

# **THE IMPACT OF OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) ON STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA KELANTAN BRANCH**

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**Abstract:** The Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has impacted education systems globally, contributing to the near-total closing of schools, universities and colleges. The pandemic has pushed schools and higher education institutions to shift the teaching and learning classes from physical classrooms to various online platforms which help to minimise the spread of infections and ensure effective learning continues. Hence, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) has decided to implement Open Distance Learning (ODL) due to the massive attack of COVID-19 in Malaysia. The purpose of this study is to identify the impact of ODL on students' performance among students of UiTM Kelantan branch. Besides, this study seeks to examine the challenges faced by students in ODL classes. The empirical data of 70 students who participated through online survey were analysed using descriptive analysis. The findings of the study revealed that majority of the respondents are dissatisfied with their ODL experiences. Results also showed that students have lack of motivation and they are unable to adapt to this new learning environment. It can be concluded that majority of the students still need more time to adapt and adopt to the new norm of online learning environment. Even though ODL is recommended due to its flexibility, accessibility, affordability and life-based education opportunities, it is recommended that the university should equip students with independent study skills and recruit competent, creative and committed academics to enhance the teaching and learning of ODL in UiTM Kelantan branch.

**Keywords:** Open distance learning, COVID-19, academic performance

## **1. Introduction**

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a recent outbreak of the virus from Wuhan, China. COVID-19 has spread quickly through the national, over-arching health services and worsened with shelter confinement. In early 2020, Malaysia reported the first case of Covid-19 and the cases keep increasing until the end of 2020. This pandemic has forced the government to enforce a movement control order (MCO) which is referred to as partial lockdown that signifies a major step taken by the Malaysian Government to stop the spreading of COVID-19 in Malaysia. However, the worldwide dissemination of the COVID-19 pandemic and the introduction of MCO severely impacted higher education, as universities closed their premises and countries shut down their borders in reaction to lockdown measure by the government.

The closing of educational institutions somehow pressures students and educators to follow the new norm, which is to accept the implementation of Open Distance Learning (ODL). Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) has introduced ODL in facilitating the teaching and learning process to replace the traditional method or face-to-face teaching. According to Allam et al. (2020), distance learning can be described as the teaching methodology in which students finish their study virtually and not necessarily come to the lecture session physically. In other words, students read, take their tests, and complete online learning in their enrolled courses without the need to visit any physical class such as lecture hall, computer lab, library, or physical classrooms. Unlike traditional learning, teachers and students are required to be in the same place and time. The purpose of this paper is to identify students' performance in Open Distance Learning (ODL) at UiTM Cawangan Kelantan.

## 2. Previous Studies

Online learning method encourages flexible learning to enhance education activity among students (Kenny, 2010). He added that online learning or flexible learning is highly beneficial for people with disabilities or dysfunctional as physical learning will limit their movement to learn. However, this finding contrasted with the finding by Strong et al. (2012). The study stated that students prefer physical classes compared to online classes. In addition, the students indicated that online learning is not their chosen form of learning.

Arias, Swinton and Anderson (2018) stated that students in face-to-face class performed statistically and significantly better than those in the online class in terms of the exam average and improvement in post-test instructor questions. Agal et al. (2016) reported that students did not seem to gain the same amount of knowledge using an online course as they would if they used the traditional classroom method. The majority of students were dissatisfied and uncomfortable with the online learning environment and favoured a real in-person classroom teacher.

In addition, Suprabha et al. (2017) added that students were unable to complete the online tasks listed by the class lecturer. This causes anxiety among the students which contributes to fear of obtaining the best outcome for the enrolled course. In addition, internet speed connection and basic computer skills require the students to have the ability to participate in online classes which must be at least in adequate level to use a computer, software, applications and online learning tools (Suprabha et al., 2017). Besides, additional problem that occurs among students in the ODL is when they are faced with overflow of assignments from different lecturers. As the final exams are cancelled because of COVID-19, students are fully assessed based on ongoing assessments. Hence, they are facing difficulties in time management because they need to meet the overflow of assignments.

Based on the study by Allam et al. (2020), during online learning, students tend to feel alienated because there is no physical or social contact with the lecturer and classmates that affects the degree of preparation. The lack of physical social contact stimulates the level of fear, poor self-confidence in completing online tasks and increases the possibility of procrastination.

## 3. Methodology

The participants of this study were 70 students from the Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences (FSKM), Universiti Teknologi MARA Kelantan branch, Machang Campus. The students were selected using random sampling. The research used a quantitative approach where an online survey was conducted by using Google form. The link to access the questionnaire was shared with the participants involved in this study via WhatsApp application from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020.

## 4. Findings

The questionnaire was designed to capture students' views of ODL implementation in UiTM, particularly among students from the Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences (FSKM), Universiti Teknologi MARA Kelantan branch, Machang Campus. A five-point Likert scale was utilised with the value of 1 for strongly disagree and the value of 5 for strongly agree. It is imperative that the students understood the instructions clearly before answering the questionnaire.

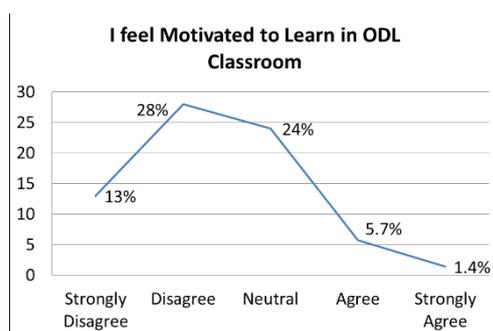
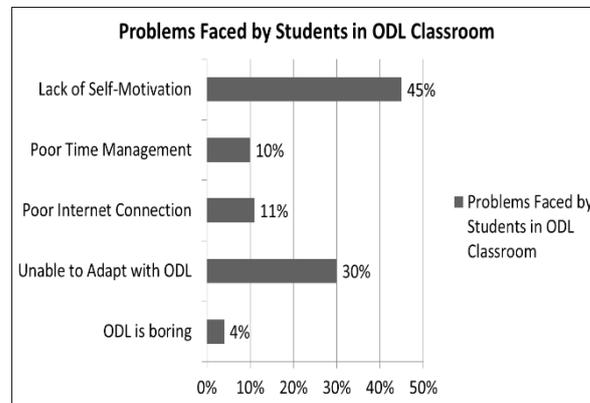


Figure 1: Students' Motivation in ODL Classroom

From Figure 1, the finding shows that majority of the respondents were demotivated to learn in ODL classroom. The finding can be related to the lack of motivation among students. This finding is supported by the study conducted by Ghaderizfreh and Hoover (2018) in which they stated that in order for the students to be satisfied and successful in online learning, they need to motivate themselves and avoid any disturbance while learning. In other words, when they feel motivated, they will be more satisfied with the learning process.



**Figure 2:** Problems Faced by Students in ODL Classroom

Figure 2 shows the problems faced by students in ODL classroom. Majority of the respondents (45%) reported that they lack self-motivation in ODL classroom. Besides, thirty percent of the respondents show that they are unable to adapt with ODL classroom which leads to the failures of their learning process. Besides that, 11% of the students have Internet issues. Based on the findings above, it can be concluded that two major problems come from the students' themselves and not external problem that can be addressed easily. A student's attention span can be shorter in ODL classroom than a traditional face-to-face setting (Cong, 2020). This can relate to the current study as students might require more time to learn and adapt with online classes rather than face-to-face class.

**Table 1:** Students' Views on the Effects of ODL Classroom on Learning Experience

a.	ODL has seriously affected me mentally yet we all just need to face and live this new normal.
b.	I need to focus more on the subject and take a long time to understand it so that I won't be left behind
c.	I am mentally tired, exhausted and feel isolated
d.	It has taken a toll on my mental state. I would much prefer face-to-face classes rather than online distance learning.
e.	Online learning has affected my understanding towards the subjects as the explanation from the lecturers virtually are less effective compare to the learning in classes, this might also affect my GPA and CGPA.
f.	It is kind of motivating me to study more before the class begins but it is also tiring because I tend to get migraine if I stay too long on the screen

Table 1 shows students' views on the effects of ODL towards their learning experience. It can be concluded that another major problem that students face is mental exhaustion that might also explain why some students cannot focus, feel stressed, or frustrated. A study conducted by Singh (2020) said that one adverse effect of online learning is the feeling of social isolation and the lack of human interaction. In addition, social contact is essential to learning and development. This can be linked to why students might feel stressed and mentally tired in their studies.

## 5. Conclusion

It can be concluded that internet access and lack of motivation might affect the students' learning process. However, the sample is too small to come to a conclusive statement. Additional research about students' preferences, the impacts and challenges of ODL should be conducted.

ODL is related to its flexibility, accessibility, affordability and life-based education opportunities (Musigafi et al., 2015), hence, it is recommended that the university should equip students with independent and creative study skills to ensure they are not left behind by the current global trend. Appropriate assistance and counselling service are also crucial to ensure all parties involved in ODL namely the students, academics and university staff are able to seek for effective assistance from the correct parties when they are in need. Moreover, the university should also recruit competent, creative and committed academics who are willing to contribute more time, efforts and ideas to enhance the teaching and learning of ODL especially at UiTM Kelantan branch.

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