

Business Ethics Post-COVID-19 Instructional Delivery Methods for Higher Education

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Abstract: *The aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic have changed education profoundly. Volatile shakeups to educational infrastructure and delivery models often exclude student learning outcomes. Limited information is available regarding the comparison between business ethics students' performance before, during, and post COVID-19 pandemic in terms of their final grades. The researcher adapted earlier study data examining two cohorts of 44 students each, including one in-person and one COVID-19 remote-learning. The present study retains those groups to establish a three-period comparison and adds a new post-COVID-19 cohort of 44 students. Using quantitative comparative analysis, the researcher performed a one-way ANOVA to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between business ethics students' mean final grades before, during, and after COVID-19. Using constructivism learning theory and social learning theory, the researcher related student learning outcomes in aggregate and instructional method to final grade performance. The findings revealed that the performance of business ethics students slightly improved post-COVID-19. Business ethics students' greatest challenge included time management, while their least challenge was technological literacy and competency. Implications for classroom pedagogy and future research were discussed.*

Keywords: coping skills, business ethics, resilience, constructivism theory, social learning theory

INTRODUCTION

Higher education business ethics students develop moral reasoning, ethical decision-making, and professional integrity. Achievable learning outcomes present challenges and strengths for educational leaders when incorporating constructivism and social learning theory (Floyd, Xu, Atkins, & Caldwell, 2013). While the frameworks provide insight on how students actively construct ethical understanding and how social environments shape moral development, educational leaders must adapt their understanding and execution of such strategies.

Constructivists suggest learners actively construct knowledge through experience, reflection, and interaction with their environment (Ohreen, Sundararajan, Trifts, & Comber, 2022; Vygotsky, 1978). Business ethics education prioritizes students absorb ethical principles. Unlike typical business courses, students interpret and internalize ethical principles based on prior experiences, beliefs, and cultural contexts. Students construct their interpretation through case analysis, role play, creative writing, and experiential learning. Case studies, simulations, and ethical dilemmas allow students to engage in higher-order thinking and apply abstract principles to real-world situations (Kyambade, 2023). Experiential-focused theoretical pedagogies enable educators to emphasize critical thinking and deeper moral reasoning, which aligns with desired learning outcomes such as ethical awareness and judgment. For example, scaffolded learning expressed by moral theoretical principles includes Aristotle's virtue ethics. Aristotle emphasized developing an individual's moral character rather than memorizing rules (Parwati, Wahyudi, Suryadi, & Viona, 2025). Rather than relying solely on policing cheating with syllabi, educators use virtue ethics to focus on cultivating internalized character traits like honesty, fairness, and respect.

Constructivist learning presents challenges for the insular mindset of novice learners. Students may construct ethical interpretations using inconsistent or influenced flawed prior knowledge. Limited thinkers who cannot dissociate strongly held beliefs based on cultural rigidity or righteousness may reject new knowledge. The initial mental distress of relying purely on critical thinking in an open classroom might negatively influence students' honest responses. Without adequate instructional scaffolding, learners may struggle to reconcile conflicting ethical perspectives or fail to reach principled reasoning (Kohlberg, 1984). Students' varying cultural and personal backgrounds can lead to divergent understandings of ethical norms, complicating assessment and standardization of learning outcomes. The linear grading model adopted by most universities heavily relies on tests and consistent measurement. Students who construct valid arguments but perform poorly on standardized tests may be unfairly graded.

Social learning theory emphasizes that individuals learn behaviors, norms, and values through observation, imitation, and social interaction (Bandura, 1977). Business ethics instructors stress the importance of peer influence, instructor modeling, and organizational context in shaping ethical behavior. Social learning theory recognizes the role of modeling to affirm students' attitudes and behaviors. Students who participate in group discussions and debates observe diverse viewpoints and refine their ethical reasoning through social interaction (Amirudin, Muzaki, & Nurhayati, 2025; Kim & Park, 2019).

Educators use real problem-oriented learning (RPOL) as a student-centered teaching method (Tian & Tang, 2025). In this scenario, students actively learn and apply knowledge to solve problems by simulating real-life complex situations (Alrehaili & Osman, 2022). Business ethics instructors emphasize critical thinking, collaborative problem-solving, and self-directed learning to motivate students (Kyambade, Nkurunziza, Namatovu, Tushabe, & Kwemarira, 2025). In one study, undergraduate medical students participated in scenario-based role play to acquire soft skills (Lavanya, Somu, & Mishra, 2024). Simulation-based training attempts to repair traditional medical

curricula lacking soft skill concepts like empathy, teamwork, and communication (Lavanya et al., 2024). Active participation in simulated activities ties textbook theory and practical human interaction.

Participants learned to verbalize clinical lessons, manage interpersonal dynamics, and navigate complex emotional exchanges with peers (Lavanya et al., 2024). Immediate peer and faculty feedback allowed learners to practice speaking like doctors, working in teams, and delivering difficult emotional news in a safe environment before facing real patients. Undergraduate medical students who developed interpersonal skills reported high satisfaction and better preparedness for real-world practice, confirming that experiential methods complement instructor expertise (Lavanya et al., 2024).

Despite these advantages, social learning environments can also reinforce negative behaviors. Peer dynamics may lead to conformity, where students adopt unethical viewpoints to align with group norms (Treviño et al., 2006). If instructors fail to model ethical behavior consistently, students may receive mixed signals about acceptable conduct. Integrating constructivist and social learning approaches offers a more comprehensive framework for business ethics education. Constructivism emphasizes individual cognitive development, while social learning theory underscores the importance of social context. Both theories support pedagogical strategies such as collaborative case analysis, role-playing, and reflective discussion.

Research suggests that combining these approaches enhances ethical learning outcomes by fostering both individual reflection and social engagement (Mintz, 1996). For example, structured group discussions allow students to construct meaning collaboratively while being exposed to diverse perspectives. Reflective writing assignments encourage students to internalize and critically evaluate their ethical beliefs (Hanh & Duyen, 2025). In one study on cooperative learning strategies introduced to graduate business ethics students, researchers measured effectiveness on graduate students' attitudes and behaviors. Martini, Cavenago, and Carminati (2025) combined a quasi-experimental pre- and post-test with qualitative focus groups to evaluate the effectiveness of a master's business ethics course. While the pedagogical approach improved student moral efficacy and moral motivation, students' moral sensitivity did not significantly change (Martini et al., 2025).

Effective integration requires careful facilitation by educators who must balance guidance with autonomy. Ensuring students construct accurate and ethically sound knowledge while engaging productively with peers. Relatable, clear learning objectives, assessment criteria, and ethical frameworks are essential to support this process. Constructivism and social learning theory provide valuable insights into the strengths and challenges of teaching business ethics in higher education. No universal ethical credentialing exists for business ethics instructors in higher education. Constructivist approaches promote deep, experiential learning but require careful scaffolding to ensure consistent outcomes. Social learning theory highlights the influence of modeling and peer interaction that enhance ethical reasoning, decision-making, and professional integrity among business students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally reshaped higher education, accelerating the adoption of online and hybrid learning environments while simultaneously exposing structural and pedagogical limitations. Business ethics educators measure student learning outcomes on moral reasoning, ethical judgment, and responsible decision-making. Post-COVID-19 classrooms now operate within digitally mediated, socially fragmented, and psychologically complex environments that influence how students construct ethical understanding and engage with others (Ma, 2025).

Constructivism and social learning theory offer complementary frameworks for analyzing these dynamics. Constructivism emphasizes knowledge construction through experience and reflection while social learning theory emphasizes observation, modeling, and interaction in shaping behavior (Bandura, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978). Business ethics educators evaluate the strengths and challenges of achieving business ethics learning outcomes in post-pandemic higher education.

In the post-COVID-19 environment, constructivism provides space for increasingly relevant digital tools and learner-centered pedagogies. Experienced constructivist learners weave acquired knowledge with uniquely formed critical thoughts, processes, and problem-solving techniques (Selama, 2025). Research indicates that online and hybrid learning environments enhance opportunities for problem-based and inquiry-driven learning, allowing students to engage with ethical dilemmas through simulations, case studies, and collaborative technologies (Worachak, Damnoen, Hong, & Putri, 2023). Business ethics students interpret ambiguous situations, evaluate competing values, and construct context-sensitive ethical judgments. For instance, some business ethics instructors hold debates among students, forcing them to argue positions they do not agree with. Allowing students to abandon their initial position to understand opposing arguments reframes the big picture. Instead of business ethics students choosing “the best outcome”, they construct how individuals form and debate arguments in an impactful way. Socratic debates help students test ethical theories, confidently prepare for assessments, and sharpen quick analytical thinking (Traczykowski, 2022).

Digital platforms (e.g., learning management systems (LMS), virtual collaboration tools) enable students to engage with real-world ethical scenarios in flexible and interactive ways. Instead of waiting on instructors to provide textbook oriented assignments restricted to traditional classroom pedagogy, constructivism permits flipped classroom experiences. In one study on the inclusion of generative artificial intelligence (AI) assistance in college level business ethics courses, researchers analyzed debate success among student groups using the AI assistance and control groups not using generative AI (Hu, 2025). Generative AI systems allow students to practice ethical debates with an AI partner before class, boosting their readiness and confidence for in-person discussions (Hu, 2025). University students in Taiwan enhanced pre-class preparation and ethical learning without increasing their workload using AI (Hu, 2025).

Constructivist environments support learner autonomy, which has become more prominent in hybrid and asynchronous formats. Instructors encourage students to take ownership of their ethical learning by integrating personal experiences and cultural perspectives in their analyses. Modern LMS platforms incorporate technical skills allowing students to learn by sharing their findings. For instance, socio-cultural considerations rarely supersede teacher-directed learning in critical thinking courses such as language, science, or law. Concerns from modern educators include redefining classroom power structures, bridging cultural expectations of authority, building peer-to-peer collaborative safety, and scaffolding self-directed evaluation skills (Ofem, 2026). Power dynamics shifting from authoritarian/follower to team considerations/empowered learners reflect shared authority. In this scenario, business ethics educators guide learning by letting students help choose course topics, reading materials, or assignment formats (Kyambade et al., 2025). Teachers act as guides or facilitators instead of the main source for student inquiry. Safe spaces created by business ethics educators allow students to question teacher views without fear of disciplinary consequences.

Cultural norms vary across regions, including the United States. Some students refrain from questioning instructors due to respect for cultural norms (Badawi, 2024). Helping students understand why autonomy shapes better thinking solidifies healthy participation. Scaffolded activities move students from guided tasks to independent tasks step by step without introducing burnout (Mukhamedaly et al., 2026). Business ethics instructors who encourage student conversation in small teams before sharing ideas with the whole class permit organic team dynamics.

Students who review and critique each other's work with kindness and care learn to track progress and set learning goals. Reflective journals reinforce constructivism by including students' writings about their own thinking habits and personal growth. Students use reflective writing to track scholarly growth acquire discernment about future workplace decision making. Open discussions remove unnecessary shame or reluctance to share real concerns regardless of self-criticism (Sims, 2004).

Constructivist learning in post-COVID-19 contexts presents several challenges. Disparities in technological access and digital literacy can hinder students' ability to engage fully in collaborative and experiential learning environments. Business ethics educators are not protected from developmental changes in classroom technology incorporation or skill building course mapping measures. Juggling accreditation assessment data while teaching students essentially "how to learn" exhausts precious resources meant to further ethical cognitive development, performance, and mastery.

The shift toward self-directed learning can exacerbate cognitive overload and disengagement, particularly when students lack sufficient scaffolding. For example, some business ethics instructors assign group projects through virtual means without considering the insufficient

contextual insights of organically formed group dynamics. Groups forced to collaborate virtually lack the discernment and discipline to complete thoughtful, robust work on time. Without structured ethical guidance, students may construct superficial or inconsistent ethical frameworks. Reduced immediacy of in-person interaction in hybrid settings can limit rich dialogic engagement, which is essential for refining ethical perspectives. Constructivist learning depends heavily on interaction, and weakened interaction reduces its effectiveness.

Social learning theory emphasizes that individuals acquire behaviors and values through observing others, engaging in social interaction, and receiving feedback. In business ethics education, this includes learning through instructor modeling, peer discussion, and collaborative problem-solving. For example, some business ethics classrooms hold collaborative problem-solving sessions to explore contemporary views on common real world business ethics problems including the use of assisted technology in grocery store self-checkout stations.

Grocery stores, such as Sprouts, use self-checkout stations at several locations. While offering expedience for customers who prefer to scan their own items, multiple issues occur for customers. From a constructivist viewpoint, self-checkout stations force consumers to construct a new mental schema: transitioning from a passive shopper to an active cashier. Unlike store employees, customers receive no formal training, standard operating procedures, or safe environments to learn via trial and error. Store personnel led by novice managers who reject early criticism of their performance find solace in proving their worth by targeting unsuspecting customers.

Rigid authoritative norms reject the idea of constructivism since constructivism reduces short-term efficiency. Punitive oriented individuals' goals enforce blame through penalties or fear. Treating the symptom or behavior rather than the root cause removes greater understanding of the bigger picture. Exploring the root cause provides accountability from store leadership to explore missed opportunities to provide self-checkout safe guards such as self-checkout employee assistance or payment freezes. Without protective safeguards, resulting behavior includes defensive employees, resentment, and a toxic environment (Eom & Schneider, 2024). In educational constructivism, errors provide vital data points to help learners refine their schema (e.g., learning how a weight sensor reacts or how to properly orient a finicky barcode). When grocery stores bypass traditional "customer service feedback" and immediately escalate minor technical mistakes to retail fraud or legal prosecution, they effectively criminalize the learning process.

Common self-checkout issues include scales and the packing area, incorrect weight recognition, discrepancies between actual and expected product weight, and false notifications about unexpected items (Koziura, Grobelna, & Nikel, 2026). Scanning problems can include ghost scans and unexpected system messages (Bradford, 2023; Koziura et al., 2026). Ghost scans occur when items moved across a self-checkout machine do not register a barcode, resulting in customers receiving charges for items they never purchased or items not charged. If an item passes near the scanner without triggering a beep or registering in the system, the AI may classify the movement as an intentional skip-scan or missed item, even if customers honestly misread the machine's

display or sounds. Complex challenges require thoughtful recognition and correction of failures; tasks that business ethics college students prepare for in their education.

Constructivism relies on tools that provide clear, predictable feedback. Because self-checkout user interfaces often glitch (such as lagging weight sensors un-scanned items, or confusing product selection images), innocent customers experience fractured corporate systems that assume criminal intent. Business ethics educators demonstrate the combination of constructivism and social learning theory to appropriately addresses ethical concerns for business relationships (Ohreen et al., 2022; Jaganjac, Abrahamsen, Olsen, & Hunnes, 2024).

Post-COVID-19 learning environments have significantly altered social dynamics. While digital platforms enable new forms of interaction, they also disrupt traditional mechanisms of observation and social reinforcement. In modern classrooms, younger generations expect social media engagement through short form videos, podcasts, and the ability to create their own content. While helpful, these expectations may become distractions if business ethics instructors rely on them too heavily. Instead of exercising rooted theories into practice, students might filter content based on production or visual quality, further reducing ethical discernment. Students who defer to popular ethical martyrdom miss big picture concepts like corporate decision makers' impacts on greater societal issues such as poverty, safety, and health.

A key strength of social learning theory in post-COVID-19 classrooms is the expansion of collaborative learning opportunities through digital platforms. Cooperative learning approaches grounded in social learning principles enhance moral efficacy, motivation, and ethical reasoning by engaging students in group-based ethical problem solving. Social learning theory supports vicarious learning even in virtual environments. Observing peers' reasoning processes and receiving feedback can reinforce ethical norms and behaviors (Martini et al., 2025). In contrast to conventional classrooms, business ethics education provides greater academic and professional value by examining the systemic causes of ethical failures rather than merely instructing students on how to correct them.

Post-COVID-19 conditions challenge business ethics educators to repair gaps weakening key mechanisms of social learning. Long periods of reduced in-person interaction limit informal social cues, modeling, and spontaneous dialogue, which are critical for ethical development (Chu, Liu, So, & Lam, 2021). Multiple research studies suggest that students in post-pandemic classrooms consistently experience behavioral and social-emotional challenges, including decreased engagement and difficulties in interpersonal interaction (Akther, 2025). Common soft skills taken for granted before the pandemic now reveal weak preparation for business interactions in the workplace among individuals graduating after the COVID-19 pandemic. Trust and psychological safety suffer due to mental health hypervigilance.

Another challenge is the potential for peer conformity and shallow consensus in online environments. Students may appear emotionally dormant, choosing to defer to dominant

viewpoints rather than critically engaging with ethical complexity. Emotional dormancy can undermine the development of independent moral reasoning. What pedagogical and environmental infrastructure business ethics instructors implement will impact future generations and whether institutions adopt supportive changes.

Research Question and Hypotheses

Research Question: Is there a statistically significant difference in students' final grades among students meeting in-person before the COVID-19 pandemic, remote during the COVID-19 pandemic, and online after the COVID-19 pandemic?

Hypotheses:

Ho: There is no statistically significant difference in mean final grades among business ethics students enrolled in pre-COVID-19 in-person, COVID-19 remote, and post-COVID-19 online instructional environments.

Ha: At least one instructional-period cohort has a statistically significantly different mean final grade from another cohort.

Conceptual Framework

The integration of constructivism and social learning theory provides a robust framework for addressing post-COVID-19 challenges while leveraging emerging strengths. Exercising constructivism through knowledge and social learning through observation and modeling helps business ethics educational leaders influence (a) student agency, (b) autonomy (c) self-regulation, and (d) critical thinking. Students feel empowered by taking charge of their learning through action. Students expressing interest in becoming entrepreneurs learn autonomy by developing their entrepreneurial orientation and intentions from start-up friendly projects and curricula (Al-Mamary & Alshallaqi, 2022). Highly competent executives consistently practice regulating their technology dependency and discernment. Building practical, expedient decision-making guides ethical considerations (Uddin, 2023).

Empirical research on business ethics education highlights the effectiveness of cooperative learning models, which combine experiential engagement with structured peer interaction. These experiences create environments where students actively construct knowledge while learning from others (Filippou, Buchs, Quiamzade, & Pulfrey, 2022). A dynamic cooperative learning environment encourages dialogue. Students learn to respect others' values, ideas, prior knowledge, and experiences while balancing readiness of each group member (Martini et al., 2025). Some individuals discover the benefits of moral reasoning in college while others grew up in the culture (Jamil, 2024). The complexity and personal relationship variations with moral issues require accommodation and adaptability. Working in a heterogeneous group exposes individuals to consider alternative resolutions to achieve a common goal (Bischoff, López Manuel, & Vázquez Vicente, 2025). Members focus more on the outcome rather than adopting a normative process.

In one study on how managers consider the impact of firm financial performance on five stakeholder groups, researchers assessed balanced deontological and utilitarianist ideals.

Researchers examined 4,926 multinational companies from 2005 to 2020 across five distinct stakeholder groups (Bischoff et al., 2025). Integrating customers and suppliers increased long-term profit, integrating employees increased short-term profit, and integrating minority shareholders and communities decreased financial performance (Bischoff et al. 2025). Utilitarianism creates the greatest good for the greatest number of people while deontological mindsets believe individuals' purpose includes serving others fairly regardless of outcomes (Melé, 2024). Collectively, companies can use the financial gains from customers, supplies, and employees to strengthen social responsibility efforts (utilitarianism) while working to protect minority shareholders and local communities regardless of whether short-term financial performance suffers losses (deontology) (Bischoff et al., 2025; Parvin, & Malik, 2024).

Social presence, or the degree to which learners feel connected to others, critically impacts online and hybrid learning (Yavuz et al., 2026). Strong social presence enhances both cognitive engagement and perceived learning outcomes, reinforcing the importance of integrating social interaction into constructivist designs. Virtual learning fosters strong emotional involvement and involuntary accountability results, but can overwhelm students who struggle to navigate technological requirements (Sari, Warsono, Ratmono, Zuhrohtun, & Hermawan, 2023).

Business ethics teachers constantly weigh the pros and cons of virtual learning. Unlike traditional in-person classrooms where students' backs are turned to each other or class size eliminates deep connection, virtual learners experience engagement through simultaneously listening, chat, and gamification mechanisms. Students consider multiple perspectives in real time without feeling mentally isolated (Yavuz et al., 2026). Used beneficially, these connections might help students manage and prioritize their mental health (Van Wingerden, 2021). Self-compassion and intrinsic motivation prepare business ethics students to develop their moral compass in meaningful ways annual employment ethics trainings fail (Kotera, Conway, & Van Gordon, 2019). Without safe guards to prevent cheating and resources to help struggling students acclimate to technology-laden assignments, expedience might unfairly influence ethical development rather than learning.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study extends an earlier quantitative investigation of business ethics students' final-grade performance before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (McAdoo, 2023). The earlier study examined two cohorts of 44 students each: an in-person cohort and a COVID-19 remote-learning cohort. The present study retains those previously analyzed cohorts to establish a three-period comparison and adds a new post-COVID-19 cohort of 44 students. Eighty-eight observations included in the present analysis were previously reported in McAdoo (2023), while 44 observations represent newly collected post-COVID-19 data.

The researcher applied a quantitative research design to empirically address the guiding research inquiries. Primary numerical data were systematically gathered from cohorts of business ethics students across pre-pandemic, pandemic-restricted, and post-pandemic pedagogical contexts

complemented by secondary metrics concerning overall student engagement. The pre-pandemic and pandemic restricted data were adapted from “Business ethics during the COVID-19 pandemic: Quantitative analysis of remote learning on business”. Students’ final grades analyzed in this study were collected as part of a larger longitudinal project. McAdoo (2023) published a previous analysis of a subset of these data focusing on different variables.

Sample composition included 132 undergraduate participants divided equally ($n = 44$) per pedagogical condition: traditional in-person modalities, COVID-19-mandated remote/restricted modalities, and post-COVID-19 online modalities. All datasets underwent rigorous deidentification procedures and were encrypted on secure, physical storage hardware. Data evaluation contained one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) alongside standard descriptive metrics to assess variance between cohorts. Detailed demographic descriptors were intentionally omitted to mitigate re-identification risks associated with the limited sample size and to maintain strict participant confidentiality. Cumulative student evaluation relied on a multifaceted assessment matrix, including examinations, quizzes, case presentations, and quantified participation.

Participants

This study examined a convenience sample of 132 undergraduate students ($n = 132$; 71 male, 61 female) recruited from a higher education institution in Tennessee. Participants were enrolled in Accounting, Management Information Systems, Management, and Sports Management degree programs. The cohort exhibited an age range of 18 to 60 years ($\bar{x} = 21.81$; $SD = 1.80$). All subjects possessed a minimum of two academic terms of experience in distance education, utilizing both synchronous and asynchronous instructional modalities. Demographically, the sample represented rural low- to middle-income socioeconomic strata. The majority of participants demonstrated baseline technological literacy and possessed the minimum hardware requisites, such as personal computers, laptops, or mobile devices, necessary for online course engagement.

The primary digital learning ecosystem comprised Cengage MindTap, a virtual learning platform that facilitates active learning through interactive texts, case studies, multimedia, and integrated assessments, alongside Moodle and Canvas as the supplementary Learning Management Systems (LMS). Concurrently, Microsoft Teams, a proprietary enterprise communication platform facilitating real-time remote collaboration, synchronous presentation, and video conferencing, served as the primary vehicle for synchronous face-to-face instruction following the onset of the pandemic. For context, Mazlan et al. (2021) surveyed 136 university educators regarding pedagogical challenges during COVID-19. Researchers found that baseline familiarity with alternative platforms like Google Classroom remained high while 71.4% of educators reported unfamiliarity with Microsoft Teams, exposing a gap in digital pedagogy and technological professional development.

Data Analysis

To address the primary research questions, the researcher employed a quantitative analysis. Quantitative data included electronic spreadsheets to facilitate descriptive statistical computations. To assess the magnitude of challenges experienced by students during remote instruction, the researcher calculated mean scores and standard deviations.

The total sample population comprised 132 undergraduate students enrolled in a business ethics course, divided equally into an in-person cohort ($n = 44$), COVID-19 remote learning cohort ($n = 44$), and post-COVID-19 cohort ($n = 44$). Demographic distribution across the combined sample included 61 female and 71 male participants. The in-person cohort (designated as Treatment 1 in Table 2) received instruction in a traditional, physical classroom environment, allowing the instructor to synchronously monitor non-verbal cues, facial expressions, and emotional engagement. Conversely, the COVID-19 cohort (designated as Treatment 2 in Table 2) attended asynchronous or remote sessions where aggregate student reactions could not be observed. Treatment 3 contained students who attended class post-COVID-19 without restrictions online. The remote cohort had access to recorded lectures, a utility unavailable to the on-campus group. The online cohort had access to recorded lectures but no live communication with the instructor. Instead, the online cohort's communication consisted of e-mail correspondence for course progress and instructor announcements. Curricular content, instructional delivery methods and course materials remained standardized across the three groups; the experimental variable was strictly limited to the instructional modality and physical location.

The final course grades for the cohorts were evaluated on a 100-point scale, yielding an absolute range from a minimum score of 60 to a maximum score of 100. The mean final grade for the in-person cohort was $M = 91.47$, compared to $M = 91.47$ for the remote learning cohort, and $M = 94.02$ for the post-COVID-19 learning cohort with a pooled standard deviation of $SD = 4.36$. Central tendency metrics revealed distinct distributions between the groups: the in-person cohort demonstrated a median score of 90 and a mode of 95, the remote cohort demonstrated a median score of 90 and a mode of 90 and mode of, and the post-COVID-19 cohort achieved a median score of 95 and mode of 95. Detailed distributions of final grades and demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

In-Person group, COVID-19, and Post-COVID Final Grades

Students	In-Person	COVID-19	Post-COVID-19
S1	95	90	95
S2	90	95	97
S3	90	95	95
S4	95	95	98
S5	90	95	96
S6	95	90	93
S7	95	90	96
S8	95	95	93
S9	90	90	95
S10	95	90	95
S11	95	95	100
S12	95	95	94
S13	90	95	91
S14	90	90	97
S15	95	90	95
S16	95	95	95
S17	95	95	96
S18	90	95	96
S19	90	95	96
S20	90	90	94
S21	90	90	98
S22	90	90	95
S23	90	90	100
S24	90	90	90
S25	90	90	93
S26	90	90	93
S27	90	95	97
S28	90	90	89
S29	90	90	93
S30	90	90	95
S31	90	80	95
S32	80	80	80
S33	60	80	92
S34	90	90	95
S35	95	90	94
S36	95	95	90
S37	95	95	92
S38	95	95	92
S39	95	95	86
S40	95	90	97
S41	95	90	93
S42	95	95	95
S43	95	90	95
S44	95	95	91

Note. Adapted from “Business ethics during the COVID-19 pandemic: Quantitative analysis of remote learning on business students,” by J. McAdoo, 2023, *Open Journal of Business and Management*, 11 p. 1024

RESULTS

This study investigated students’ online learning experience in higher education within the context of the pandemic. Specifically, the researcher identified the extent of challenges that pandemic induced changes to course delivery methods affected students’ final grades, how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their online learning experience, and the strategies used by all educational stakeholders to reduce negative impacts. The researcher performed a one-way ANOVA test to determine whether a statistically significant difference existed between 44 students attending an in-person business ethics course, 44 students attending a remote-learning business ethics course during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 44 students attending online courses post-COVID-19. The results of this study indicated the post-COVID-19 group experienced a statistically significant difference in final grade mean scores from the normal in-person and COVID-19 impacted semesters. While the post-COVID-19 group differs in mean from other groups, the small sample size and general A grade range prevents the significance from being generalizable or extraordinary. This research guides business ethics educators on tested teaching methods to navigate disrupted learning. Overall, students performed slightly better in the post-COVID-19 affected semesters. Table 2 comprises the summary of the data:

Table 2
Summary of Data

	Treatments			
	1	2	3	Total
N	44	44	44	132
$\sum x$	4025	4025	4137	12,187
Mean	91.47	91.47	94.02	92.32
$\sum x^2$	369625	368875	389497	1,127,997
Std. Dev.	5.6988	3.9282	3.4541	4.36

Note. Adapted from “Business Ethics During the COVID-19 pandemic: Quantitative Analysis of Remote Learning on Business Students,” by J. McAdoo, 2023, *Open Journal of Business and Management*, 11 p. 1026

Table 3 included the results details. The F-ratio value is the ratio of two mean square values. The F-ratio equaled greater than one, which indicated the variance between groups was greater than the variance within groups. The P-value refers to the level of marginal significance. In this case, the P-value equaled 0.0111 which indicated the researcher should reject the null hypothesis:

Table 3
Result Details

Result Details				
Source	SS	df	MS	F-Value
Between-treatments	190.0606	2	95.0303	F=4.6559
Within-treatments	2632.92	129	20.4103	
Total	2822.9806	131		

Note. The *F*-ratio value is 4.6559. The *p*-value is 0.0111. The result is significant at $p < .05$.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Post-COVID-19 higher education needs challenge educators to update technological apparatus more frequently, surrender social expectations of assimilation, and evolve to include and incorporate stakeholder feedback. Constructivism and social learning theory illuminate the opportunities and limitations of this environment. While constructivist approaches enhance deep, experiential ethical learning, social learning processes enrich ethical development through interaction and modeling but are vulnerable to disruption in digitally mediated environments. Educators should focus on comprehensive models designed to manage post-pandemic challenges while strengthening the development of ethical, reflective, and socially responsible business leaders.

Limitations

Limitations of this study included small sample size, lack of primary qualitative data, and the subjective nature of business ethics pedagogy in a rural university setting. The small sample size was limited to a small SACSCOC (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges) Level III institution in Tennessee with roughly 1,000 students. Business ethics students enrolled in classes before, during, and after the pandemic provided the data needed to complete the research. Since none of the participants were interviewed, primary data only included final grade outcomes. Limited diverse student demographics, access to stable, high-speed internet, and resource disparities hindered the depth and breadth of the study. Semistructured interviews with students and credentialed faculty in the business ethics study area and experiential learning observations could have deepened the understanding of best practice models for future similar events.

Participants were not compared based on demographic information such as age, race, sex, or socioeconomic status. All participants experienced an interactive online learning management system, lectures, case study analyses, and presentations in business ethics. The subjective nature of business ethics eliminated the possibility of generalizable data from this study. However, this study adds to the growing body of knowledge on the post-COVID-19 environment for students' final grade performance by challenging traditional expectations.

Future Implications

Future implications of this study suggest that the consequential permanency of remote and hybrid pedagogical modalities must evolve. Higher education leaders who retreat to traditional in-person only learning delivery methods risk undoing the critical gains made to match current student schedule preferences. Student success indicators must adapt to include mental health support, career development, and belonging. Strict administrative directives without thoughtful engagement of all stakeholders will result in unfortunate backlash or workarounds. Substantive training for stakeholders teaching the costs and benefits of incorporating artificial intelligence in course work requires thoughtful leadership guidance.

Post-pandemic realities have shifted the corporate and educational landscape due to blurred lines between profitability and social responsibility. Students show great disdain for artificial intelligence replacing highly skilled jobs, but regularly use the tool to complete assignments. The duality complicates students' ability to navigate complex moral gray areas. Applying abstract ethical theories to heavily administrative and efficiency-based real world workplace environments challenge their ideal work life balance motives. Inflation, economic instability, and regressive social norms undermine foundational cultural narratives of the meritocratic "American Dream".

Future studies could include more robust qualitative data across multiple higher education institutions. Including student, faculty, and staff feedback on lessons learned post-pandemic will offer effective preparation for impactful college business ethics courses. To optimize business ethics learning outcomes in post-COVID-19 classrooms, educators should design structured, collaborative learning experiences that combine case-based inquiry with peer discussion. Experiential gamification and ethical scaffolding supplement student knowledge construction. Modern college business ethics courses should foster social presence (feeling seen) and psychological safety (feeling safe) in online and in-person settings. Institutional stakeholders should model ethical reasoning explicitly to reinforce social learning processes.

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