

From Burdened Learners to Adaptive Survivors: Identity Construction Through Evaluative Discourse in Malaysian Higher Education During COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered an unprecedented transition to Open and Distance Learning (ODL), fundamentally reshaping higher education experiences worldwide. While previous research has extensively examined students' perceptions, challenges, and experiences of ODL, comparatively little attention has been devoted to how learners discursively constructed identities while navigating educational disruption. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates how learner identities were constructed through evaluative discourse in Malaysian ODL-related Twitter communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA), Appraisal Theory, and contemporary perspectives on discursive identity construction, the study analysed a specialised corpus of 14,764 Malaysian ODL-related tweets (594,060 tokens). Keyword, collocation, concordance, and semantic prosody analyses were employed to identify recurring evaluative patterns and their relationship to processes of identity positioning. The findings reveal that evaluative discourse functioned not merely as a means of expressing attitudes towards ODL but also as a resource for identity construction. Five recurring identity narratives emerged from the corpus: the Burdened Learner, Resistant Critic, Adaptive Survivor, Supported Community Member, and Negotiating Learner. Together, these narratives illustrate how learners interpreted, negotiated, and represented themselves during a period of unprecedented educational disruption. The study contributes to research on online learning, educational discourse, and identity by demonstrating how recurring evaluative practices function as mechanisms of identity construction.

Keywords: identity construction; evaluative discourse; corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis; appraisal theory; open and distance learning

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally disrupted higher education, forcing universities worldwide to replace face-to-face teaching with Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Although online learning was already established, the rapid transition transformed teaching, learning, and assessment practices, making ODL a central topic of public discussion (Yong, 2024). Studies have extensively examined students' experiences of ODL, highlighting both its benefits, such as flexibility and accessibility, and its challenges, including technological limitations, increased workload, communication barriers, and emotional stress (Aristovnik et al., 2020; Bozkurt et al., 2020; Bond et al., 2021; Crawford et al., 2024). Despite these contributions, existing research has focused primarily on learners' perceptions, attitudes, and educational outcomes, relying largely on surveys and interviews (Law & Kaur, 2025). Comparatively little attention has been paid to how learners discursively constructed identities while evaluating their ODL experiences. This is an important gap because language not only reflects experience but also enables individuals to position themselves and negotiate social identities (Bamberg, 2011; Benwell & Stokoe, 2016).

Social media provides a valuable context for examining these processes because it captures naturally occurring discourse rather than elicited responses. During the pandemic, Twitter became an important platform where

students publicly expressed frustrations, appreciation, resilience, and criticism relating to ODL. However, existing studies have largely examined such discourse through sentiment analysis or public opinion, while corpus-assisted investigations linking evaluative language to identity construction remain limited, particularly in the Malaysian higher education context. To address this gap, the present study employs Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA) to examine Malaysian ODL-related Twitter discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) and contemporary perspectives on discursive identity construction (Bamberg, 2011; Benwell & Stokoe, 2016), the study investigates how recurring evaluative discourse contributed to the construction of learner identities. Specifically, it addresses the following research question: *How are learner identities discursively constructed through evaluative discourse in Malaysian ODL Twitter communication during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

LITERATURE REVIEW

ODL Experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the global adoption of Open and Distance Learning (ODL), transforming higher education and generating extensive research on students' learning experiences. Studies consistently report that although ODL enabled educational continuity during campus closures, students encountered numerous challenges, including unstable internet connectivity, limited technological resources, communication barriers, increased academic workload, and reduced learning engagement (Aristovnik et al., 2020; Bozkurt et al., 2020). Beyond instructional concerns, researchers also documented heightened levels of stress, emotional exhaustion, social isolation, and declining psychological wellbeing among university students (Bond et al., 2021; Means & Neisler, 2021). At the same time, ODL was not perceived entirely negatively. Several studies highlighted advantages such as flexibility, accessibility, learner autonomy, and opportunities for self-regulated learning (Dhawan, 2020; Bozkurt, 2022). Consequently, pandemic-era ODL has increasingly been characterised as a complex educational experience shaped by both opportunities and constraints rather than a uniformly successful or unsuccessful mode of learning. More recent scholarship has shifted towards examining the longer-term implications of online and hybrid education, focusing on learner resilience, adaptability, educational sustainability, and institutional preparedness (Bond et al., 2023; Crawford et al., 2024). While these studies have substantially advanced understanding of students' perceptions and behavioural responses, they have largely relied on surveys and interviews that describe experiences rather than examine how learners discursively interpreted and represented those experiences. Consequently, the linguistic processes through which learners constructed meanings and identities during educational disruption remain insufficiently understood.

Identity Construction in Educational Discourse

Contemporary discourse scholarship conceptualises identity as dynamic, relational, and continuously negotiated through language rather than as a fixed personal attribute (Bamberg, 2011; De Fina, 2021). From this perspective, identities emerge through communicative practices in which individuals position themselves and others within particular social, institutional, and cultural contexts. Identity construction is therefore understood as an ongoing discursive accomplishment shaped by interaction and meaning-making. Educational contexts provide particularly rich environments for identity negotiation because learners continually position themselves in relation to institutional expectations, academic performance, peers, and learning environments (Benwell & Stokoe, 2016). These processes become especially salient during periods of disruption, when established educational routines are challenged and learners are required to reinterpret their roles and experiences. The rapid transition to ODL during the COVID-19 pandemic created precisely such conditions, requiring students not only to adapt to new modes of learning but also to renegotiate their identities within unfamiliar educational environments. Although recent research has explored learner agency, resilience, belonging, and self-regulation in online learning (Müller & Goldenberg, 2021; Kahu & Picton, 2023), these studies have predominantly adopted psychological or behavioural perspectives rather than discourse-oriented approaches. Recent scholarship has also recognised social media as an important site for identity construction. Rather than merely reflecting pre-existing identities, digital communication platforms actively shape how identities are performed, negotiated, and recognised through discourse (Darvin, 2023; Georgakopoulou, 2023; Androutsopoulos, 2023). Through everyday acts of evaluation, affiliation, resistance, and self-positioning, users construct socially meaningful

identities within online communities. Despite growing interest in digital identity, relatively little research has examined how learner identities are discursively constructed through naturally occurring ODL-related social media communication, particularly within higher education.

Evaluative Discourse and Identity Positioning

Evaluation is a fundamental interpersonal resource through which speakers express attitudes, assign value, and negotiate social relationships. Beyond communicating opinions, evaluative language enables individuals to position themselves in relation to experiences, institutions, and other social actors, making it central to processes of identity construction. Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) provides one of the most influential frameworks for analysing evaluative language. Its Attitude system distinguishes between Affect, which captures emotional responses; Judgement, which evaluates people's behaviour; and Appreciation, which evaluates objects, processes, and phenomena. Together, these resources explain how speakers construct interpersonal meanings while expressing approval, criticism, gratitude, frustration, resilience, and other evaluative orientations. Recent discourse research has increasingly highlighted the relationship between evaluation and identity. Bamberg (2011) argues that identities emerge through acts of positioning, while De Fina (2021) demonstrates that recurring evaluative choices contribute to broader identity narratives through which individuals interpret their experiences. From this perspective, repeated evaluations do not merely reveal attitudes but also construct recognisable social identities by positioning speakers in relation to particular events, values, and communities.

Within educational discourse, evaluative language allows learners to position themselves in relation to academic success, institutional practices, technological challenges, and social relationships. Expressions of frustration may contribute to identities associated with struggle and resistance, whereas evaluations emphasising perseverance, gratitude, or collaboration may construct identities grounded in resilience and solidarity. Although recent studies acknowledge resilience as a socially negotiated process (Bond et al., 2023; Kahu & Picton, 2023; Martin et al., 2022), relatively little attention has been devoted to examining how such identities emerge through recurring evaluative discourse in naturally occurring educational communication. Consequently, the relationship between evaluative language and learner identity remains underexplored.

Social Media, Educational Discourse, and Corpus-Assisted Approaches

Social media platforms have become valuable sources for investigating educational discourse because they capture naturally occurring communication produced in response to real-world events. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Twitter functioned as an important space where students publicly discussed their ODL experiences, enabling researchers to examine spontaneous evaluations, interactions, and identity positioning that are often inaccessible through interviews or questionnaires. Existing studies using Twitter data have investigated public attitudes towards online learning, educational policy, and student wellbeing, frequently employing sentiment analysis, thematic analysis, or descriptive content analysis (Greenhow & Chapman, 2020; Veletsianos et al., 2022). While these approaches have generated valuable insights into public opinion, they often pay limited attention to the linguistic mechanisms through which evaluations contribute to identity construction. Corpus-assisted approaches provide a useful alternative by combining quantitative analyses of recurrent linguistic patterns with qualitative interpretation of discourse (Baker et al., 2008; Brezina, 2018). In particular, Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA) enables researchers to identify statistically salient lexical patterns while interpreting their broader social and ideological significance (Baker & Levon, 2015; Marchi & Taylor, 2022). This integration offers a robust framework for examining how recurring evaluative patterns contribute to identity construction across large bodies of naturally occurring discourse.

Collectively, the literature reveals three important limitations. First, research on pandemic-era ODL has primarily focused on learners' perceptions, experiences, and educational outcomes rather than the discursive construction of learner identities. Second, although discourse scholars recognise the close relationship between evaluation, positioning, and identity, relatively few studies have examined these processes using naturally occurring ODL-related social media discourse. Third, corpus-assisted investigations integrating evaluative language, Appraisal Theory, and identity construction remain scarce, particularly within the Malaysian higher

education context. Addressing these gaps, the present study employs a Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis of Malaysian ODL-related Twitter discourse to investigate how recurring evaluative discourse contributed to the construction of learner identities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Analytical Framework

The present study integrates three complementary theoretical perspectives: Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA), Appraisal Theory, and discursive identity construction; to examine how learner identities are constructed through evaluative discourse in Malaysian ODL-related Twitter communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. Together, these perspectives provide a multi-level analytical framework linking recurrent linguistic patterns with evaluative positioning and identity construction.

Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis

Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA) combines the systematic pattern-identification capabilities of corpus linguistics with the interpretive orientation of Critical Discourse Analysis (Baker et al., 2008; Partington et al., 2013). By identifying recurrent lexical, collocational, and semantic patterns across large datasets, CACDA enables discourse to be analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively, linking observable linguistic regularities to broader processes of meaning construction and social representation (Fairclough, 2015). In the present study, CACDA provides the overall analytical perspective for identifying statistically salient evaluative patterns within Malaysian ODL Twitter discourse. Rather than interpreting individual tweets in isolation, recurring linguistic patterns are examined as discursive resources through which learners collectively interpreted educational disruption and constructed shared understandings of their ODL experiences. CACDA therefore establishes the empirical foundation upon which subsequent analyses of evaluation and identity are built.

Appraisal Theory

While CACDA identifies recurrent discourse patterns, Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) provides the analytical framework for interpreting their evaluative meanings. The study focuses on the Attitude system, comprising Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation, which respectively capture emotional responses, evaluations of behaviour, and evaluations of objects, processes, or situations. These appraisal resources enable the systematic classification of evaluative meanings embedded within ODL-related discourse. Because evaluative choices simultaneously express attitudes and position speakers in relation to their experiences, Appraisal Theory serves as an important bridge between linguistic evaluation and broader processes of identity construction. Rather than functioning solely as a classification framework, appraisal analysis explains how recurring evaluations contribute to patterns of learner positioning across the corpus.

Identity Construction through Evaluative Positioning

The study adopts a discursive perspective of identity, viewing identities as socially negotiated and continuously constructed through acts of positioning rather than as fixed personal attributes (Bamberg, 2011; Benwell & Stokoe, 2016; De Fina, 2021). From this perspective, repeated evaluations become resources through which individuals construct recognisable identities by positioning themselves in relation to experiences, institutions, and other social actors. Within the context of ODL, learners continually evaluated academic demands, institutional practices, technological challenges, and interpersonal relationships. These recurring evaluations not only expressed attitudes towards online learning but also positioned learners as struggling, resilient, critical, supportive, or adaptive participants in educational discourse. Accordingly, identity is conceptualised as an emergent product of recurring evaluative positioning rather than a pre-existing characteristic of individual learners.

Drawing these perspectives together, the analytical framework adopted in this study proceeds from recurrent evaluative lexical items, to collocational patterns and semantic prosodies, then to evaluative positioning, and finally to identity narratives. CACDA identifies recurrent discourse patterns, Appraisal Theory explains their

evaluative meanings, and discursive identity theory accounts for how repeated evaluations contribute to the construction of learner identities. This integrated framework provides the theoretical basis for interpreting the five identity narratives identified in the analysis: *the Burdened Learner*, *Resistant Critic*, *Adaptive Survivor*, *Supported Community Member*, and *Negotiating Learner*. Figure 1 summarises the analytical framework adopted in the study.

Figure 1 Analytical Framework for Identity Construction through Evaluative Discourse

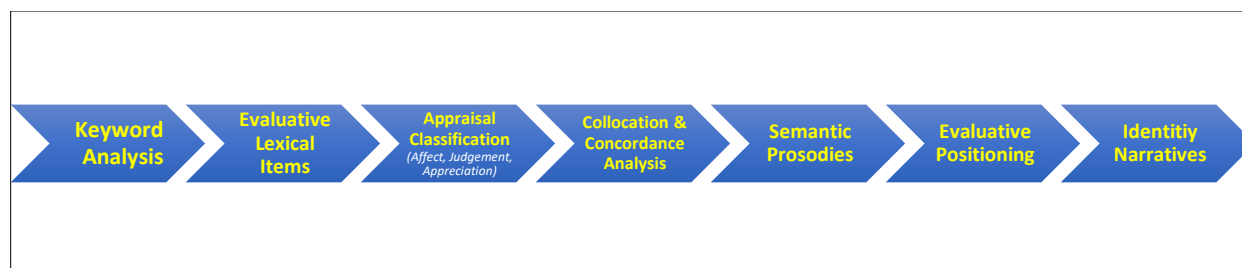


Figure 1 illustrates the sequential analytical workflow adopted in this study. The analysis progressed from statistically salient evaluative lexical items to appraisal classification, collocational and concordance analysis, semantic prosodies, evaluative positioning, and finally the construction of learner identity narratives. This framework conceptualises identity construction as an emergent and cumulative discursive process in which recurring evaluations become shared forms of learner positioning across Malaysian ODL Twitter discourse.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a sequential corpus-assisted qualitative research design integrating quantitative corpus-linguistic techniques with qualitative discourse analysis. Corpus linguistic procedures were first employed to identify statistically salient evaluative lexical patterns in Malaysian ODL-related Twitter discourse. These patterns were subsequently interpreted using Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) and contemporary perspectives on discursive identity construction (Bamberg, 2011; De Fina, 2021). This sequential analytical design enabled the study to move systematically from observable linguistic regularities to higher-order interpretations of evaluative positioning and learner identity construction. By combining quantitative pattern identification with qualitative contextual interpretation, the study ensured both analytical rigour and sensitivity to discourse context.

Corpus Compilation

Data Collection

The dataset comprised a specialised corpus of Malaysian ODL-related Twitter (X) discourse produced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Twitter was selected because it provided naturally occurring public discourse in which students, educators, and other stakeholders shared experiences and evaluations of Open and Distance Learning (ODL), making it well suited for investigating evaluative language and identity positioning. Tweets were retrieved using a purposive keyword-based sampling strategy. Search terms included *ODL*, *open and distance learning*, *online learning*, *online class*, *distance learning*, *remote learning*, *kelas online*, *belajar online*, and *pembelajaran dalam talian*, together with commonly used ODL-related hashtags identified through preliminary corpus exploration. To ensure relevance, only tweets referring to Malaysian higher education, including teaching and learning activities, assessments, coursework, lecturers, academic workload, and institutional policies, were retained. Promotional content, advertisements, automated messages, duplicate tweets, retweets, hyperlinks, usernames, and tweets unrelated to Malaysian higher education were excluded during preprocessing. As the study analysed publicly available social media data, no interaction with users occurred. Usernames and other identifying information were removed during preprocessing, and all concordance extracts presented in the findings were anonymised to protect user privacy.

Corpus Composition

Following data cleaning and preprocessing, two corpora were established. The Malaysian ODL Tweet Corpus (MOTC) served as the target corpus, while the Malaysian General Tweet Corpus (MGTC) functioned as the reference corpus for keyword extraction. Both corpora covered the same period (May 2020–December 2021), thereby minimising temporal variation while allowing lexical comparisons between ODL-related discourse and general Malaysian Twitter communication.

Table 1 Corpus Composition

Corpus	Corpus Type	Description	Data Source	Timeframe	Tweets (n)	Tokens (n)	Types (n)
Malaysian ODL Tweet Corpus (MOTC)	Target Corpus	ODL-related tweets within Malaysian higher education discourse	Twitter/X	May 2020–December 2021	14,764	594,060	13,014
Malaysian General Tweet Corpus (MGTC)	Reference Corpus	General Malaysian tweets not specifically related to ODL	Twitter/X	May 2020–December 2021	29,073	762,552	28,288

As the two corpora differed in overall size, comparisons were based on normalised frequencies, Log-Likelihood (LL), and LogRatio statistics rather than raw frequency counts. This approach follows established corpus-linguistic practice by enabling meaningful comparisons between corpora of unequal sizes while simultaneously considering statistical significance and effect size (Brezina, 2018). Consequently, lexical salience was determined by statistically significant overrepresentation within the MOTC relative to the MGTC, ensuring that subsequent analyses focused on evaluative lexical items that were genuinely characteristic of ODL-related discourse.

Analytical Procedures

The analysis was conducted using LancsBox 6.0 (Brezina et al., 2020) and proceeded through four sequential stages. The analytical workflow combined quantitative corpus-linguistic procedures with qualitative discourse analysis, enabling the study to move systematically from statistically salient lexical patterns to higher-order interpretations of learner identity construction. To ensure both statistical reliability and interpretive relevance, keyword and collocation analyses were conducted using the thresholds shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Analytical Thresholds and Parameters

Analytical Procedure	Parameter	Threshold / Setting
Keyword Analysis	Log-Likelihood (LL)	≥ 15.13 ($p < .0001$)
Keyword Analysis	LogRatio	≥ 1.5
Keyword Analysis	Minimum Frequency	≥ 10 occurrences
Collocation Analysis	Span	± 5 words
Collocation Analysis	Mutual Information (MI)	≥ 4

Keyword extraction employed Log-Likelihood (LL) to determine statistical significance and LogRatio to measure effect size, while a minimum frequency threshold of ten occurrences was applied to minimise the influence of infrequent lexical items. Collocational analyses were conducted within a ± 5 -word span, and only collocates with Mutual Information (MI) scores of four or higher were retained. Collectively, these parameters ensured that subsequent analyses focused on statistically robust and semantically meaningful evaluative patterns. The analytical process consisted of four interconnected stages:

Stage 1: Keyword Analysis

The first stage identified lexical items that were statistically overrepresented in the Malaysian ODL Tweet Corpus (MOTC) relative to the Malaysian General Tweet Corpus (MGTC). Keyword analysis was conducted using the Words tool in LancsBox, employing Log-Likelihood and LogRatio statistics to identify lexical items that occurred significantly more frequently in ODL-related discourse than in general Malaysian Twitter communication. Because the study focused on learner identity construction through evaluation, only evaluative lexical items were retained for subsequent analysis. Non-evaluative keywords, including topical or referential items that did not express evaluative meaning, were excluded. This filtering process ensured that the analysis concentrated on lexical items functioning as potential resources for evaluative positioning rather than simply identifying frequently discussed ODL topics.

Stage 2: Appraisal-Based Evaluation Analysis

The second stage examined the evaluative meanings of the lexical items identified during keyword analysis. Drawing on the Attitude subsystem of Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), each evaluative lexical item was classified as Affect, Judgement, or Appreciation according to its dominant evaluative function within its discourse context. Classification was not based solely on dictionary definitions because evaluative meanings are inherently context-dependent. Instead, concordance lines generated in LancsBox were examined to determine how each lexical item functioned within authentic Twitter discourse. Where lexical items displayed multiple potential evaluative meanings, repeated concordance analysis was undertaken until the dominant appraisal function consistently observed across contexts was identified. This stage enabled the systematic identification of how learners evaluated emotions, behaviours, institutional practices, learning environments, and educational experiences. Rather than serving as the final analytical outcome, Appraisal Theory functioned as an interpretive framework linking recurrent evaluative language to broader processes of learner positioning.

Stage 3: Collocational and Concordance Analysis

The third stage investigated the contextual environments surrounding salient evaluative lexical items. Collocation analysis was conducted using the GraphColl tool in LancsBox to identify recurrent lexical associations occurring within a ± 5 -word span of each node word. Only collocates meeting the predetermined Mutual Information threshold were retained for interpretation. Subsequently, concordance analysis was undertaken to examine how evaluative lexical items functioned within authentic discourse contexts. Particular attention was paid to semantic prosodies, understood as evaluative meanings emerging through recurrent patterns of lexical co-occurrence (Sinclair, 1991; Louw, 1993). Rather than interpreting isolated lexical items, the analysis examined how repeated collocational patterns consistently associated particular evaluations with academic workload, institutional practices, technological challenges, interpersonal relationships, and learning experiences. Together, collocation and concordance analyses provided the contextual evidence necessary for interpreting evaluative meanings beyond individual lexical items and identifying broader discourse tendencies across the corpus.

Stage 4: Identity Narrative Construction

The final stage interpreted recurrent evaluative patterns as resources for learner identity construction. Drawing upon contemporary perspectives on discursive identity (Bamberg, 2011; De Fina, 2021), identity narratives were derived through an iterative analytical procedure integrating evidence from the preceding stages rather than through isolated interpretation of individual tweets. Specifically, the analytical process proceeded through five sequential steps:

1. Identification of statistically salient evaluative lexical items through keyword analysis.
2. Classification of evaluative meanings using the Appraisal framework.
3. Examination of collocational patterns and semantic prosodies through collocation and concordance analysis.

4. Interpretation of recurrent evaluative positioning across multiple discourse contexts.
5. Construction of higher-order identity narratives based on recurring patterns of evaluative positioning observed throughout the corpus.

Identity narratives were established only when multiple evaluative lexical items, collocational patterns, and concordance evidence consistently converged around similar forms of learner positioning. Consequently, the resulting narratives represent empirically grounded discursive constructions rather than researcher-imposed thematic categories. This procedure enabled the identification of five recurring learner identities: *the Burdened Learner*, *the Resistant Critic*, *the Adaptive Survivor*, *the Supported Community Member*, and *the Negotiating Learner*.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Corpus analysis identified five recurring learner identity narratives emerging from evaluative discourse in Malaysian ODL-related Twitter communication during the COVID-19 pandemic: *the Burdened Learner*, *Resistant Critic*, *Adaptive Survivor*, *Supported Community Member*, and *Negotiating Learner*. These narratives emerged through recurrent patterns of evaluative positioning identified across keyword, collocation, concordance, and semantic prosody analyses. Table 3 summarises the five identity narratives, their representative evaluative lexical items, the corresponding Appraisal resources, and the dominant forms of learner positioning identified in the analysis.

Table 3 Identity Narratives Emerging from Evaluative Discourse

Identity Narrative	Representative Evaluative Items	Appraisal Resources	Dominant Positioning
Burdened Learner	stressed, exhausting, overwhelming	Affect	Emotional strain and academic overload
Resistant Critic	unfair, ridiculous	Judgement, Appreciation	Institutional criticism and perceived injustice
Adaptive Survivor	adapting, surviving, motivated	Judgement, Affect	Resilience, perseverance, and adaptation
Supported Community Member	supportive, understanding, grateful	Judgement, Affect	Solidarity, collaboration, and social support
Negotiating Learner	difficult, convenient, comfortable	Appreciation	Ambivalence and contextual negotiation

Collectively, these identity narratives reveal a continuum of learner positioning ranging from emotional burden and institutional resistance to resilience, social support, and evaluative negotiation. Importantly, the narratives should not be interpreted as discrete learner types but as recurring discursive positions that emerged through repeated evaluative practices across the corpus. This finding supports the view that identity is constructed dynamically through language and interaction rather than reflecting fixed personal characteristics. The following sections examine each identity narrative in detail by integrating corpus evidence with discourse interpretation.

Identity Narrative 1: The Burdened Learner

Table 4 Corpus Evidence for the Burdened Learner Identity

Evaluative Item	Appraisal Resource	Dominant Collocates	Semantic Prosody	Dominant Positioning	Representative Concordance Extract
stressed	Affect	overly, mentally	Academic pressure and emotional	Emotional burden arising from accumulated	"I am mentally stressed with all these assignments and online classes."

			strain	academic demands	
exhausting	Affect	mentally, more	Sustained fatigue and educational burden	Psychological and cognitive exhaustion	"It is mentally exhausting. One reason I cannot handle this ODL..."
overwhelming	Affect	everything, too	Cognitive overload and competing responsibilities	Cognitive overload caused by multiple simultaneous demands	"Everything is overwhelming with ODL; I am constantly chasing things."

Table 4 presents the corpus evidence underpinning the first identity narrative, the Burdened Learner. Across the corpus, the evaluative lexical items *stressed*, *exhausting*, and *overwhelming* consistently co-occurred with collocates associated with academic workload, psychological fatigue, and competing responsibilities. Collectively, these recurrent collocational patterns generated a predominantly negative semantic prosody, portraying ODL as an emotionally and cognitively demanding educational experience.

The concordance evidence further demonstrates how learners positioned themselves through recurring expressions such as *mentally stressed*, *mentally exhausting*, and *everything is overwhelming*. Rather than functioning as isolated descriptions of challenging experiences, these evaluations repeatedly associated ODL with emotional strain, sustained fatigue, and cognitive overload. The consistent co-occurrence of these evaluative expressions with references to assignments, online classes, deadlines, and multiple responsibilities suggests that learners interpreted educational disruption as an enduring rather than temporary condition. From a corpus perspective, these evaluative patterns exhibit a clear semantic preference for psychological burden. The lexical items do not simply communicate dissatisfaction with ODL; instead, they repeatedly construct a discourse in which emotional and cognitive strain becomes a defining feature of learners' educational experiences. Through recurrent evaluative positioning, learners represent themselves as individuals attempting to cope with persistent academic demands while simultaneously navigating the broader uncertainties of the pandemic. Consequently, the Burdened Learner emerges not as a fixed learner type but as a recurring discursive identity constructed through repeated acts of affective evaluation.

Identity Narrative 2: The Resistant Critic

Table 5 Corpus Evidence for the Resistant Critic Identity

Evaluative Item	Appraisal Resource	Dominant Collocates	Semantic Prosody	Dominant Positioning	Representative Concordance Extract
unfair	Judgement	<i>feels, becomes</i>	Procedural injustice and perceived inequity	Critical evaluation of institutional fairness and accountability	"It feels unfair because the tuition fees are nearly RM6000."
ridiculous	Appreciation	<i>more, is</i>	Criticism of excessive academic expectations	Resistance towards unrealistic academic demands	"The assignments are getting more ridiculous, and the due dates are even more ridiculous."

Table 5 presents the corpus evidence underpinning the second identity narrative, the Resistant Critic. Across the corpus, the evaluative lexical items *unfair* and *ridiculous* consistently co-occurred with collocates relating to tuition fees, assessments, workload, and institutional practices. Together, these recurrent collocational patterns generated a semantic prosody of procedural injustice and institutional dissatisfaction, framing ODL as an educational environment characterised by inequitable expectations and unreasonable demands.

The concordance evidence further illustrates how learners positioned themselves through recurring evaluations such as *it feels unfair* and *the assignments are getting more ridiculous*. Rather than expressing isolated

complaints, these evaluations consistently challenged institutional decisions concerning academic workload, assessment arrangements, and financial obligations. The repeated association of *unfair* with tuition fees and institutional responsibility, alongside *ridiculous* with excessive assignments and unrealistic deadlines, indicates that learners were not merely evaluating educational experiences but actively questioning the legitimacy and fairness of institutional practices. From a corpus perspective, these evaluative patterns exhibit a clear semantic preference for institutional critique. Unlike the Burdened Learner, whose evaluations centred on emotional and cognitive strain, the Resistant Critic is characterised by evaluations directed outward towards educational policies and institutional decision-making. Through recurring acts of judgement and appreciation, learners positioned themselves as active evaluators of institutional authority rather than passive recipients of educational change. Consequently, the Resistant Critic emerges as a discursive identity constructed through repeated challenges to perceived inequities, excessive expectations, and institutional accountability.

Identity Narrative 3: The Adaptive Survivor

Table 6 Corpus Evidence for the Adaptive Survivor Identity

Evaluative Item	Appraisal Resource	Dominant Collocates	Semantic Prosody	Dominant Positioning	Representative Concordance Extract
adapting	Judgement	<i>still, about</i>	Adjustment to changing learning conditions	Active adaptation to educational disruption	"In your first semester, you are still adapting to new things."
surviving	Affect	<i>for, barely</i>	Endurance and perseverance under adversity	Resilience in the face of prolonged educational challenges	"Congratulations to myself for surviving the struggle with ODL and adapting to a new way of learning."
motivated	Affect	<i>stay, more</i>	Persistence and self-regulation	Sustained commitment to learning despite adversity	"If you want to stay motivated during this ODL process, try making..."

Table 6 presents the corpus evidence underpinning the third identity narrative, the Adaptive Survivor. Across the corpus, the evaluative lexical items *adapting*, *surviving*, and *motivated* consistently co-occurred with collocates associated with adjustment, perseverance, and sustained engagement. Together, these recurrent collocational patterns generated a positive semantic prosody centred on resilience, portraying ODL not solely as a source of disruption but also as a context in which learners actively developed strategies for coping with educational uncertainty.

The concordance evidence further illustrates how learners positioned themselves through recurring expressions such as *still adapting*, *surviving the struggle*, and *stay motivated*. Rather than portraying themselves as passive recipients of educational change, learners consistently represented adaptation as an ongoing process requiring perseverance, behavioural adjustment, and self-regulation. The repeated association of these evaluative expressions with learning, academic progress, and personal effort suggests that resilience was constructed as an active response to disruption rather than the absence of difficulty. From a corpus perspective, these evaluative patterns exhibit a clear semantic preference for agency and endurance. Unlike the Burdened Learner, where affective evaluations foreground psychological strain, the Adaptive Survivor is characterised by evaluations that emphasise persistence, self-regulation, and continued participation despite adversity. The coexistence of *surviving* with references to struggle, together with *adapting* and *motivated*, demonstrates that resilience was not constructed in opposition to hardship but emerged through continued engagement with it. Consequently, the Adaptive Survivor represents a discursive identity in which learners negotiate educational disruption by positioning themselves as capable of adapting while acknowledging the ongoing challenges of ODL.

Identity Narrative 4: The Supported Community Member

Table 7 Corpus Evidence for the Supported Community Member Identity

Evaluative Item	Appraisal Resource	Dominant Collocates	Semantic Prosody	Dominant Positioning	Representative Concordance Extract
supportive	Judgement	<i>having, by</i>	Interpersonal support and collective encouragement	Collaborative engagement within learning communities	<i>"During ODL, having supportive group members, thinking together, struggling together..."</i>
understanding	Judgement	<i>very, for</i>	Empathy, flexibility, and accommodation	Recognition of compassionate educational relationships	<i>"To all my lecturers who are very understanding and very committed to their work."</i>
grateful	Affect	<i>so, am</i>	Appreciation and acknowledge-ment of support	Recognition of shared achievement and educational support	<i>"Alhamdulillah, I am so grateful to have finished my diploma this time."</i>

Table 7 presents the corpus evidence underpinning the fourth identity narrative, the Supported Community Member. Across the corpus, the evaluative lexical items *supportive*, *understanding*, and *grateful* consistently co-occurred with collocates referring to lecturers, peers, group members, and academic communities. Together, these recurrent collocational patterns generated a positive semantic prosody centred on empathy, encouragement, and shared responsibility, portraying ODL as a collaborative rather than purely individual educational experience.

The concordance evidence further illustrates how learners positioned themselves through recurring expressions such as *supportive group members*, *very understanding lecturers*, and *I am so grateful*. Rather than emphasising individual perseverance alone, these evaluations consistently foregrounded interpersonal relationships as essential resources for navigating educational disruption. The repeated association of positive evaluations with lecturers, peers, and collaborative learning practices indicates that learners interpreted academic success not solely as a personal achievement but as a product of collective support and mutual encouragement. From a corpus perspective, these evaluative patterns exhibit a clear semantic preference for relational connectedness and social solidarity. Unlike the Adaptive Survivor, whose evaluations primarily emphasised individual agency and perseverance, the Supported Community Member constructs resilience as a collective accomplishment sustained through interpersonal relationships. The recurring co-occurrence of *supportive*, *understanding*, and *grateful* demonstrates that positive evaluations were directed not only towards learning experiences but also towards the people who enabled learners to persist throughout the pandemic. Consequently, this identity narrative positions learners as members of collaborative communities in which empathy, encouragement, and shared responsibility become central resources for negotiating educational disruption.

Identity Narrative 5: The Negotiating Learner

Table 8 Corpus Evidence for the Negotiating Learner Identity

Evaluative Item	Appraisal Resource	Dominant Collocates	Semantic Prosody	Dominant Positioning	Representative Concordance Extract
difficult	Appreciation	<i>more, is</i>	Educational challenge and constraint	Negotiating learning obstacles within changing circumstances	<i>"Does ODL make things easier or more difficult?"</i>

convenient	Appreciation	<i>is, so</i>	Flexibility and practical accessibility	Recognition of the practical advantages of ODL	<i>“The benefit of ODL is that it is convenient for achieving social distancing.”</i>
comfortable	Appreciation	<i>is, already</i>	Adaptation and personal accommodation	Acceptance of evolving online learning practices	<i>“Doing ODL at home is comfortable because everything is available.”</i>

Table 8 presents the corpus evidence underpinning the fifth identity narrative, the Negotiating Learner. Across the corpus, the evaluative lexical items *difficult*, *convenient*, and *comfortable* consistently co-occurred with collocates reflecting both the challenges and advantages of ODL. Unlike the preceding identity narratives, which exhibited relatively stable evaluative orientations, these recurrent collocational patterns generated a mixed semantic prosody characterised by ambivalence, qualification, and contextual negotiation. Rather than evaluating ODL as either wholly positive or wholly negative, learners repeatedly constructed nuanced assessments that acknowledged both its constraints and its practical benefits.

The concordance evidence further illustrates how learners positioned themselves through recurring expressions such as *more difficult*, *it is convenient*, and *already comfortable studying via ODL*. These evaluations reveal an ongoing process of balancing competing experiences rather than adopting fixed evaluative positions. The repeated co-occurrence of positive and negative evaluations indicates that learners continuously reassessed their experiences as circumstances evolved, recognising that the effectiveness of ODL depended upon changing educational demands, personal circumstances, and broader pandemic conditions. From a corpus perspective, these evaluative patterns exhibit a clear semantic preference for contextual negotiation. Unlike the Burdened Learner, Resistant Critic, Adaptive Survivor, and Supported Community Member, each of which is characterised by a dominant evaluative orientation, the Negotiating Learner is defined by the coexistence of contrasting evaluations within the same discourse. This recurring interplay between challenge and opportunity suggests that learner identity was not constructed through fixed attitudes towards ODL but through continual processes of evaluation, reinterpretation, and adjustment. Consequently, the Negotiating Learner represents the most dynamic identity narrative identified in the corpus, reflecting the fluid and evolving nature of learner positioning throughout the pandemic.

CONCLUSION

Although the five identity narratives have been presented separately for analytical clarity, corpus evidence indicates that they were neither discrete nor mutually exclusive. Individual tweets frequently contained evaluative patterns associated with multiple identities, demonstrating that learner positioning was dynamic and context-dependent rather than fixed. For example, expressions of emotional burden frequently co-occurred with evaluations emphasising perseverance and motivation, revealing intersections between the Burdened Learner and Adaptive Survivor identities. Similarly, evaluations of institutional unfairness often appeared alongside expressions of adaptation or appreciation, illustrating that learners could simultaneously criticise educational practices while continuing to engage constructively with ODL. Among the five narratives, the Negotiating Learner occupied a particularly significant position because it frequently mediated these intersecting forms of learner positioning. By accommodating both positive and negative evaluations within the same discourse, this identity illustrates how learners continuously negotiated changing educational realities rather than adopting stable orientations towards online learning. The corpus therefore suggests that learner identities were fluid and relational, shifting in response to evolving experiences rather than remaining fixed across different communicative contexts. These intersections reinforce contemporary discourse perspectives that conceptualise identity as an ongoing process of positioning rather than a stable personal attribute (Bamberg, 2011; De Fina, 2021). Accordingly, the identity narratives identified in this study should be understood as recurring discursive positions emerging from collective evaluative practices rather than as predefined learner categories. Taken together, the findings demonstrate that evaluative discourse enabled learners not only to express attitudes towards ODL but also to negotiate multiple and sometimes competing identities while navigating the educational

disruption brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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