

# ***Explore Chinese People's Nostalgia for Online Learning in the Post-epidemic Era in 2023***

**Rui Xue<sup>1,a,\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS), University of Nottingham Ningbo China,  
Ningbo, 315199, China*

*a. hvyrx1@nottingham.edu.cn*

*\*corresponding author*

**Abstract:** The theme of this paper is to explore that in 2023, when the epidemic and online learning symbolize the end, people begin to miss the period of online learning, the causes of this phenomenon, and the specific content of nostalgia. In the previous research, scholars discussed the three aspects, students, teachers, and online courses, which profoundly demonstrated the influence of students' self-control, teachers' mastery of the interaction with students and network equipment, and the content of online courses on students' efficiency and experience. In addition, it also shows whether online learning brings helpful or awful aspects to students and families. Undoubtedly, it improves the original approaches to learning and brings people a memorable and profound memory. Therefore, based on the previous articles, this paper is committed to studying why, in 2023, Chinese students begin to miss the online learning and the specific content of the miss. This paper adopts qualitative analysis. First, 20 related posts are selected from Weibo according to keywords and then artificially classified and analyzed. Then, 10 participants who experienced online learning during the epidemic were selected and interviewed to draw conclusions. The experimental study found that most participants still maintained a positive attitude toward online learning and miss it. In addition, this paper also puts forward that with the trend of people missing online learning, the form of classes should also be reformed to benefit different kinds of people's needs and start to move closer to the combination of online learning and offline learning.

**Keywords:** Online Learning, Online Course, Chinese, COVID-19

## **1. Introduction**

The sudden emergence of COVID-19 in 2019 has dealt an irreversible blow to the economy and education in China and around the world. The unexpected and urgent request for previously face-to-face courses to be taught online has been a special challenge. Because of the need for epidemic prevention and control, offline teaching and other activities requiring people to gather are not allowed most of the time from the end of 2020 to 2023. Over 1,000 million students worldwide were impacted by 185 countries closing higher education institutions (HEIs) in April 2020, according to The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) [1]. Based on this situation, the shift from offline learning to online education is irreversible.

A specific pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) was implied by online teaching and learning. With the help of digital technologies, it mainly related to designing and organizing for better learning

experiences and creating distinctive learning environments. In the three years 2019-2022, online education has given students the opportunity to continue their courses during COVID-19 as much as possible, with a strong initiative. The ability to change the time and location of the educational engagement stands out as a valuable source of flexibility [2]. It breaks the restrictions of time and space and, to a large extent, gives students the possibility of diverse development. For example, it can take classes anywhere, not confined to the classroom. In terms of course content, it also gives students more choices. Online learning can be recorded and broadcast, and students can flexibly choose the content they need to learn.

However, by the end of 2022, based on the economic losses caused by COVID-19 and the reduction of its damage to people's health, the country has gradually lifted the lockdown policy, and students can resume offline classes. It also means that the three-year national online learning time has come to an end. Just when everyone thought that online learning would withdraw from people's attention, more and more people began to miss online learning life during the pandemic period in microblog messages. This paper aims to explore the Chinese people's nostalgia for online learning during the pandemic in 2023 and the reasons.

## 2. Literature Review

At the end of 2022, the Chinese government issued a policy of gradually lifting the lockdown, which means that people can begin to participate in normal group activities, including offline classes. Based on this situation, whether online learning will completely withdraw from the historical stage. Despite mixed reviews over the past three years, online learning has been seen as a panacea [3]. However, there is no doubt that the existence of online learning has primarily maintained people's basic education during the epidemic period. For example, online learning can connect teachers and students who are far away from each other and give feedback on knowledge [2]. They also provide people with special memories.

Zhu & Liu [4] insisted that the Chinese government has taken measures to prevent the further spread of COVID-19, such as banning classes and postponing the opening of schools. The Ministry of Education has launched an initiative entitled 'Disrupted classes, undisrupted learning.' But at first, there were many questions about the enforceability of online courses. Universities must change from largely lecture-based learning systems to problem-based learning techniques in virtual contexts like online courses in order to engage students more actively [1]. It will be necessary to reevaluate the skills and abilities that students will need in this new environment as a result of the transition from face-to-face to virtual education, which will have a substantial impact on the overall learning process [5]. Although there are many hidden defects in online courses, they also bring learners many benefits and special memories. The opening of 24,000 online courses for higher education institutions by 22 major online curriculum platforms on February 2, 2020, included 1,291 national excellence courses and 401 national virtual simulation experimental courses that covered 12 undergraduate and 18 tertiary vocational programs [6]. The rich and varied courses offered by online courses give students the opportunity to develop themselves and find out what they are interested in. Teachers are crucial to delivering inclusive, equitable, high-quality distance education [7]. They must possess the information, abilities, and moral principles necessary to teach online, necessitating the need for more adaptable and dynamic post-pandemic teacher education.

However, there are difficulties in the implementation of online learning. The Coronavirus outbreak has considerably hastened the growth of online education in Chinese higher education, even if technology is only the first step in the post-pandemic age. Technologies including the Internet, big data, AI, 5G, and cloud-based platforms, have been used to improve education [4]. However, the gap between regional disparities is hard to bridge. The online course delivery, interaction, and data collection require stable digital infrastructure and platforms, yet poor Internet access interrupts some

students across China and overseas learning. Therefore, compared with students in wealthy areas, how students in poor areas overcome difficulties to complete their studies is a more impressive measure. In addition, students' self-control is also an essential factor in exploring the implementation effect of online courses. Students must be able to engage in self-disciplined, self-directed active learning, and instructors must continue their professional growth, according to Zhu & Liu [4]. Students that are motivated, disciplined, organized, and have good time management skills can benefit from online learning [8]. For kids without access to the right technology or in environments with less interactions between students and teachers, it may be less effective [9]. The following important obstacles were cited by students as being particularly difficult to overcome when learning entirely online: boredom, a feeling of isolation, a lack of time to devote to each subject, and a lack of self-organizing skills [10]. Additionally, some pupils are more in favor of traditional classroom instruction. Some students prefer in-person or face-to-face learning over online courses because they feel there is a perceived lack of contact [11], while others participate differently in online courses.

Teachers encounter difficulties as well. For them to teach online, they need to lack pedagogical content knowledge [12]. Such PCK covers the technical and managerial facets of online education, such as utilizing platforms and tools and planning workflows. The ability to develop and facilitate effective online learning experiences requires a solid understanding of pedagogical ideas and their application [13].

However, there are some limitations in these studies. In Rapanta's [13] study, he emphasized the role of teachers in guiding students through online classes in the later stages of the epidemic and the skills that need to be mastered. However, whether during or after the epidemic, the relationship between students and teachers should be more interactive and mutual feedback so as to show the relationship between online courses, teachers, and students to the greatest extent.

Jandridic [14] believed that the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on the Chinese educational system should go far beyond merely addressing the current issue; they should also highlight prospective development chances in the years to come. Although the three years of the pandemic rarely carry out collective learning offline, this unique experience of online classes, whether good or bad, has left a deep memory for people until the end of online classes; there are still some people who will post on social platforms to recall that life. Therefore, this paper focuses on exploring the various memories of Chinese people for online courses during the pandemic in 2023 and the causes.

### **3. Method**

This part consists of 4 parts, which are research philosophy, research design, data collection, and data analysis.

#### **3.1. Research Philosophy**

Based on interpretivism, qualitative analysis is used in this study. First, posts of online learning posters published online learning are screened on Weibo; 20 are selected for analysis, and then eligible participants are selected for interview. Finally, conclusions are drawn.

#### **3.2. Research design**

This experiment adopts qualitative analysis and will be divided into two parts. The first part will screen out 20 posts from January 2023 till now by searching the keywords #online learning and #covid19 on Weibo. Through the artificial analysis, we can find out their attitude towards online learning, whether they have the feeling of nostalgia, and what part of online learning they miss.

In the second part, 10 participants were selected for interview. The interview questions are as follows.

- 1) Whether you have fully experienced the online course period from 2021-2023
- 2) Do you prefer online classes or online classes
- 3) In the first online class, what is your opinion of online class
- 4) Whether the communication with the teacher during the online class is timely
- 5) Have you encountered any technical problems, such as communication equipment failure during the online course
- 6) Will your mood fluctuate significantly during the online course
- 7) How do you think about the problem of getting along with your parents for a long time during the online course
- 8) Do you often lose your mind during online classes
- 9) Is online class more efficient or online class more efficient
- 10) If you can take online classes all the time, would you like to

### 3.3. Sampling and Data Collection

For the selection of samples, 20 posts related to the theme #online learning #covid19 will be artificially selected from the searched posts. In terms of the choice of participants, all 10 participants have taken online courses or expressed opinions on online courses. The 10 participants were interviewed using an online questionnaire with 10 short answer questions. After filling in the questionnaire, the answers were reviewed, and the results were valid.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the experiment was artificially analyzed. The 20 posts selected by Weibo were analyzed according to whether they missed online courses and what specific content they missed.

The answers to the questionnaire were sorted out and analyzed according to three aspects: attitude reasons and personal experience/stories.

## 4. Result

Among the 20 posts from Weibo posted after the end of the epidemic in 2023, 4/5 participants clearly expressed their nostalgia for the time of online learning. Among the participants who expressed nostalgia for online learning, a quarter of the participants felt that online learning brought a simpler living environment and relaxed atmosphere, and one said that such a relaxed environment also improved his learning. Some participants also found that students with poor conditions still overcome difficulties and study hard. This spirit impressed him deeply. In addition, online courses also help participants find their natural interests and let them have a long time to experience the feeling of learning in the company of family members. Most participants who have expressed nostalgia for online learning find it difficult to contact the same life as before; thus, they feel nostalgia for online learning. However, there are also a few participants who believe that overcoming the difficulties of online learning during the pandemic is challenging and memorable. Although the difficulties have passed, they are still worth remembering.

The reasons for the participants not missing the online learning can be divided into the following three points.

- 1) Because of the pandemic, many expected activities cannot be held, and the parts worth remembering are lost.
- 2) The epidemic has a harmful effect on their character and figure, which is their dark side.
- 3) Prefer offline classes with real interaction.

In the interview, six participants made it clear that they miss the online learning, and their reasons can be divided into two points.

- 1) Online learning had a lot of freedom, and there were no restrictions on time and space.
- 2) They could get along with their parents and enhance their relationship through online courses at home.

## 5. Discussion

Beyond the crisis, the majority of universities (92%) and 75% of colleges and universities have stated that they intend to investigate alternative modes of instruction. Online and offline education must be viewed in tandem in our post-digital world [15]. In order to help existing and future teachers become more robust to crises like the COVID-19 epidemic, we encourage the development of an all-encompassing teacher education system, regardless of the method of delivery. It will meet the needs of a wide range of people to the greatest extent possible while also improving the resilience of schools and educational institutions to deal with possible crises in the future.

According to the interview and analysis, most participants still held a positive attitude towards online learning. Even in 2023, when COVID-19 is about to end, many people still miss the online learning period. Although different people have different attitudes to online learning, there is no doubt that online learning has changed people's ways of learning and gaining.

This study found that most participants missed online learning because they missed the simple and relaxed atmosphere during the online course.

Every day at home, this kind of simple life without social interaction made me feel good and missed this kind of time.

Eat, have classes and sleep, very comfortable and calm. Not talking to people or thinking about other relationships still feels so good.

According to Anderson [2], time and space did not limit online learning. It meant that everyone could arrange courses according to their needs and find a more suitable learning pace, which may lead to improved grades. However, this relaxed atmosphere also included that some students who lacked self-control were absorbed in recreational activities such as playing games and watching TV. When Lockdown policies against COVID-19 were lifted and the school was gradually resuming, it meant that people could no longer do things unrelated to the class during the class. Therefore, they missed the life of online learning. It is consistent with the view of Zhu & Liu [4]

Online learning is well-known for its variety and flexibility. People had more course choices and could find the learning content that really suited them from online courses. One participant said that with the various learning materials and courses provided by online learning, she found her interest and direction for learning.

People were different in what they were interested in, and they did not want to listen to the compulsory courses during the epidemic. However, like me, I would listen carefully in the course that I was interested in.

Online learning made most students at all levels successfully attend web-based distance educational activities and allowed students to choose what they were really interested in. Therefore, she had significant memories of online learning and missed online courses even after the end of the online course era.

I was an arts student, but I am also interested in biology. Because of the online learning, I could also get a good biology class. I had cultivated my interest and expanded my knowledge.

Online learning gave me the opportunity to meet many teachers. In daily life, it is difficult to get in touch with high-level professors, but because of the existence of online learning, I can also take lessons from these teachers.

However, a small number of participants had negative attitudes toward online learning and showed that the period of online learning was not valuable to memory.

During the online course, I felt lonely without friends at home for a long time.



The epidemic had made me different. Before the pandemic, I was lively, cheerful, slim, and had many friends. Due to online learning and unlimited overeating, I began to feel that I was not good-looking and confident.

I was delighted with my high school life, but many activities should have been canceled because of the pandemic. It was a pity that many parts that can become beautiful memories are missing.

From their views, although online learning had a great initiative, due to the lack of personal self-control, many students did not learn the valuable things and knowledge they needed to master. Besides, this kind of situation also delayed the follow-up course learning. Online learning may also have a harmful effect on their mental and physical health. There is evidence that when students leave school, they have less physical activity, more screen time, irregular sleep patterns, and poor diet, leading to weight gain and decreased cardiorespiratory function [16]. Therefore, they do not want to recall the time of online learning.

Some scholars in the literature review indicated that teachers played an important role in students' perceptions of online courses. However, from the experimental results, no participants proposed the positive or negative effects of teachers on their online learning. According to Zhu & Liu [4], they believe that students' attitudes towards online courses and whether they miss online courses are related to the region where students live. Maceviciute and Wilson [17] showed that digital inequality primarily affects low-income households, particularly those in rural or semi-urban areas. Students in poor areas may be unable to conduct online courses generally due to the lack of Internet equipment, poor signal, and other problems, which significantly affect their views on online courses. However, none of the participants in this article explicitly address this issue.

Although this paper clearly describes the Chinese people's various memories and the causes of memories of online learning during the epidemic in 2023, there are also many limitations. First of all, the sample size of this experiment is small; thus, the experimental results may not be rigorous enough. Secondly, in the analysis of the text, keywords are extracted according to the author's subjective ideas. There may be some differences between the original intention of the posters and the author's understanding, which may not fully understand the intention of the poster's text. In subsequent studies, the sample could be expanded to 200 and use R for sentiment analysis. Sentiment analysis can conduct a detailed classification of posts. With the support of data, sentiment, and attitude contained in posts generated by analysis will be more accurate, and experimental results will be more credible.

Through this study, we find that such a group of people still have a deep nostalgia for the era of online courses, and it also indicates that the combination of online courses and online classes may become a new trend to promote education. The European University Association [18] reports that despite the crisis, the majority of universities have affirmed that they want to investigate novel teaching methods, and 75% of them will increase their digital capability. Online and offline education must both be taken into account in the post-digital era, according to Jandriic et al. [15]. In order to help present and future teachers become more robust to crises like the COVID-19 epidemic, they argued for the creation of an all-encompassing system of teacher education, regardless of how it is delivered. It will meet the needs of a wide range of people to the greatest extent possible while also improving the resilience of schools and educational institutions to deal with possible crises in the future.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper is devoted to studying the various memories and causes of Chinese people's online classes during the pandemic in 2023. Compared with the previous studies, this paper mainly studies the behavior of people's nostalgia in online learning. In contrast, the previous article emphasizes what online learning brings to people, which is not directly related to nostalgia. This paper describes the advantages and disadvantages of online learning to people in more detail, and the profound impact it

brings to people's lives is highlighted. Make the logic of the article smoother. This paper adopts qualitative analysis. First, keywords are used to select qualified posts from Weibo for artificial appreciation and analysis, and then ten qualified participants are selected for interviews, and the interview results are integrated.

According to the results of the research, although some students think that online courses have a terrible impact on their lives, most of them hold a positive attitude toward online learning. At the end of the epidemic period, many people announced that online learning would also be gradually banned by offline learning. However, there are still many people who like the way of learning online and are very excited about this particular time. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate the needs of all people and find out the coexistence mode of online learning and offline learning, which can improve the existing education model. All in all, while exploring how people's nostalgia for online learning is generated, this paper also finds that the education model still needs to be further improved to meet the needs of various groups of people.

## References

- [1] Marinoni, G., Van 't Land, H., and Jensen, T. (2020). *The Impact of Covid-19 on Higher Education Around the World*. IAU Global Survey Report
- [2] Anderson, T. (2011a). *Towards a theory of online learning*. In T. Anderson (Ed.), *The theory and practice of online learning*. 2nd Edition (pp. 45–74). Edmonton: Athabasca University Press.
- [3] Dhawan, S. (2020). Online learning: A panacea in the time of COVID-19 crisis. *Journal of educational technology systems*, 49(1), 5-22.
- [4] Zhu, X., & Liu, J. (2020). Education in and after Covid-19: Immediate responses and long-term visions. *Postdigital Science and Education*, 2, 695-699.
- [5] Jensen, T. (2019). *Higher Education in the Digital Era: The Current State of Transformation Around the World*. International Association of Universities (IAU).
- [6] Wang, Y. (2020). How does the Chinese education system cope with the virus outbreak challenge? *China Daily*, 18 February. <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-02-18/China-s-online-learning-sector-thrives-amid-epidemic-ObnQfU8hfW/index.html>.
- [7] Zhu, X. (2020). Building up National Online Teacher Education System. *Research in Education Development*, 40(2), 3. <https://doi.org/10.14121/j.cnki.1008-3855.2020.02.002>.
- [8] Jacob, S., & Radhai, S. (2016). Trends in ICT e-learning: Challenges and expectations. *International Journal of Innovative Research & Development*, 5(2), 196–201.
- [9] Bullen, M. (1998). Participation and critical thinking in online university distance education. *Journal of Distance Education*, 13(2), 1–32.
- [10] Liang, S. W., Chen, R. N., Liu, L. L., Li, X. G., Chen, J. B., Tang, S. Y., et al. (2020). The psychological impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on Guangdong College students: the difference between seeking and not seeking psychological help. *Front. Psychol.* 11:2231.
- [11] Tichavsky, L. P., Hunt, A. N., Driscoll, A., & Jicha, K. (2015). It's just nice having a real teacher": Student perceptions of online versus face-to-face instruction. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 9(2), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.20429/ijstl.2015.090202>
- [12] Shulman, L. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57, 1–22.
- [13] Rapanta, C., Botturi, L., Goodyear, P., Guàrdia, L., & Koole, M. (2020). Online university teaching during and after the Covid-19 crisis: Refocusing teacher presence and learning activity. *Postdigital science and education*, 2, 923-945.
- [14] Jandrić, P. (2020). Postdigital research in the time of Covid-19. *Postdigital Science and Education*, 2, 233– 238. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-020-00113-8>.
- [15] Jandrić, P., Knox, J., Besley, T., Ryberg, T., Suoranta, J., & Hayes, S. (2018). Postdigital science and education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 50(10), 893–899. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2018.1454000>.
- [16] Wang G, Zhang J, Lam SP Li SX, Jiang Y, Sun W, et al. (2019). Ten-year secular trends in sleep/wake patterns in Shanghai and Hong Kong school-aged children: a tale of two cities. *J Clin Sleep Med.* 15:1495–502. doi: 10.5664/jcsm.7984
- [17] Macevičiūtė, E., & Wilson, T. D. (2018). Digital means for reducing digital inequality: Literature review. *Informing Science: The International Journal of an Emerging Transdiscipline*, 21, 269-287.
- [18] European University Association (2020). *EUA 2020: Preliminary Results of the EUA Survey on "Digitally Enhanced Learning at European Higher Education Institutions*.