

Challenges, Learning Dimensions, and Coping Strategies of Myanmar Students Transitioning from On-Campus to Online Learning: A Case Study at the University of Mataram

Aung Minn Khant

English Education Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Mataram, Indonesia

Received : 28 July 2026

Revised : 29 September 2026

Accepted : 29 September 2026

Published: 30 September 2026

Corresponding Author

Author Name: Aung Minn Khant

Email: amk942000@gmail.com

DOI: 10.29303/jeef.v6i3.1098

© 2025 The Authors. This open access article is distributed under a (CC-BY License)



Phone*: +95777790725

Abstract: This qualitative case study explored the challenges, learning dimensions (motivation, engagement, and academic performance), and coping strategies of Myanmar students who moved from on-campus learning in Myanmar to online learning at the University of Mataram, Indonesia, during the dual crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability. Nine students took part in semi-structured interviews, and the data were analyzed thematically. The students faced technical challenges (unstable internet, reliance on VPNs, and power cuts), emotional challenges (isolation and hesitation to ask questions), pedagogical challenges (delayed feedback), and socio-cultural challenges (exclusion from Indonesian-language communication and unfamiliar accents). Their engagement declined, but their motivation was sustained mainly by the goal of completing a degree, and their academic performance was maintained through self-directed study and flexible routines. They combined problem-focused strategies, such as time management and downloading materials in advance, with emotion-focused strategies, such as peer support and intentional breaks. The findings suggest that, for students in crisis-affected contexts, online higher education can serve as both an academic pathway and a lifeline, and that host universities should provide flexible, low-bandwidth, and multilingual support.

Keywords: Dual Crisis, Coping Strategies, Online Learning, Myanmar International Students, Educational Resilience

INTRODUCTION

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic, online education, often described as “emergency remote teaching” (Hodges et al., 2020), plays a significant role in the education sector (Dhawan, 2020). Although well-designed online and blended learning can be as effective as face-to-face instruction (Means et al., 2013), the sudden shift during the pandemic exposed problems of digital access, infrastructure, and readiness. Students from around the world reported challenges such as poor internet connection, reduced motivation, and loneliness because of the absence of physical interaction with teachers and peers (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Cao et al., 2020). Additionally, students from developing countries faced limited resources and access to technology.

In Myanmar, the situation was complicated because of political instability, frequent internet shutdowns, electrical shortages, and restricted access to digital tools. These complex conditions forced students to manage their education journey under a dual crisis of the pandemic and political conflict (Kato, 2024; Nanthakorn et al., 2023). Consequently, many Myanmar students have moved from on-campus to online learning at international universities in a dual crisis context (D’Apice & Guasconi, 2025). This transition made students experience technical, academic, cultural, and emotional challenges.

International students face additional linguistic, cultural, and contextual barriers in online learning, such as language differences, time zone differences, unfamiliar academic expectations, and fewer opportunities for social interaction and cultural exchange (Forbes-Mewett & Gomes, 2021; Thu & Vungsiriphisal, 2024). Online learning also

requires self-regulation and time management, which can be difficult for students used to teacher-led classrooms, and the absence of a supportive learning environment has been associated with stress, anxiety, and lower motivation (Cao et al., 2020; Li & Che, 2022).

To manage these challenges, students have relied on peer support networks, online discussion groups, and messaging apps, which can reduce loneliness and facilitate resource sharing (Mozid, 2022). Teachers, in turn, have used blended methods, interactive tools, and immediate feedback to increase participation and motivation in virtual classrooms (Sato et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2021).

However, studies of students from conflict-affected contexts who study online at foreign universities remain limited (Kato, 2024; Nanthakorn et al., 2023); most research examines either online learning within one country or the experiences of international students in general. This study addresses this gap by examining how Myanmar international students at the University of Mataram managed technical, emotional, pedagogical, and socio-cultural challenges after moving from on-campus to online learning under a dual crisis.

The study draws on four theoretical lenses (Figure 1). Hofstede’s (2011) cultural dimensions theory, particularly power distance, helps explain why students from teacher-centered educational cultures may hesitate to ask questions or join discussions in student-centered online classes. Berry’s (1997) acculturation theory explains the emotional strain and culture shock that students may experience when adapting to a new academic culture, even when they study from their home country, and it distinguishes problem-focused from emotion-focused ways of coping with this stress. Vygotsky’s

(1978) sociocultural theory, which views learning as a social process, highlights how the loss of face-to-face interaction may affect engagement and the collaborative construction of knowledge.

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) holds that motivation and engagement depend on the satisfaction of three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In crisis-driven online learning, isolation and limited institutional support may frustrate these needs, particularly relatedness. In this study, learning dimensions refer to students' motivation, engagement, and academic performance (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Pintrich, 2003).

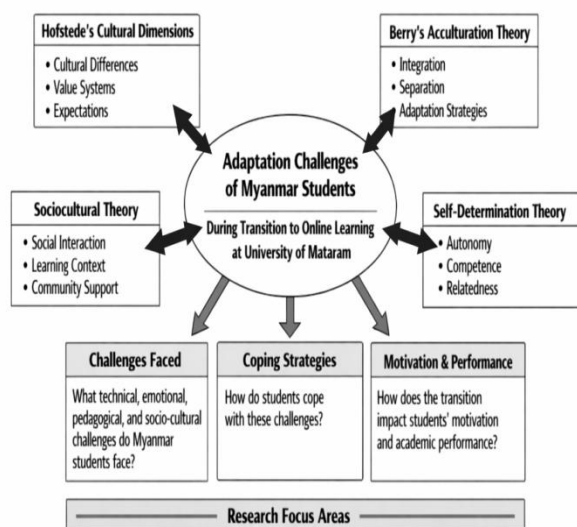


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

Accordingly, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. What technical, emotional, pedagogical, and socio-cultural challenges do Myanmar students experience during the online transition at the University of Mataram?
2. How has the online transition affected Myanmar students' learning dimensions such as motivation, engagement, and academic performance under the dual crisis context?
3. What problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies do Myanmar students apply, and how do these strategies affect their online academic journey?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative, holistic single-case study design (Yin, 2018) to examine the experiences of Myanmar international students who moved from on-campus to online learning. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows participants' experiences to be explored in depth and in context (Creswell, 2014). The case was the

group of Myanmar students studying online at the University of Mataram.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling. The criteria were Myanmar nationality, enrollment in an online program at the University of Mataram, experience of on-campus learning at a university in Myanmar before the transition, and willingness to share their experiences. Nine students took part (Table 1). This number was considered adequate for an in-depth analysis of a relatively homogeneous group, as the basic elements of themes can emerge within the first six interviews in such groups (Guest et al., 2006). The participants were recruited through student WhatsApp groups, online class forums, and personal academic networks. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained before the interviews, and the participants are referred to as Participant 1 to Participant 9 to protect their identities.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted on Zoom, each lasting about 20 minutes. The interview guide covered the participants' experiences of on-campus learning and the transition; technical, academic, socio-emotional, and cultural challenges; the effects of the transition on their motivation, engagement, and academic performance; and their coping strategies and support systems. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed verbatim.

The transcripts were analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes were grouped into themes guided by the research questions and the patterns in the data, and the participants' responses were compared to identify similarities and differences. The themes were then interpreted through the theoretical framework described above.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Participant Overview

The profiles of the nine participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of participant profiles

Participant Identifier	Major / Academic Program	Current Physical Location	Contextual Baseline / Job Status
Participant 1	Business and Human Resource Management	Myitkyina, Myanmar	Final year; writing thesis on youth businesses.
Participant 2	Veterinary Medicine (Clinical)	Myanmar	Final year; balances clinical part-time work.
Participant 3	Accounting and Business	Thailand	Final year; balances full-time employment.
Participant 4	Development Economics	Yangon, Myanmar	Final year; first time experiencing virtual learning.
Participant 5	English Language Education	Ayeyarwady, Myanmar	Thesis stage; completely remote from

			home.
Participant 6	Bachelor of Accounting	Myanmar	Final year; balances remote part-time work.
Participant 7	Bachelor of Architecture	Thailand	Thesis stage; balances multiple part-time jobs.
Participant 8	English Education	Myanmar	Last semester; previously an engineering student.
Participant 9	English Language Education	Myanmar	Final semester; works long night shifts until midnight.

As Table 1 shows, the participants' locations shaped their experiences. Students in Myanmar faced infrastructural problems such as unstable internet connections and electricity shortages, whereas students in Thailand mainly struggled to balance work and study.

Findings for RQ1: Challenges in Online Learning

The data revealed four types of challenges: technical, emotional, pedagogical, and socio-cultural.

Technical Challenges in Online Learning

The main challenges that many students in Myanmar faced during online learning are the internet instability and the necessary reliance on Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to overcome national digital blocks. These challenges significantly affect the students' participation in the classroom activities.

Participant 1 mentioned that accessing a stable internet connection mainly depended on the paying cost:

"We have to reliance on the expensive one... we have to go to particular places that can access the internet."

In addition, some students within Myanmar experienced unpredictable frequent electrical shortages, and as a result, it hindered active participation in the online learning classroom activities. Participant 6 stated the detailed participation rate due to this challenge:

"Only the 70% because... electricity cut off time, and also the internet line are unstable."

This challenge also increased anxiety and lessened the classroom participation. Participant 5 shared how electrical shortage affected the concentration in the lessons:

"Our country has lots of electrical shortage... I can't open the camera... sometimes I lost the concentration..."

On the other hand, students who live in Thailand did not encounter these basic infrastructural challenges. They faced the challenge of managing between study and work instead of internet and electrical challenges.

Emotional Challenges in Online Learning

Due to the fully transitioned online learning and political instability of the country, some students felt isolated, lonely, and hesitant in classroom activities. One of the participants felt lonely and had difficulties finding academic

support because there was only one student in the online classroom.

Participant 2 mentioned being the only one student in the classroom made her hesitant in asking questions to the supervisor:

"I'm the only one student in that subject... I'm so hesitate to my supervisor... So, I didn't ask too many questions."

Other participants expressed that lack of physical interaction and virtual learning made them bored and miss the campus life. Participant 4 mentioned her loneliness and feelings and difficulties faced during online learning:

"Studying alone at home is also difficult to focus for long time on screen... I miss meeting my classmates and teachers in person."

Pedagogical Challenges in Online Learning

Some participants faced challenges in teaching methods. Online learning sometimes leads to delayed feedback and time-consuming due to the lack of physical interaction. Participant 7 explained that online learning processes made her academic progress slow:

"If I want to discuss... I have to make the presentation first... send to professor... consume more time... less effective."

Socio-Cultural Challenges in Online Learning

Owing to the cultural difference and practice, some students experienced challenges in participation with other Indonesian students and in pronunciation.

Participant 1 described the feeling of exclusion during group chat where Indonesian students used their native language:

"They have a group... all are using their language, so I don't understand what they are talking..."

In addition, some students faced pronunciation and flow challenges in the online learning classroom. Participant 8 noted:

"The accent, Indonesian accent... some teachers speak way too fast..."

Findings for RQ2: The Impacts of Online Transition on Motivation, Engagement, and Performance

Table 2 summarizes how the transition affected the participants' motivation, engagement, and academic performance.

Table 2. The impact of the online transition on learning dimensions

Learning Dimension	Participant Evidence (Quotes)	SDT Link	Observed Academic Outcomes
Motivation	Participant 2: "I feel dizzy... hesitate to ask questions." Participant 4: "I remind	Autonomy disrupted by uncertainty; relatedness supported by peer networks	Decline in intrinsic drive; emergence of goal-oriented resilience

	myself of my goal... to finish my bachelor degree successfully.”		
	Participant 8: “Online study really motivates me because everything that I want, I can search.”		
Engagement	Participant 1: “I couldn’t see a lot of engagement, except with the professor... online I don’t see group activity.” Participant 6: “Only about 70%” engagement due to power cuts. Participant 7: “I actively participated in philosophy classes... listening to others’ perspectives.”	Relatedness undermined by isolation; digital adaptation reduced collaboration	Depressed synchronous participation; reliance on asynchronous materials
Performance	Participant 3: “I need to prepare my time for class and for my work.” Participant 5: “Sometimes their explanation is different... I have to find the information through AI or Google.” Participant 9: “Online learning is	Competence challenged by linguistic/digital barriers; autonomy constrained by workloads	Fragmented outcomes; success dependent on time-management and coping

	quite effective... I can balance my career and study.”		
--	--	--	--

As Table 2 shows, the dual crisis affected the three learning dimensions differently. Students' engagement lowered because of the isolation and technological challenges. However, their motivation and performance remained relatively high owing to the passionate goals, dedication, and effective self-study practices.

The Impact of Online Transition on Student Motivation

Students' intrinsic motivation was affected by loneliness and isolation. However, extrinsic motivation was maintained due to the hope of getting a bachelor degree for a secure future.

Participant 4 explained that the constant reminder is getting a bachelor degree and this long-term goal made the learning continuous:

"I remind myself of my goal... to finish my bachelor degree successfully."

Some students mentioned that their motivation increased because of this international education program. This program offered international connections and opportunities for getting wider digital databases. Participant 8 shared:

"Online study really motivates me because everything that I want, I can search."

The Impact of Online Transition on Student Engagement

Most students' classroom engagement decreased due to the technological challenges and the lack of structured classroom online activities. Online learning and immediate transition had negative effects on engagement.

Participant 1 explained that the online classes rarely offered group work and collaboration:

"I couldn't see a lot of engagement, except with the professor... online I don't see group activity."

Power cuts also reduced engagement: Participant 6 estimated that they limited participation to only about 70% (see the technical challenges above).

The Impact of Online Transition on Academic Performance

Although students' engagement decreased and they faced technological challenges, they could manage to maintain their academic performance by researching online and making flexible schedules.

For students in Thailand, online learning brought many benefits for study and career. Participant 9 stated:

"Online learning is quite effective... I can balance my career and study."

In addition, some students sought additional information and learning resources when they faced challenges in understanding teachers' instructions. Participant 5 explained:

"Sometimes their explanation is difficult... I have to find the information through AI or Google."

Findings for RQ3: Coping Strategies to Overcome Challenges in Online Learning

The third question focused on the strategies that students applied to solve the challenges along their online learning journey. According to the data, students mainly used problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies to maintain their academic progress.

Problem-Focused Coping Strategies to Overcome Challenges in Online Learning

Problem-focused coping strategies included direct and behavioral actions to handle the stressful situation. Students who work full-time jobs had to manage their time effectively. They arranged the schedule for study time to maintain academic progress. Participant 3 mentioned the detailed strategy:

"I set the time... three hours in a day... if I don't do any study, I didn't finish my assignments."

Some students who were facing infrastructural challenges had to do some preparations as a problem-focused coping strategy. Participant 6 managed to overcome an unstable internet connection by downloading all necessary data and reading materials during stable internet hours. This made the learning comfortable when there was no stable internet connection.

Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies to Overcome Challenges in Online Learning

Emotion-focused coping strategies involve the managing of the emotional stress by peer support and intentional breaks for more mental energy.

The peer support system played an essential role in this online academic journey under double crises. Participant 5 mentioned that this academic journey couldn't be completed without the support and help of classmates:

"When even I can't get up, you call me, wake me up... If I don't have such kind of friends, I can't complete this degree."

Some students applied intentional breaks to reduce stress and structured coping strategies to maintain emotional well-being. Participant 9 explained:

"I pause what I'm doing and then I do things that I feel pleasure... I love eating... after eating, I feel better."

Integrated Coping Strategies to Overcome Challenges in Online Learning

The findings showed that students who could apply both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies when they faced challenges along the online learning journey remained engaged and persistent. Participant 9 shared the effective mindset of learning:

"Be hungry, humble, and hardworking... Bruce Lee said, 'Be like an empty glass.'"

Discussion

The findings show that the participants faced technical, emotional, pedagogical, and socio-cultural challenges, and that these challenges differed by location.

The infrastructural problems reported by students in Myanmar, such as internet shutdowns, reliance on VPNs, and power cuts, reflect the digital divide documented in Myanmar after the 2021 coup and the COVID-19 pandemic (Kato, 2024; Nanthakorn et al., 2023) and the connectivity barriers reported in other developing countries (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). The pedagogical difficulties, such as delayed feedback and time-consuming communication with lecturers, can be understood as transactional distance, the psychological and communicative gap between learners and teachers that grows when dialogue is limited (Moore, 1993).

The emotional and socio-cultural challenges are consistent with Berry's (1997) view that adapting to a new academic culture causes acculturative stress, even though these students did not relocate physically. The reluctance to ask questions, as when Participant 2 hesitated to approach her supervisor, may also reflect the high power distance of teacher-centered educational cultures (Hofstede, 2011), while exclusion from Indonesian-language group chats limited the social interaction through which learning takes place (Vygotsky, 1978). Similar feelings of isolation and anxiety have been reported among other students who learned online during the pandemic (Cao et al., 2020; Forbes-Mewett & Gomes, 2021).

In terms of learning dimensions, the findings partly support self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Engagement declined when isolation and the lack of group activities frustrated the need for relatedness, but motivation was sustained mainly by extrinsic goals, such as completing a degree, and relatedness was partly rebuilt through informal peer networks. Academic performance was maintained through self-directed study with online resources and flexible schedules, which suggests that goal-oriented motivation and self-regulation helped the participants protect their learning outcomes (Pintrich, 2003).

The participants combined problem-focused strategies, such as time blocking and downloading materials during stable internet hours, with emotion-focused strategies, such as peer support and intentional breaks. This pattern is consistent with studies that linked students' coping strategies to their challenges and well-being in online learning during the pandemic (Li & Che, 2022; Mozdil, 2022). The central role of self-organized peer networks suggests that host universities could formalize such support, for example, through peer mentoring. Because the findings are based on nine self-reported interviews, however, they should be read as an in-depth account of this group rather than as generalizable results.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the experiences of nine Myanmar international students who moved from on-campus learning in Myanmar to online learning at the University of Mataram during the dual crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability. The students faced technical challenges (unstable internet, VPN reliance, and power cuts), emotional challenges (isolation and hesitation to ask questions), pedagogical challenges (delayed feedback), and socio-cultural challenges (language exclusion and unfamiliar

accents). Their engagement declined, but their motivation was sustained by the goal of completing a degree, and their academic performance was maintained through self-directed study. They coped by combining problem-focused strategies, such as time management and offline preparation, with emotion-focused strategies, such as peer support. Host universities are encouraged to provide recorded lectures and low-bandwidth learning platforms, to use multilingual communication in official channels, and to formalize peer mentoring for international students from crisis-affected contexts. Policymakers and funding bodies could support affordable internet access in conflict-affected areas and protect scholarships during national crises. Future research could include more host institutions and combine interviews with quantitative indicators, such as learning management system data and grade records.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, A.M.K.; methodology, A.M.K.; formal analysis, A.M.K.; investigation, A.M.K.; data curation, A.M.K.; writing original draft preparation, A.M.K.; writing review and editing, A.M.K.; visualization, A.M.K. The author has read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- Adnan, M., & Anwar, K. (2020). Online learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic: Students' perspectives. *Journal of Pedagogical Sociology and Psychology*, 2(1), 45–51. <https://doi.org/10.33902/JPSP.2020261309>
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology*, 46(1), 5–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Cao, W., Fang, Z., Hou, G., Han, M., Xu, X., Dong, J., & Zheng, J. (2020). The psychological impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on college students in China. *Psychiatry Research*, 287, Article 112934. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.112934>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- D'Apice, C., & Guasconi, M. (2025). International partnerships in health education: Adapting e-learning models for conflict-affected Myanmar. *Healthcare*, 13(3), Article 285. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare13030285>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. Springer.
- Dhawan, S. (2020). Online learning: A panacea in the time of COVID-19 crisis. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 49(1), 5–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047239520934018>
- Forbes-Mewett, H., & Gomes, C. (2021). International students in the time of COVID-19: International education at the crossroads. *Journal of International Students*, 11(S2), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v11is2.4292>
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903>
- Hodges, C., Moore, S., Lockee, B., Trust, T., & Bond, A. (2020, March 27). The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning. *EDUCAUSE Review*. <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning>
- Hofstede, G. (2011). Dimensionalizing cultures: The Hofstede model in context. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014>
- Kato, Y. (2024). Accessibility to education during the “Coup-Vid”: An overview of online learning in Myanmar. *k@ta*, 26, 187–192. <https://doi.org/10.9744/kata.26.00.187-192>
- Li, J., & Che, W. (2022). Challenges and coping strategies of online learning for college students in the context of COVID-19: A survey of Chinese universities. *Sustainable Cities and Society*, 83, Article 103958. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2022.103958>
- Means, B., Toyama, Y., Murphy, R., & Bakia, M. (2013). The effectiveness of online and blended learning: A meta-analysis of the empirical literature. *Teachers College Record*, 115(3), 1–47.
- Moore, M. G. (1993). Theory of transactional distance. In D. Keegan (Ed.), *Theoretical principles of distance education* (pp. 22–38). Routledge.
- Mozid, N.-E. (2022). Association between psychological distress and coping strategies among students engaged in online learning. *PLOS ONE*, 17(7), Article e0270877. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0270877>
- Nanthakorn, B., Ractham, P., & Kaewkitipong, L. (2023). Double burden: Exploring the digital divide in the Burmese educational system following the 2021 coup d'état and the COVID-19 pandemic. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, 11, Article 100310. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2023.100310>
- Pintrich, P. R. (2003). A motivational science perspective on the role of student motivation in learning and teaching contexts. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95(4), 667–686. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.95.4.667>
- Sato, S. N., Condes Moreno, E., Rubio-Zarapuz, A., Dalamitros, A. A., Yañez-Sepulveda, R., Tornero-Aguilera, J. F., & Clemente-Suárez, V. J. (2024). Navigating the new normal: Adapting online and distance learning in the post-pandemic era. *Education*

- Sciences*, 14(1), Article 19.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14010019>
- Thu, P. M., & Vungsiriphisal, P. (2024). The impacts of COVID-19 and coup on Myanmar migrant children's education in Thailand. In M. McAuliffe & C. Bauloz (Eds.), *Research handbook on migration, gender, and COVID-19* (pp. 325–343). Edward Elgar Publishing.
<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781802208672.00031>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Yu, H., Liu, P. L., Huang, X. H., & Cao, Y. C. (2021). Teacher online informal learning as a means to innovative teaching during home quarantine in the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, Article 596582.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.596582>