencing weakened interaction, distraction and unequal access (Aristovnik et al., 2020; Hensley et al., 2022).

The difficulties were not caused by technology alone. Independent learning requires time management, confidence and sustained effort; connectivity can interrupt participation; and a lecturer who uploads materials without opportunities to question or discuss may unintentionally turn literature into the memorisation of supplied interpretations. Studies across countries link satisfaction to interaction, course organisation, instructor support, self-efficacy and technological conditions, although their relative importance varies (Abdullah et al., 2022; Baber, 2020; Hettiarachchi et al., 2021; Mihat et al., 2024). However, most studies done were not in the context of literature. Literature raises a particular challenge because the tasks are not merely to access the text but also to revisit ambiguities and defend an interpretation with evidence (Awajan, 2022; Douglas et al., 2026).

Although this study was conducted after the pandemic, its significance remains a necessity for those who are keen on conducting online lessons. The post-pandemic sessions are different from the ones conducted during emergency closure. Institutions are no longer deciding only how to continue classes at a distance; they are now embedding and deciding which digital practices deserve a permanent place in English teacher education. Reviews published since 2023 report benefits from flexibility and thoughtfully designed blended learning, but they also identify unresolved problems of engagement, social connection and the digital divide (Akpen et al., 2024; Cramarenco et al., 2023; De Bruijn-Smolders & Prinsen, 2024; Olawale & Maphalala, 2026), where in Malaysia, uneven digital access and the quality of teacher–student interaction remain salient concerns (Mokhtar et al., 2025; Subramaniam et al., 2024).

Against this background, we revisit a TESL cohort for their opinion on these two questions: (1) How satisfied were teacher trainees with learning literature online? and (2) Which of the measured domains, learner, technology or instructor characteristics, received the highest ratings? The purpose of this cross-period study is not to present responses on old experience as a new 2026 survey or to claim that

practices improved after the pandemic. Instead, it is to interpret what this cohort revealed in the light of subsequent research, identifying what has remained important, what appears to be changing in contemporary pedagogy and also to understand whether continued satisfaction is sufficient evidence that learning literature online is working well.

## Literature Review

### *Online learning, satisfaction and disciplinary demands*

Online learning can make materials available beyond classroom hours and reduce travel and printing costs. These advantages are important for learners with competing responsibilities. Yet satisfaction is a multidimensional perception rather than a direct measure of learning. It can reflect convenience, support, technical reliability, social connection and the perceived quality of instruction. A recent systematic review by Olawale and Maphalala (2026), covering 76 studies, identifies five recurrent conditions associated with satisfaction: technology reliability, instructional design and teaching presence, equitable access, self-regulation and psychosocial interaction. The implication is that no single platform or lecturer practice is sufficient by itself.

Literary study adds another layer to this issue. Reading a narrative or poem typically involves returning to the text, comparing interpretations, responding to peers and substantiating claims. Awajan (2022) shows the relevance of deliberate instructional design for online English literature courses, while Shi et al. (2024) demonstrate how online consultation and collaborative writing can support ESL students' interpretative and writing work. Yu and Cai (2025) also report gains in reading-related engagement in a purpose-designed distance literature course. These studies suggest that online literature classes can be valuable when activities are structured around disciplinary practices rather than simply reproducing lectures on screen.

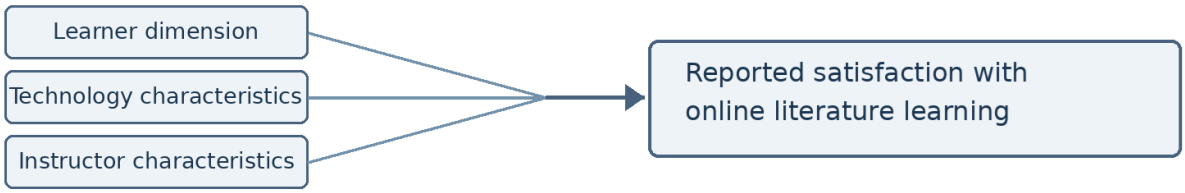
The accumulated evidence is neither a straightforward endorsement nor a rejection of online teaching. Xu and Xue (2023), synthesising pre- and post-outbreak satisfaction studies, found substantial variation by stakeholder group and setting. Cramarenco et al. (2023) similarly documented both favourable perceptions of flexibility and concerns about the educational environment. A 2024 review of blended-learning interventions reported generally positive engagement outcomes, but stressed the importance of design rather than delivery mode alone (De Bruijn-Smolders & Prinsen, 2024). More recent cross-period studies suggest that students continue to use digital tools after campus teaching resumes, although the relative influence of technological and personal conditions changes with context (Maican et al., 2025; Perrmann-Graham et al., 2025). As Svihus (2024) observes, moving a traditional lecture online without adapting its design is an inadequate response. The literature therefore shifts the argument from whether online learning is acceptable to what forms of online learning are educationally worthwhile.

### *Instructor, learner and technological dimensions*

The present study retains three dimensions from the questionnaire adapted from Shaid et al. (2021). The learner dimension captures trainees' reported confidence, effort, time organisation and perceived benefits. The technology dimension includes connectivity, access to resources and the usability of

online arrangements. The instructor dimension concerns lecturers' subject knowledge, clarity, encouragement, questioning opportunities, responsiveness and multimedia support. The domains overlap in practice: for example, a trainee's willingness to ask questions may depend both on personal confidence and on how approachable the lecturer appears.

***Figure 1.***
Three descriptive questionnaire dimensions of this study




The Community of Inquiry framework offers a useful interpretative lens. Garrison et al. (2000) distinguish teaching, social and cognitive presence in mediated educational settings. Here, teaching presence helps explain why clear guidance and responsive questioning may be valued; social presence draws attention to the connections needed for meaningful discussion; and cognitive presence concerns the sustained exploration of problems and ideas. Malaysian ESL evidence further suggests that teaching and cognitive presence matter across learner groups, although their relative needs may differ (Ng & Roslan, 2026). This framework is used to interpret the pattern of responses, not as an additional construct formally tested by the questionnaire.

Recent research reinforces the importance of the social dimension. A systematic review by Zhang et al. (2024) links social presence with satisfaction and persistence in online learning, while Liang and Ren (2025) report associations between social presence, academic emotions, self-efficacy and satisfaction. In the Malaysian context, Azizan et al. (2025) identify student–instructor, student–student and student–content interactions as relevant to online learning satisfaction. These findings make it important to investigate not only whether trainees are pleased with a lecturer but also whether they experience meaningful participation.

Instructor presence has received particularly strong attention. In a meta-analysis, Caskurlu et al. (2020) reported positive associations between teaching presence and satisfaction, although effect sizes differed across course settings. Koh and Daniel (2022) identified a range of teaching strategies used during the emergency transition, while Ingram et al. (2024) found that short instructor videos alone did not significantly improve overall teacher-education satisfaction, even though personalised communication mattered to participants. Later research associates responsiveness similarly, teaching organisation and constructive feedback with more favourable learning experiences (Azizan et al., 2025; Ng & Roslan, 2026; Pham & Nguyen, 2025; Zhang & Atwater, 2025). Yet Alshammari and Alrehaili (2025) found that teaching presence did not directly predict engagement in their model once social and cognitive presence were considered. Taken together, these results suggest that accessible lecturers are valuable, but their presence must help learners think and interact rather than merely feel supported.

### *The continuing relevance of pandemic-era evidence*

Studies emerging after the return to campus have begun to ask whether early lessons endured. Su et al. (2024) found that students and lecturers did not evaluate the same features of online learning in the same way; instruction ranked highly, but engagement and self-regulation remained problematic. Maican et al. (2025), comparing pandemic and post-pandemic learning contexts, found that platform expectations and the effects of technological conditions varied across pandemic and post-pandemic contexts. Similarly, a study in Malaysia reported continuing links between instructor performance, academic support and remote-learning satisfaction (Yi et al., 2023). These studies do not establish that all students became more comfortable with online learning; rather, they show why early survey findings should be reconsidered against contemporary expectations for purposeful blended and flexible teaching.

### *What the research tells us about learners and access*

Learner independence remained both a benefit and a burden. Adams et al. (2021), studying student engagement in Malaysia, drew attention to the quality of participation rather than simple platform access. Hensley et al. (2022) described students' experiences of distraction and disconnection during emergency teaching; Hettiarachchi et al. (2021), Siaw et al. (2022) and Aldhahi et al. (2022) showed that motivation, readiness and self-efficacy were associated with online satisfaction. Social presence offers a further explanation: systematic and empirical studies relate belonging, interaction and the willingness to persist to more positive learning experiences (Liang & Ren, 2025; Zhang et al., 2024). Importantly, evidence across multiple countries also suggests that the same course design can produce different levels of engagement depending on context (Sharif Nia et al., 2023). For TESL trainees, autonomy is therefore something to be taught and supported, not assumed because they can log into a platform.

The technology evidence has also matured. Malaysian research documents how gaps in access, skills and use can compound one another (Subramaniam et al., 2024). Survey studies found that internet availability, support and workload shaped satisfaction during emergency online learning (Sanusi et al., 2022; Yi et al., 2023), while later work continues to identify platform quality and digital support as important (Mansor et al., 2025; Olawale & Maphalala, 2026). Monazam-Tabrizi et al. (2026) argue that maintaining a digital platform does not, by itself, resolve motivational and feedback difficulties during learning disruption. Thus, the persistent problem is not simply whether online access exists, but whether it enables every student to participate in intellectually meaningful work.

### *Implications for the teaching of literature*

This wider evidence must be interpreted in relation to literature. Awajan (2022) describes the use of redesigned activities to encourage engagement in online English literature; Shi et al. (2024) show how consultation and collaborative writing can support language and interpretation in an online literature course. Douglas et al. (2026), revisiting English literary studies after the pandemic, identify flexibility and inclusion as advantages while emphasising the continued need for close reading and dialogue. Rahman and Idris (2025) document the adaptation challenges faced by ESL teachers, and Karim and Mustapha (2025) review post-COVID satisfaction among Malaysian ESL learners. Together these

studies suggest a clear direction: retain convenient access and varied media, but evaluate whether trainees are asking questions of texts, discussing plausible interpretations and developing the confidence to teach reading literary texts themselves. This disciplinary focus gives the present study more value than a general comparison of online platforms would provide.

## Method

### *Design and participants*

The original study followed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods arrangement: descriptive questionnaire findings were followed by interviews intended to explain trainees' experiences. The setting was a teacher education institute in Terengganu, Malaysia, and the target cohort comprised 72 TESL trainees from four classes. Fifty-seven trainees completed the questionnaire (79.2% of the eligible cohort); the demographics reported for these respondents are presented in Table 1. The subsequent interview analysis is used to illuminate, rather than statistically verify, the questionnaire patterns. No new participants or follow-up surveys were added for this post-pandemic reinterpretation.

***Table 1.***
Profile of survey respondents (N = 57)

| Variable | Category | n | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 16 | 28.1 |
| | Female | 41 | 71.9 |
| Age | 21 years | 53 | 93.0 |
| | 22 years | 4 | 7.0 |
| Class | TESL 1 | 16 | 28.1 |
| | TESL 2 | 12 | 21.1 |
| | TESL 3 | 18 | 31.6 |
| | TESL 4 | 11 | 19.3 |

### *Instrument*

The questionnaire adapted items from Shaid et al. (2021) and consisted of 28 seven-point Likert items: learner characteristics (10), technology characteristics (9) and instructor characteristics (9). Items combined judgements of satisfaction with perceptions of convenience, readiness and access. This matters for validity: the overall mean is best understood as a descriptive response index, not an independently validated measure of satisfaction alone. The use of previously published items provides a reasoned starting point for content coverage.

### *Data collection and analysis*

The Google Forms questionnaire was distributed through class representatives using WhatsApp. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and the anonymity of their responses. Descriptive analysis was conducted using SPSS 27, producing means and standard deviations for the overall index,

three dimensions and individual items. Fifteen trainees subsequently participated in interviews designed to explain the survey patterns.

## Results

### *Overall responses to online literature learning*

Across the 28 items, the reported overall mean was 6.55 (SD = 0.46; N = 57) on the seven-point scale. This indicates that responses were generally close to the agreement end of the scale. The source study classified scores of 5.80–7.00 as "very high"; applying that published rule, the overall score falls in the very-high category. As the instrument combines enjoyment, effort, access, convenience and evaluations of teaching, this result should not be interpreted as evidence that all aspects of learning were equally satisfactory or that literature achievement improved.

### *Comparison of the three dimensions*

***Table 2.***
Overall and domain-level descriptive results (seven-point scale; N = 57)

| Measure | Items | M | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Overall response index | 28 | 6.55 | 0.46 |
| Learner dimension | 10 | 6.54 | 0.51 |
| Technology characteristics | 9 | 6.36 | 0.57 |
| Instructor characteristics | 9 | 6.76 | 0.45 |

Table 2 shows the overall and domain-level descriptive results. Instructor characteristics had the highest mean (M = 6.76, SD = 0.45), followed by learner characteristics (M = 6.54, SD = 0.51) and technology characteristics (M = 6.36, SD = 0.57). The 0.40-point difference between instructor and technology scores is a difference in observed means, not a statistically established difference or a causal effect. The pattern nevertheless identifies instructor-related experiences as a promising focus for closer examination. The source narrative elsewhere reports the instructor mean as 6.75; the present revision follows the value of 6.76 shown in the results table, pending confirmation against the SPSS output.

### *Highest- and lowest-rated experiences*

Based on Table 3, the highest-rated item was satisfaction with lecturers' responsiveness to questions (C8: M = 6.84, SD = 0.46). Opportunities to ask questions (C2: M = 6.81, SD = 0.44) and the quality of multimedia materials (C9: M = 6.79, SD = 0.56) were also rated highly. These ratings point to a combination of interpersonal availability and accessible presentation of content. Respondents also endorsed savings on printed materials (A8: M = 6.77) and transport (A9: M = 6.75), indicating that convenience formed part of their favourable evaluation.

Stable internet access on campus (B1) received the lowest rating (M = 5.16, SD = 1.52), with greater variability than the other items. Importantly, 5.16 falls within the "high", not "low", interval of the source study's own 4.60–5.79 interpretation scale; it is relatively weak only when compared with the

other highly rated items. Completing work despite distractions (B7: M = 6.02, SD = 1.17), confidence with the online system (A3: M = 6.33, SD = 0.76) and willingness to invest time and energy (A2: M = 6.35, SD = 0.77) were among the less highly rated statements. These differences suggest that practical barriers can persist even in a generally positive response profile.

***Table 3.***
Item-level descriptive results (N = 57; original item codes retained)

| Code | Questionnaire item (edited for brevity) | M | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | Open to learning new things through online literature classes | 6.61 | .56 |
| A2 | Able to devote time and energy to online literature classes | 6.35 | .77 |
| A3 | Confident using the online learning system | 6.33 | .76 |
| A4 | Enjoy using Google Classroom | 6.67 | .55 |
| A5 | Find online literature learning comfortable | 6.39 | .90 |
| A6 | Believe online learning improves literature study | 6.47 | .73 |
| A7 | Believe online learning reduces unproductive time | 6.58 | .65 |
| A8 | Save money on printed learning materials | 6.77 | .50 |
| A9 | Save money on transportation | 6.75 | .54 |
| A10 | Able to organise time and prevent work accumulating | 6.47 | .76 |
| B1 | Have access to a stable campus internet connection | 5.16 | 1.52 |
| B2 | Keep up to date with technology | 6.32 | .76 |
| B3 | Receive clear instructions about participation | 6.58 | .65 |
| B4 | Revisit online literature materials when needed | 6.65 | .55 |
| B5 | Believe internet strength affects learning opportunities | 6.74 | .52 |
| B6 | Can access literature materials after class | 6.63 | .59 |
| B7 | Can complete work despite distractions | 6.02 | 1.17 |
| B8 | Satisfied with the content covered in class | 6.56 | .78 |
| B9 | Believe online learning makes up for missed class time | 6.60 | .78 |
| C1 | Lecturers demonstrate sound literature knowledge | 6.77 | .46 |
| C2 | Lecturers provide opportunities to ask questions | 6.81 | .44 |
| C3 | Lecturers make literature interesting | 6.72 | .56 |
| C4 | Lecturers respond more quickly in online courses | 6.65 | .67 |
| C5 | Lecturers provide clear instructions | 6.74 | .52 |
| C6 | Lecturers review previously covered topics | 6.75 | .51 |
| C7 | Lecturers are supportive when questions arise | 6.74 | .52 |
| C8 | Lecturers respond well to questions | 6.84 | .46 |
| C9 | Lecturers provide high-quality multimedia teaching aids | 6.79 | .56 |

*Note*: The item descriptions have been shortened for readability; A = learner dimension; B = technology characteristics; C = instructor characteristics.

The pattern is instructive when placed alongside the newer literature. Lecturer responsiveness remains a consistently valued feature of online education, as shown in recent Malaysian and international studies (Mokhtar et al., 2025; Ng & Roslan, 2026; Pham & Nguyen, 2025). Yet it would be inappropriate to label any shift in the three domain means as a post-pandemic change: the present study contains one cohort and no repeated measurement. What is new is the interpretative context supplied

by later scholarship, which allows us to question whether satisfaction alone is an adequate standard for online literature learning (Douglas et al., 2026; Wang et al., 2026).

## Discussion

*What do the high satisfaction scores actually tell us?*

At first sight, the results appear straightforward. Teacher trainees were very positive about online literature learning, with an overall mean of 6.55 on a seven-point scale. It would be tempting to conclude that the programme worked well and that there is little reason to change it. But satisfaction and learning are not quite the same thing. Students may be pleased that materials are accessible and that travelling costs are reduced, yet still struggle to read a difficult text, offer an interpretation or sustain a discussion. We therefore need to ask not only whether trainees liked the experience, but also what they were able to do as a result of it.

The interviews offer a useful starting point for understanding this distinction. The researchers' account notes that studying away from the usual classroom could "affect their motivation and engagement". The tension between enjoying the convenience of online learning and remaining actively involved in literary discussion can be illustrated by the following extract:

> *"I enjoyed learning literature online because I could read the materials whenever I was free. I did not have to travel or rush to class. But sometimes I just listened to the lecturer and did not really participate in the discussion. I understood what the lecturer explained, but I was not always sure whether I could explain the story myself."* [P2]

This distinction deserves attention because the literature classroom depends on more than the delivery of information. A trainee can download a short story and follow a lecture on its themes without ever examining an alternative interpretation or explaining why a particular passage matters. The online course may feel convenient, even successful, while the more demanding work of literary reading remains limited. Similar tensions between flexibility and engagement appear in recent reviews of online learning (Akpen et al., 2024; De Bruijn-Smolders & Prinsen, 2024).

Another possible dimension of this tension concerns how trainees judge their own learning experiences. Satisfaction may reflect the ease with which they complete assigned activities rather than the depth of their engagement with literary texts. This distinction is illustrated in a second extract:

> *"I think the online classes were good because everything was organised, and the lecturer provided the notes and recordings. I could complete the activities without much difficulty. However, when we had to discuss the meaning of a poem, I sometimes realised that I had only understood the lecturer's explanation and had not really developed my own interpretation."* [P5]

These examples suggest why favourable evaluations should not automatically be equated with stronger learning outcomes. They also raise a pedagogical question: are trainees satisfied because the course helps them become more thoughtful readers, or because it makes the learning experience easier to manage? The two possibilities are not mutually exclusive, but they should not be confused.

This does not mean that the favourable ratings are unimportant. They tell us that many practical features of online learning were appreciated. Nor does it mean that these trainees learnt less than students in face-to-face classes; the study did not measure that comparison. Rather, the findings point to the limits of satisfaction as an outcome. Zhang and Atwater (2025) show that course evaluations and achievement need not move together, while Perrmann-Graham et al. (2025) identify tensions between the freedom of online study and learners' need to feel connected. In literature teacher education, therefore, satisfaction should be the beginning of an evaluation, not its final verdict.

*Why did instructor responsiveness matter so much?*

The strongest result concerns lecturers. Instructor characteristics were rated more highly than learner or technology characteristics, and the single highest-rated item was responsiveness to trainees' questions (M = 6.84). This is unsurprising, but it deserves explanation. Learning literature involves making sense of language that is not always literal, following characters whose motives may be uncertain and considering interpretations that are open to disagreement. When students encounter these difficulties, a timely response from a lecturer can help them return to the text rather than abandon the task.

The original interview synthesis also reports that instructor support "helped reduce the challenges" of participating from different locations. One way this support may have mattered is illustrated in the following extract:

> *"Sometimes I did not understand certain parts of the story, especially when the language was difficult, or the meaning was not direct. I would ask my lecturer through WhatsApp or during the online class. When the lecturer responded, I felt more confident to continue reading. Without that explanation, I think I would have just moved on to the next part without understanding it properly."* [P4]

The survey and interview accounts point in the same direction, although neither establishes a causal effect. What appears important is not simply the availability of a lecturer, but the reassurance that help can be obtained when understanding breaks down. For trainees who are still developing confidence in literary interpretation, this reassurance may be particularly valuable.

Yet we also need to ask what kind of response is most useful. There is an important difference between supplying the answer and helping a student find an answer. Suppose a trainee asks why a character refuses to speak. A lecturer might simply explain the intended meaning. A more productive response might be: "Which part of the story supports your interpretation, and what might another reader notice?" The second response does not remove the difficulty; it turns the difficulty into an opportunity to read more closely. This is consistent with the Community of Inquiry view of teaching presence as purposeful facilitation rather than constant teacher talk (Garrison et al., 2000). More recent research also associates supportive teacher–student interaction with meaningful online experience (Mokhtar et al., 2025; Ng & Roslan, 2026; Pham & Nguyen, 2025).

There is a practical lesson here for teacher educators. Responsiveness need not mean replying instantly at all hours, nor should it make students dependent on lecturers. Clear consultation periods, brief comments on written interpretations, questions posted after a reading and opportunities to compare

answers with peers may all provide effective support. Shi et al. (2024) illustrate how consultation and collaborative activity can be built into an online English literature course. The point is to make lecturers accessible without taking away students' responsibility to think. Teacher trainees are, after all, learning not just how to understand literature but how to help their future pupils understand it.

The high rating for multimedia materials is similarly encouraging, but it should be interpreted with care. Attractive slides and well-produced recordings may explain a passage, yet explanation alone is not the same as interpretation. The possible difference between enjoying these resources and using them for deeper engagement is illustrated in another extract:

> *"I liked it when the lecturer used videos and slides to explain the literary texts. They made the lessons more interesting and easier to follow. But I think I learnt more when we were asked to give our own opinions about the characters or explain why we agreed or disagreed with our friends. That was when I had to think about the story instead of just listening."* [P9]

This distinction is worth considering. Multimedia resources may make literary texts more approachable, particularly when students encounter unfamiliar vocabulary, cultural references or historical settings. However, their pedagogical value depends on what learners are subsequently asked to do. A shared document in which trainees mark evidence, a forum where they defend competing readings, or a short reflective response can make thinking more visible. Research on online literature teaching increasingly emphasises such purposeful activities rather than the simple transfer of classroom lectures to a screen (Awajan, 2022; Douglas et al., 2026). A useful digital resource is one that leads students back to the literary text and towards a richer discussion of it.

*Learner independence does not mean learning alone*

The learner dimension was also rated highly, but the interview account provides an important qualification. It describes online study as requiring "a high level of self-discipline and motivation" and identifies "feelings of isolation and disengagement" when interaction is reduced. These phrases come from the researchers' summary of the interviews, rather than from individual transcripts, but they draw attention to a familiar problem. When the classroom routine disappears, students must decide when to read, how long to persist and when to seek help. Some manage this well; others find the freedom difficult to use.

The difficulty of managing such freedom can be illustrated by the following extract:

> *"At first, I liked the idea of studying at my own pace because I could arrange my own time. But after a while, I realised that I kept postponing my reading. There was nobody reminding me to finish the story before class. Sometimes I only read it shortly before the online discussion, so I was not really prepared to share my ideas."* [P11]

The issue here is not necessarily a lack of interest in literature. It may be a lack of structure within which that interest can grow. Reading literature requires time and attention, particularly when the text contains unfamiliar expressions or meanings that are not immediately obvious. Without regular routines, students may complete their reading rather hurriedly, leaving little opportunity to question, reflect upon or revisit what they have read.

It would therefore be misleading to regard independence and support as opposites. Learners often become more independent when they know what is expected, can see their progress and have someone with whom to test an idea. Studies of emergency learning highlighted the difficulties of sustaining self-regulation without established routines (Hensley et al., 2022; Siaw et al., 2022). More recent work links social presence and engagement to students' experience of learning online (Alshammari & Alrehaili, 2025; Liang & Ren, 2025; Wang et al., 2026; Zhang et al., 2024).

Another difficulty concerns opportunities for interaction. Reading literature is often a personal activity, but learning to interpret literature can benefit from hearing how others understand the same text. The potential loss of this social dimension is captured in the following illustrative account:

> *"When we were learning online, I sometimes felt that I was studying alone. I could read the story and answer the questions, but I missed discussing the text with my classmates. Sometimes they had different opinions about a character, and that made me look at the story differently. Online, especially when most of us kept quiet, we did not really have that kind of discussion."* [P15]

This raises an important point about literary learning. Discussion does more than provide students with an opportunity to speak. It allows them to encounter interpretations they may not have considered and to revisit their own understanding. In an online environment, where students can easily remain silent or turn off their cameras, such opportunities may need to be created more deliberately. The existing research does not prove why the present trainees experienced isolation or disengagement, but it helps explain why a highly rated course might still contain moments of withdrawal and uncertainty.

Consider a literature class in which trainees are asked to read a poem before an online meeting. Merely making the poem available does little to ensure that they will read it attentively. The lecturer could instead ask each trainee to choose two lines that seem important, explain the choice in a short post and respond to a classmate who selected different lines. During the live meeting, small groups could compare their interpretations before discussing them with the whole class. Such activities are neither elaborate nor technologically demanding. Their value is that they give reading a purpose and make participation possible even for quieter learners. The aim is to develop students who can work independently without having to work in isolation.

*Is the technology good enough?*

Technology received the lowest of the three domain means (M = 6.36). Campus internet stability was the lowest-rated individual item (M = 5.16) and showed the widest variation (SD = 1.52). These figures need careful interpretation. A mean of 5.16 still falls within the original study's "high" band, so it would be wrong to describe the group as dissatisfied with connectivity. At the same time, the lower mean and greater variation indicate that trainees did not experience this condition as evenly as they experienced their lecturers' support. A group average can look reassuring while concealing difficulties faced by particular students.

An illustrative account of how connectivity problems might interfere with literary discussion is presented below:

> *"The online learning platform was easy to use, but the internet connection was sometimes a problem. There were times when the lecturer was explaining something important, and suddenly the connection became unstable. When I managed to rejoin the class, the discussion had already moved to another part of the story. I could still get the notes, but I missed what the others had discussed."* [P7]

What makes this situation particularly problematic is that literary discussion is not always easily recovered through lecture notes. A student who misses an explanation may be able to read about it afterwards, but a missed exchange of ideas is more difficult to reconstruct. The discussion may have involved students challenging one another's interpretations, referring to particular passages or reconsidering their initial assumptions. These are valuable learning opportunities that cannot always be reproduced through recorded materials.

Should unreliable connectivity be considered acceptable in the post-pandemic period? As an emergency measure, intermittent access could sometimes be managed through goodwill and improvised solutions. It is harder to defend as a normal feature of teacher education. If one trainee can join a discussion, consult the text and contribute an interpretation while another repeatedly loses connection, they are not receiving the same opportunity to learn. The Malaysian digital-divide evidence and international policy reviews suggest that access should be treated as a matter of educational participation, not simply technical convenience (Subramaniam et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2023). The fact that lecturer support was rated most highly does not make connectivity less important.

Nevertheless, technological difficulties need not always prevent learning if alternative arrangements are available. A further illustrative extract highlights how flexibility in accessing materials may help trainees manage interruptions:

> *"I appreciated it when the lecturer uploaded the recording and reading materials after class. If my connection was not good, I could go back and listen to the explanation again. But I still preferred joining the live session because I could ask questions immediately. Watching the recording helped me understand the lesson, but it was not quite the same as being part of the discussion."* [P8]

The distinction between access to materials and access to participation is important. Downloadable texts, low-bandwidth recordings, discussion boards that do not require continuous video and submission arrangements that accommodate brief interruptions are all reasonable safeguards. These measures may appear modest, but they allow the pedagogical benefits of online learning to reach more students. Malaysian research continues to associate platform quality and support with students' satisfaction (Mansor et al., 2025), while broader reviews emphasise that technology works best when it responds to educational needs (Olawale & Maphalala, 2026).

In other words, the question is not simply whether the technology is good enough to deliver lessons. It is whether the technology allows trainees to participate meaningfully in the learning activities that matter. In literature teacher education, this means being able not only to access a text or listen to an explanation, but also to question, discuss, interpret and reconsider what has been read. There is little value in designing an excellent online literature activity if some trainees cannot reliably take part in it.

*Revisiting the findings in a post-pandemic context*

What, then, is new about these findings when viewed in 2026? Strictly speaking, the data do not show a change over time. They come from one cohort, and no post-pandemic comparison group was surveyed. What has changed is the question we can reasonably ask of the evidence. During the emergency period, the immediate concern was whether classes could continue. In a more settled digital environment, continuity is no longer enough. We can ask whether online learning helps trainees develop the knowledge, habits and confidence needed for good literary teaching. This shift in expectations is consistent with post-pandemic work on blended engagement and online English literary studies (De Bruijn-Smolders & Prinsen, 2024; Douglas et al., 2026; Su et al., 2024).

Some things appear remarkably consistent. The importance trainees placed on lecturers' accessibility accords with later research on teaching presence, feedback and social connection (Caskurlu et al., 2020; Mokhtar et al., 2025; Monazam-Tabrizi et al., 2026; Zhang et al., 2026). Other concerns are also familiar: students still need structure for independent learning, and reliable access remains a condition of meaningful participation. The newer literature therefore supports a qualified judgement. We should retain online practices that make materials accessible and lecturers approachable, but we should not assume that favourable satisfaction scores mean that students are engaged in deep reading.

Is the situation satisfactory? In one respect, yes: the trainees' appreciation of lecturer support is a genuine strength. In two important respects, however, the evidence calls for improvement. Self-discipline and social exchange cannot be left entirely to individual learners, and unequal connectivity should not be accepted simply because the overall technology mean is positive. More importantly, the study did not establish whether trainees became stronger interpreters of literary texts, an area to be discovered in future. A post-pandemic evaluation should therefore include examples of students' annotations, written interpretations, discussion contributions and teaching plans. These would allow us to see not only whether trainees enjoyed online literature classes but also whether those classes prepared them to teach literature well.

## Conclusion

The study involves one cohort at one institution, with 57 survey respondents and 15 interview participants. While its descriptive statistics cannot establish the different effects of teaching practices or measure changes between pandemic and post-pandemic periods, the interview summaries offer useful explanations. A larger multicampus study should collect responses at several points in time, establish the reliability and validity of a literature-specific instrument, and examine the quality of trainees' literary work alongside their experiences of teaching.

A further step would be to compare different instructional designs, such as recorded explanation alone, discussion supported by teacher questioning, and collaborative close reading. Tracking trainees' engagement and interpretation across a semester would help establish which arrangements strengthen learning. The larger question is no longer whether literature can be taught online; the pandemic answered that in practical terms. The more useful question is what kind of online teaching helps prospective English teachers read, discuss and teach literature for better understanding.

To conclude, the study suggests that what trainees value most in online literature learning has not lost its importance: a knowledgeable and responsive lecturer remains central to the experience. Yet the interviews remind us that positive ratings may coexist with difficulty concentrating, working independently and remaining connected to others. Revisiting these findings after the pandemic leads to a balanced conclusion. Online learning offers genuine opportunities, especially when it provides flexible access and meaningful feedback, but convenience and satisfaction are not sufficient educational goals. For future English teachers, the test is whether online learning helps them read literary texts thoughtfully, discuss different interpretations and create similar opportunities for their own pupils.

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