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ONLINE TEACHING-LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION DURING THE LOCKDOWN PERIOD OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

The Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has caused the closure of the whole educational system from kindergarten to tertiary levels worldwide. This study presents a qualitative study that examines the various forms of online distance learning modes adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic by lecturers in the Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA Kedah. This paper seeks to find out the perceptions of lecturers and students on online distance learning and the challenges faced by them during the COVID-19 pandemic. All lecturers and students of the Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA Kedah were the population of the study and they the interviewees were sampled using convenience sampling technique. This study is descriptive and exploratory in nature, with the data obtained from a semi-structured interview. The findings revealed that the major challenge during online distance learning was the unstable internet connection. The findings is significant in helping lecturers and educational institutions to understand students' challenges regarding online learning. Higher education institutions are recommended should consider and solve the challenges faced by lecturers and students.

1. Introduction

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), a novel pneumonia disease which was first detected in Wuhan, was confirmed by the World Health Organization on January 12, 2020, before becoming an outbreak in all countries (Umaira et al., 2020). Soon, the virus spread rapidly around the world because the virus can be transferred through respiratory droplets and direct or indirect contact with the mucous membranes of the eyes, mouth, and nose (Umaira et al., 2020), making it contagious among humans. . The virus has caused major outbreaks of COVID-19 disease with severe effects worldwide (Shahzad et al., 2020). WHO has declared COVID-19 as a pandemic and resulted in a global shutdown of several activities including educational activities (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020).

The Malaysian government took all necessary measures and actions in the effort to combat and curb the pandemic but less aggressively (Azah et al., 2020). For instance, a strict screening process at all airports in Malaysia was enforced after the first case outside China was reported in Thailand (Azah et al., 2020). However, the government still kept their borders open to visitors with a lack of screening at entry points and left those with infected status to enter freely into the country (Azah et al., 2020). As a result, on January 25, 2020, Malaysia recorded its first COVID-19-positive case (Azah et al., 2020; Umaira et al., 2020). Then, on April 14, 2020, Malaysia reported two waves of COVID-19 cases, with the first wave ending successfully within less than 2 months. In early March 2020, the second wave occurred with an exponential spike due to a massive religious gathering in Petaling Jaya Mosque involving thousands of participants from more than 15 different countries. These new cases were found to have been in contact with an individual, who had attended at least five different meetings with a travel history to Shanghai, China (Azah et al., 2020; Umaira et al., 2020).

On 18 March 2020, a Movement Control Order (MCO) was executed to aid the effort of the Ministry of Health (MOH) in combating the spread and death tolls under control caused by the COVID-19 in Malaysia (Azah et al., 2020; Mazlan et al., 2020). The first phase of MCO started on 18th of March to 31st of March 2020 lasted for 14 days. The MCO restricted the movement of people into or out of an area (Umaira et al., 2020). The sudden enforcement of the MCO by the government put various sectors of the economy in jeopardy when all Malaysians were instructed primarily to stay indoors (Azah et al., 2020). Consequently, the MCO affected the closure of all facilities as well as the education sector from preschools to universities except for primary and essential services such as health services, water, electricity, telecommunication and food supply companies (Yassin, 2020). All students were unable to go to schools or universities. According to UNESCO (2021), the COVID-19 outbreak affected 177,208,409 learners at pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels as well as at tertiary education levels around the world.

The first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has required universities to close face-to-face classes and send students home. This Situation has left universities to resort to the introduction and implementation of courses through online portals and online distance learning (Shahzad et al., 2020; Malaysian Investment Development Authority, 2021). On 18 March 2020, all students of Universiti Teknologi MARA were instructed to go home after two weeks of beginning the new semester. Some of them were sent safely home by the management of Universiti Teknologi MARA and all traditional face-to-face classes in Universiti Teknologi MARA were cancelled. While waiting for the first MCO to end, many lecturers and students were speculating on whether they can come back to campus to continue the learning process for the semester. Nevertheless, the MCO continued to the second phase for another 14-day period commencing on 1 April 2020. As a result, Universiti Teknologi MARA has shifted all physical classes to open and distance learning

(ODL) mode effective from 13 April 13, 2020, for three semesters at the moment (Abu Karim, 2020; Musa et al., 2020).

In light of this issue, this study employs a qualitative approach to investigate the modes adopted by the lecturers of Universiti Teknologi MARA for the teaching-learning process, highlighting the implementation process of online distance learning modes and the perceptions of lecturers and students on online distance learning modes during COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, this study explores the challenges faced by lecturers and students in adapting to the online distance learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.   Literature Review

2.1   *Implementation of Online Distance Learning*

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, most universities offered online courses, or e-learning, for their students on and off campus. Malaysian Investment Development Authority (MIDA) (2021) defined "e-learning as a technology trend that provides the opportunity for lifelong learning and requires digital literacy readiness". Furthermore, Shahzad et al. (2020) explained further that "e-learning is covered under a larger term of technology-based learning through websites, learning portals, video conferencing, YouTube, mobile apps, and a thousand types of free available websites for blended learning tools".

In Malaysia, the government is currently providing many resources to implement E-learning in higher education institutions such as Massive Open Online Courses (Malaysian Investment Development Authority (MIDA), 2021). The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) highlighted the importance and priorities of digital literacy, critical thinking and problem-solving as 21st-century learning skills that will help students thrive in IR4.0 (MIDA, 2021). According to MIDA (2021), there is a total of nine educational institutions have been operating primarily as ODL Universities which are Open University Malaysia (OUM), Wawasan Open University (WOU), GlobalNxt University, Asia E-University, Veritas University College, UNITAR International University, Universiti Tun Abdul Razak (UNIRAZAK), Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU) and Genovasi University College. The earliest e-learning institution in operation since 2001, located in Petaling Jaya, Kuala Lumpur is Open University Malaysia. However, other private and public universities also had selectively offered some ODL mode programmes to complement full-fledged physical programmes. Hence, online distance learning was not fully operated without face-to-face meetings between lecturers and students. The learning process is known as blended learning (BL). The most important aspect of BL is a combination of both face-to-face and online teaching and learning (Jamalpur et al., 2021).

The unprecedented outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to the rapid and wide practices of e-learning. In response to the new normal resulting from the pandemic, Malaysia's higher learning institutions have jump-started their initiatives in adopting the e-learning approaches, representing the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) practices. ODL has been an emerging trend to access quality education, create lifelong learning opportunities, practise flexible modes of learning methods and offer a conducive learning environment for young school leavers, university communities and the working population. Students were expected to participate in online lectures, tutorials and self-directed online learning. In contrast to physical tests, online tests and assignments may even allow students to instantly review their marks and obtain feedback to improve their next sittings (Malaysian Investment Development Authority, 2021).

Globally, many universities shifted to online distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020). In addition, Ali (2020) stated that many universities are either closed physically or are moving towards online distance learning. With a short notice, many university lecturers started discovering all forms available for video-conferencing applications and platforms (Oyedun, 2020). The video-conferencing applications and platforms for online distance learning are Google Meet, Zoom, Cisco Webex and Microsoft Teams. While mobile applications for communication such as WhatsApp and Telegram were used in addition to platforms proposed by the university.

Online distance learning worked as an alternative to resume the education process during the COVID-19 pandemic. Previous studies have reported online distance learning brought benefits to education sectors. A study by Oyedun (2020) agreed that online distance learning has proven to be a good transition and worked as a mechanism for the accomplishment of the semester during this COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, online distance learning brings a lot of benefits to students and lecturers as well as universities. Oyedun (2020) postulated some of the benefits of this transition, including: 1) the optimization of online resources, 2) the accessibility to live cloud recordings of teachings, meetings, lectures, and other interactions, 3) the exploration of various technological learning options and other online tools for instruction and learning and the development of blended learning, and 4) The opportunity to work remotely, which allows both lecturers and students to continue engagement outside the classroom. As a result, it increases the use and utilization of available resources (Oyedun, 2020). In the same vein, Bdair (2021) found that the advantages of online distance learning included a flexible learning environment, academic achievement, and student-centered learning.

However, the success of online distance learning depends much on the stability of internet connections and devices. Accordingly, Wan (2020) proposed that the prerequisite to learning via the online platform would be to have internet and a device such as a computer, laptop, tablet or smartphone. But, Wan (2020) found that children have to share devices and they could not fully utilize the online lessons due to their poor internet connections or lack of devices, especially in rural areas of Malaysia. This showed that the Malaysian education system is lacking in terms of digital preparedness (Wan, 2020).

Another study by Chang and Fang (2020) summarized the difficulties and solutions of online learning from teachers' Chinese Network of Internal Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education. The study reported that even though most teachers prepare the contents of instructions well, it is still not an easy task to monitor and change the students' learning behaviours in such a short term. This view is supported by Shahzad et al. (2020) who found in hi sstudy that males and females have different levels in terms of attitudes toward E-learning portals in Malaysian Universities. The study implied that female students are more focused on the E-learning portal compared to male students.

Furthermore, the sudden implementation of online distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic is currently facing different kinds of challenges for lecturers and students. Online distance learning arose abruptly with no preparation. A few recent research studies have explored the challenges associated with e-learning during pandemics (Adedoyin and Soykan, 2020; Aguilera-Hermida, 2020; Bdair, 2021; Khalil et al., 2020; Nassr et al., 2020; Oyedun, 2020;). Some of the challenges are a lack of resources, poor national infrastructure, course delivery problems, problems faced by students, and cybersecurity problems (Oyedun, 2020). Whilst Aguilera-Hermida (2020) categorized types of challenges intoi three categories namely situational and environmental, online educational, and emotional challenges. Additionally, Bdair (2021) suggested that the challenges in conducting ODL were inadequacy, academic integrity, learning environment, and family burden. In short, challenges include a lack of resources, poor infrastructure, course delivery problems, student issues, and cybersecurity.

A few studies have examined the effectiveness of online distance learning in Malaysia (Mazlan et al. 2020; Musa et al. 2020). A study by Musa et al. (2020) proposed an effective strategy to conduct online distance learning (ODL) in UiTM through the perspective of ODL interaction, motivation, students' performance and ICT and technology support system. Besides that, numerous previous studies examined the attitudes towards online distance learning from the students' perspectives (Aguilera-Hermida 2020; Bestiantono, Agustina, & Cheng 2020; Khalil et al. 2020; Nassr et al. 2020; Wai Yee & Cheng Ean 2020). For instance, Khalil et al. (2020) carried out an exploratory study to determine medical students' perceptions regarding online learning methods implemented during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The study found that the perception of students was generated into four core themes which are educational impact, time management, challenges encountered, and preferences for the future.

To ensure the effectiveness of online distance learning among students and lecturers, adequate hardware or gadgets at home and high accessibility to internet connections throughout the country are very much required to increase digital literacy among students (MIDA, 2020). However, Ali (2020) indicated that the transition to online learning on a large scale is a very difficult and highly complex undertaking for education systems. Even though some universities had applied e-learning as supplementary teaching material and a process to use in face-to-face classes before COVID-19, most of them were not ready for a full online experience (Coman et al., 2020; Wan, 2020). Consequently, some universities have suspended learning and teaching processes due to the lack of information technology infrastructure for both students and teachers (United Nations, 2020). Wan (2020) stated that this technological issue affects most countries worldwide. Furthermore, many lecturers are not technology savvy and are forced to familiarize themselves with the technology to conduct their classes online (Wan, 2020). Currently, online distance learning has become the only method for teaching students. Universiti Teknologi MARA nationwide campuses have used this online distance learning to continue the learning and teaching processes.

However, most of the previous studies quantitatively examined the perception of students in the context of online learning (Coman et al., 2020). On the other hand, this study explores the perception of online distance learning from lecturers' and students' perspectives using the qualitative method. This study provides a wide perspective of online distance learning from both lecturers and students. In addition, this study also explores modes adopted by the lecturer of Universiti Teknologi MARA for the teaching-learning process and highlights challenges faced by the lecturers and students in adapting to the online distance learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to know the perception of lecturers and students, as well as the challenges faced by them in ensuring the effectiveness of online distance learning implementation.

2.2   Theoretical Grounding

In a previous study, Jogezai et al. (2021) applied the theory of reasoned action to investigate teachers' attitudes toward social media use amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The study used Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) as a theoretical framework. The theory encompasses the links between behavioral intention, behavioral attitudes, and subjective norms. The study has found the TRA relevant when the study intends to know about one's attitudes towards their behavior. The study conceptualizes TRA in connection with teachers' attitudes towards online distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While Aguilera-Hermida (2020) applied the technology acceptance model (TAM) based on cognitive theories that explain the process of adopting a behavior. Technology acceptance implies the users' willingness and the continuous use of technology (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020). The study focused on the factors that are mainly related to a student's behavior or attitude, which are attitude, affect, motivation, perceived behavioral control, and cognitive engagement.

3.   Methodology

This study employed qualitative methodologies to explore the various forms of online distance learning modes adopted, the perceptions of lecturers and students based on the online distance learning process in Higher Education Institutes and the challenges faced by the lecturers and students in adapting to the online distance learning process during COVID-19 pandemic. This study is delimited to the Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA Kedah. The Faculty of Accountancy offered two programs, Degree in Accounting and Diploma in Accountancy. The unit of analysis for the study was at individual levels.

3.1   Sample of Study

All lecturers and students of the faculty were the populations of the study. There were 26 lecturers and 915 undergraduate students for the semester of March 2021. For the study, only 7 lecturers and 7 students were selected for semi-structured interviews using a non-probability convenience sampling design to collect data concerning the forms of online distance learning modes adopted, their perceptions and challenges towards the implementation of online distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The reason for selecting only seven lecturers and seven students was due to the saturation of the collected data.

Based on Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the minimum number of interviews is 5 to 25 informants. In qualitative research, the purpose is not statistical representativeness but representativeness in the sense of gaining access to the full range of views, themes, or possibilities in the population (Polit & Beck, 2010). Qualitative researchers will be less concerned about the representativeness of a population (Hyers, 2019). The non-probability convenience sampling design is being used because it is easy to access and inexpensive (Patton, 2002). Hyers (2019) argues that the non-probability convenience sampling design involves recruitment not so much for representativeness but simply because the people are in the researcher's social networks.

3.2   Data collection method

Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with selected lecturers and students using an interpretivism paradigm (Parker, 2012). The lecturers were identified as informants A, B, C, D, E, F, and G, while students were identified as informants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 for confidentiality reasons. Interviewees were offered anonymity, and the study assured them that they would remain anonymous.

3.3   Semi-structured Interview Procedures

Informants were recruited among the lecturers and students of the Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA Kedah, based on their willingness to take part in this study. Informants were informed that the study was about online distance learning. The semi-structured interview consisted of open-ended questions that elicited answers in the informant's own words in any way they preferred. The semi-structured interview was carried out on April 19 and 20, 2021, for an

average of 15 minutes for each informant. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatimly.

Before the interviews, the interviewees were briefed and assured about their safety and confidentiality, that their interview would be taped for fifteen minutes, and that the interviews were conducted in English. Patton (2002) suggested that the open-ended questions enable the researchers to understand and capture the points of view of other people without "being pigeonholed into standardized categories". The open-ended questions also encourage informants to express their views and experiences more easily and responsively (Bdair, 2021; McCracken, 1988).

The study is to obtain an in-depth understanding of the students' and lecturers' perspectives regarding the adoption of ODL during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the challenges they faced in adopting online distance learning. The lecturers and students were first asked to answer the question "What types of online teaching and learning modes were adopted during the lockdown period". While the perceptions of online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges faced in adapting to the online teaching-learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic were questioned with open-ended questions, three open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire, and each of the relevant informants responded to one of them. Online distance learning had been implemented for three semesters at the time of data collection. After data analysis, participants were asked to confirm the emerging themes to ensure the rigor of the findings. The data analysis process was reviewed by an external researcher to verify its accuracy and credibility.

4.   Results

This study used semi-structured interviews to collect data. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the research questions. The interview transcripts were read and analyzed considering the research questions. Based on Braun and Clarke (2006), "thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data". It minimally organizes and describes your data set in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In accordance with Thomas and Harden (2008), this study adopted a thematic method of data analysis to ensure effective analysis of the collected data. Thomas and Harden (2008) proposed three steps for thematic synthesis: line-by-line coding, developing descriptive themes using the first coding, and generating analytical themes based on the descriptive themes. They are the difference between descriptive and analytical themes. The descriptive themes represent the original studies, while the analytical themes bring new interpretative insights (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

4.1   Findings

4.1.1   Demographics Data of Informants

For the study, only seven lecturers and seven students were selected for semi-structured interviews using a non-probability convenience sampling design to collect data concerning the forms of online distance learning modes that were adopted and their perceptions and challenges towards online distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. All the informants were female. There were four lecturers between the ages of 31 and 40 years old, and three of the lecturers were between the ages of 41 and 50 years old. The majority of those students with a degree in accounting were between the ages of 21 and 30 years old. Table 1 presents the demographic data for informants.

Table 1
Demographics of Informants

Gender	Lecturers Female (N:7)	Students Female (N:7)
Age:		
21-30	0	7
31-40	4	0
41-50	3	0

4.1.2   Semi-structured interview questions

The semi-structured questionnaires were based on questions on modes adopted, perceptions, and challenges faced in adapting to the online teaching-learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic. The open-ended questionnaires are as below:

1.   What types of online teaching-learning modes were adopted during the lockdown period?
2.   What are your perceptions of online teaching-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? (Pros & cons)
3.   What are the challenges faced in adapting to the online teaching-learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic?

4.1.3   Types of online teaching and learning modes

This study investigated what types of online teaching and learning modes were adopted during the lockdown period and how lecturers conducted online teaching and learning. Table 2 provides information on various types of online distance learning modes that lecturers and students used during the lockdown period of the COVID-19 outbreak. The lecturer's modes of communication are the same as those that the students use.

Table 2
Types of online distance learning modes

Objective 1	Lecturers	Students
Modes of online distance learning	Telegram, Ufuture, Google Meet, Google Classroom, Youtube Channel, Whatsapp Group, Microsoft Teams, Google Form, Cisco Webex	Telegram, Ufuture, Google Meet, Google Classroom, Youtube Channel, Whatsapp Group, Microsoft Teams, Google Form, Cisco Webex

Most lecturers and students used WhatsApp or Telegram to communicate and discuss with one another. For online classes, the lecturers were utilizing Google Meet, Microsoft Teams or Cisco Webex platform. No one used Facebook to conduct classes. In contrast, Jogezai et al (2021) found that Facebook was the highest used social media platform in Pakistan and the second highest was YouTube.

Besides that, the lecturer used Google Classroom or Ufuture to upload notes and materials for online distance learning. Ufuture is a platform for delivering learning content online to any students who want to take up a course. The Ufuture was developed by Universiti Teknologi MARA where students can also participate in self-paced asynchronous learning activities on the

university's online learning platform (UFUTURE) (Abu Karim, 2020). Several teaching and learning platforms can be implemented in online distance learning to make learning more flexible and effective by using different methods of reaching the students such as lectures, case studies, debates, discussions, brainstorming, tutorials, and gaming (Jamalpur et al., 2021).

4.1.4   Perceptions on ODL mode

In order to get the findings of objective two, to study the perceptions of lecturers and students on online distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, the thematic analysis of the open-ended questionnaire on the perceptions of lecturers and students towards online distance learning was carried out. There are many advantages and disadvantages of online distance learning. If there is no weighing of the pros and cons of online distance learning, the quality of teaching and learning can be impaired (Sia & Abbas Adamu, 2020). It is important to study the perceptions of lecturers and students.

The majority of the lecturers opined that the advantages of ODL were that they learned various mode of online distance learning. From this ODL, students learn to manage themselves and become independent. With the method of giving the recorded video to students, the students can learn in a flexible way which they can refer back to the video when needed on their own time. Meanwhile, the disadvantage of online distance learning, the lecturers perceived that there was difficulty to assess students' understanding, difficulty delivering the knowledge and difficulty marking online. One lecturer perceived that:

"*Quite tough to deliver the lecture, difficult to measure the level of students' understanding since it is an open examination book, struggling when marking the answer scripts''*.

As far as students' perception of online distance learning, they opined that the online learning process during COVID-19 offered a convenient and flexible method to learn. One of the students opined that:

"*After almost 3 semesters of learned through Online Distance Learning (ODL), I will say it is a very convenient and flexible method to learn because I can study anywhere such as in my room even though I am not feeling well but I still can join the online class''*.

Other than that, the students found that they can save money during online distance learning. When they stay at home with their family, they are not required to pay for house rentals. Their homes also made them feel more comfortable, but they experienced internet connection problems, lack of social interactions and difficulties in understanding certain subjects during ODL

4.1.5   Challenges faced in adapting to ODL

Lastly, the findings of objective three examine the challenges faced by the lecturers and students in adapting to online distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The lecturers and students responded to the final question of open-ended questionnaires for the data. It was found that most of the lecturers and students in some way encountered similar kinds of challenges.
The major challenge during online distance learning was unstable network connections. This finding was supported by Nassr et al. (2020). They found that it was difficult to be online during classes due to an unstable internet connection in UniKL. This finding agrees with a study conducted by Sia and Abbas Adamu (2020) which showed the effect was more severe in East Malaysia due to poor internet connectivity for online learning. In addition, Bestiantono et al.

(2020) reported that 51.6% of students have limited internet access. This finding was also found in a study conducted by Coman et al. (2020).

Moreover, some of the lecturers were not technology savvy. As a result, they faced difficulties in learning new ways of teaching and adapting to technology. Also, it was perceived that some of the students did not have the essential resources to join online classes. They have no proper gadgets or electronic devices to learn online. This finding is consistent with a study by Coman et al. (2020) in which there is a lack of computers or laptops. Among other challenges, the lack of students' participation during online distance learning was a significant challenge reported by the lecturers. In supporting this finding, Oyedun (2020) found that there are course delivery problems that diminished student-teacher engagement. The study noted that many students no longer participate in online class discussions as they do in the traditional face-to-face class and there was often little or no feedback when questions are asked in an online class. One lecturer opined in these words:

"Some students did not participate during discussion or class, it's very difficult to trace or identify whether students do understand during lectures compared to face-to-face classes".

Besides, the students were struggling with time management. Some of them were assigned household chores at home. One student exhibited these words:

"The challenge that I face in adapting to the online teaching-learning process during this COVID-19 pandemic is that I have a lot of commitments since I am learning from home. As the daughter in the house, I need to help my family with household chores every day. But I will always try better at managing my time so that I can commit as a good student and a good daughter".

5.0   Discussion

The main objective of this study was to explore the various forms of online distance learning modes adopted, the perceptions of lecturers and students based on the online distance learning process in the Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA and the challenges faced by the lecturers and students in adapting to the online distance learning process during COVID-19 pandemic. This study is limited to the Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA Kedah. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews of 7 lecturers and 7 students from the Faculty of Accountancy and analysed using thematic analysis to meet the objectives of the study.

In this study, lecturers revealed a variety of platforms for conducting online distance learning. Several available online teaching and learning tools were found to be used by both students and lecturers, like Telegram, Ufuture, Google Meets, Google Classroom, Youtube Channel, WhatsApp Group, Microsoft Teams, Google Form, and Cisco Webex. This finding was also found by Sia and Abbas Adamu (2020), who reported that lecturers and students started establishing online learning platforms such as Cisco Webex, Google Meets, and Microsoft Teams for synchronous online teaching. Synchronous learning is a real-time and live online social interaction, where responses are given to students immediately. For communication, the majority of the lecturers opted for WhatsApp or Telegram as a mode of reaching their students. WhatsApp or Telegram also being used for discussion was simple, they were accustomed to using it in day-to-day life and suitable for slow internet connectivity.

For the perceptions of lecturers and students, their views on the advantages and disadvantages of using online distance learning are discussed. The findings of the study showed that the advantages were that they learned various modes of online distance learning, students learned to manage themselves and become independent, and students could learn flexibly. Regarding the disadvantages of online distance learning, the lecturers perceived that there was difficulty assessing students' understanding, difficulty delivering the knowledge, and difficulty marking online.

This study also reported that the major challenge during online distance learning was the unstable network connection. All lecturers and students have encountered similar challenges. The internet connection became the main issue for conducting online distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bestiantono et al., 2020; Coman et al., 2020; Nassr et al., 2020; Sia & Abbas Adamu, 2020). Wai Yee and Cheng Ean (2020) proposed that higher education institutions should upgrade technical advancements like an Internet connection to improve online distance learning. In addition, Musa et al. (2020) recommend an effective strategy to conduct online distance learning (ODL) in UiTM from the perspectives of ODL interaction, motivation, students' performance, and ICT and technology support systems. In order to implement online distance learning effectively, higher education institutions should consider and solve the challenges faced by lecturers and students. This COVID-19 crisis is not over yet, we need to consider and give feedback to the lecturers' and students' responses if we want them to continue and have a positive higher education experience (Musa et al., 2020).

6.0   Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic obstructed traditional face-to-face learning. This crisis moved the traditional learning method to online distance learning in educational institutions across the world. Thus, many schools, colleges and universities opted for online distance learning as an alternative way to continue education during the pandemic. This study concluded that there are advantages and disadvantages of online distance learning for lecturers and students. Although online distance learning creates room to resume the education process for lecturers and students, there are also many challenges in adapting to the online distance learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially unstable internet connections. Thus, the government should provide better digital and cost-efficient infrastructure to make effective online distance learning possible.

Authors Contributions
Roshidah Safeei led this study and wrote the paper; Hawa Syamsina Md Supie reviewed and improved the article.

Conflict of Interest
No conflict of interest is associated with this publication.

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