The New Norms and Students' Motivation in the Pandemic Sphere

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ABSTRACT

The global pandemic COVID-19 has hit the world tremendously and shifted all normal daily routines to a new way of living. Education and knowledge sharing has now been held virtually to prevent the spread of this life-threatening virus. Hence, students nowadays have to cope with so many changes in the execution of their courses and assignments. Aside from this challenge, lectures now have to be conducted strictly online and the lecturers can no longer physically be with them to teach face-to-face as per previous practice. Therefore, this study aims to explain the motivational conditions of students when using various media in ODL. The survey has been distributed to 174 numbers of students from one of the Higher Learning Institutions in East Peninsular Malaysia. The result showed that even students who are in worry, restless and wanted everything to be ended immediately, still try their best to perform and to gain knowledge through any medium that they can to perform their best.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Motivation, Online Learning, Pandemic*

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization has declared that the pandemic of novel virus COVID-19 has become a major public health concern and challenge worldwide (World Health Organisation, 2020). The action of infection control and methods of physical distancing have to be taken to prevent further spreading and this action will be able to control the pandemic situation. The policy of compulsory physical distancing has been implemented in many countries including the ones in Malaysia. Therefore, learning institutions such as schools and universities are compelled to make appropriate and timely modifications to continue delivering education and to sustain the continuation of students.

Data dated July 2021 shows that there are 196, 553, 009 confirmed cases and 4, 200, 412 deaths all around the world as reported by World Health Organization (WHO). Malaysia, up to the date, has recorded 1, 130, 422 cases that were reported by the Ministry of Health (MOH) Malaysia and 9, 184

deaths. Such alarming circumstances were directly caused because COVID-19 is a highly contagious disease that can spread either directly or indirectly through a respiratory system such as the nose, throat, and lungs. Therefore, all institutions' face-to-face communications have been compulsorily paused by the government and various standard operation procedures (SOP) have been introduced to prevent this virus outbreak. The same situation has to be faced by education institutions where classes are no longer to be held face-to-face and all medium has been transferred to virtual communication platforms.

These abrupt changes brought so many emotional and physical challenges to both students and lecturers. Besides being tech-savvy and up-to-date with current news, this Gen Y might as well feel devastated with this new era of gaining knowledge. Hence, this overwhelming situation may bring harm to students' mental and physical well-being. COVID-19 and relevant technologies for educational/governmental presentational efforts have a small yet persistent effect on university students' mood and health behaviors (Copeland et al., 2020). Thus, in the long run, this pandemic and learning style will lead to stress and pressure and eventually will arise mental health problems such as anxiety (Wang et al., 2020). Higher education should provide help to prevent this situation from growing more alarmingly by providing strategies to ensure mental health services are accessible and there is intentional outreach to university students (Liu et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020).

Therefore, the researchers aim to study the situation and conditions of the students in facing this challenging phase in Malaysia and evaluate the motivational condition including the most favourable method that suits students' situation at home.

Open Distance Learning

Open Distance Learning (ODL) is referring to the provision of versatile opportunities for education in terms of access and various ways of gaining knowledge. This online eLearning is part of the ODL concept inspired by Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM). This ODL concept allows students and lecturers to be more flexible in choosing the best educational endeavors anywhere, anytime, and anyhow as long as the access is being made available to all and free them from constraints of time and place. When the cases of COVID-19 became severe in Malaysia, the government had rapidly closed all face-to-face operations, moved to digital form, and paused the operations for the education sector for some time to assist the people in adapting to the Neo situation. In midst of this chaos, some countries do not need this intraperiod, such as the United Arab Emirates and Australia since online learning has been part of their practice even before this pandemic outbreak (Crawford et al., 2020). Due to restricted movements, the students' learning activity strategies have changed to be more self-directed and self-learning, but of course with the guidance from the lecturers. These new norms are believed to be influencing the students' study periods to be more of a continuous habit and improve their efficiency. For these reasons, students' performances increased. Assessments are expected due to COVID-19 confinement that can be explained by an improvement in their learning performance (Gonzalez et al., 2020).

Students nowadays do not have any choice other than to pursue their studies using online mediums, but these experiences are believed to enhance their perceived learning experience (Boyles, 2011). Nevertheless, the learning experience will differ from one student to another depending on the chosen delivery mode learning environment, hometown internet coverage as well as additional work at home and family matters (Stoessel et al, 2015).

Students' Motivation

In this global pandemic attack, independent learning through online learning and ODL is compulsory. Therefore, these approaches are believed to be helping students to be more independent in

learning by relying on teaching materials as students can study anytime and anywhere, both online and offline (Buabeng-Andoh, 2018). Most of the studies done by researchers all over the world proved that there is a significant positive value of digital learning on students' motivation to learn (Faridah et al., 2020). However, after more than a year of utilizing ODL, some researchers showed that students perceived online education to be less satisfying than on-campus education and rated their interests as declining. This can be seen in lesser time invested in lectures and small-group meetings, the attendances are decreasing in number, and students' estimated hours of studying dropped. This situation is similar to cases in Malaysia where students are currently practicing ODL for more than a year and this, worryingly, can lead to burnout and an unhealthy mental state among them. Nevertheless, it is concluded that even though students' satisfaction and motivation dropped during the shift to online education, there is an increase in efficiency, which means results are not lower than they would have normally been (Meeter et al., 2020).

Other than that, interaction in the classroom, students' motivation, course structure, instructors' and lecturers' knowledge and facilitation can also be a part of boosting and influencing students' perceived learning outcomes (Baber, 2020) The use of savvy and user-friendly applications also can increase motivation in online learning in this era of the pandemic. The usage of the WhatsApp application as a communication medium between students, classmates, and also between lecturers and student groups can also increase student learning outcomes (Susilawati & Supriyatno, 2020). Wulandari (2016) also agreed that an important factor for successful learning, including in an online learning environment, is to reconsider learning motivation in learning environments that use technology. Ninjo (2011) said that this reason is important for researchers in the world of education to examine in-depth students' motivation in online learning, especially learning activities that are carried out during the pandemic of COVID-19.

METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on the descriptive quantitative method and the study has been done on 174 students at one of the Higher Learning Institution in East Peninsular, Malaysia. According to Chua (2012), quantitative research is an analysis that attempts to reveal universal truth and values in the relationship between the variables or phenomena. This study adopted a survey research technique where it is limited - to study data that has been collected from a sample of a population to represent the entire population. The sampling technique that has been used is simple random sampling towards undergraduate students age 18-27 years old. This differs from a census where information is collected from the entire population. In general, the unit of analysis in survey research is the individual. Thus, this survey is a study that takes a sample from one population and uses a set of questionnaires as the main data collection tool. The surveys have been distributed through Google form to particular students.

Survey research is the best method to reveal how motivated students are in this online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Likert scale that is used to measure attitudes, opinions and perceptions is the ideal tool for this study as the researchers' objective is to see the perceptions and opinions of a group of students towards online learning. The instrument used in this study has been adopted from Ritonga & Ramadhani (2020) with five Likert scales started with Not at All as (1) and Very Good as five (5). The survey was distributed using Google form so that it is easily accessible by the students. Meanwhile, the percentage results that have been obtained were interpreted according to Table 1 by (Siyoto, 2015)

Table 1: Score Interpretation Criteria

Percentage	Indicator
0% - 19.99%	Very poor
20% - 39.99%	Not good

40% - 59.99%	Enough
60% - 79.99%	Well
80% - 100%	Very Good

This study also applied a descriptive study where the goal of this study is to describe the characteristics and opinions of the respondents towards this phenomenon. Several studies had utilized descriptive studies to explain the action, perception, and opinion on a certain situation (Nassaji, 2015).

RESULTS ANALYSIS

The results from the analysis below are including demographic study in terms of respondents' gender, age, and background of study in this institution. This study also focused on respondents' emotional state, the online medium used by the lecturer and instructor that is probably the most burdening to them, and also the most preferable learning medium. The researchers had also conducted a survey related to learning motivation where it is focused on learning material, visual face-to-face meetings, assignments, and language.

Descriptive Result

Respondents' Background

Of a total of 174 respondents for this study, 86.3% are female students, and another 13.7% are male students. The respondents are currently completing their Bachelor in Finance, Operation Management, Customer Service Management, Operation Management, Customer Service Management, Hotel Management, Food Service Management, and Accounting. Referring to Figure 1, most students are around age 16-20 and only 21.8% of them are 21 and above.
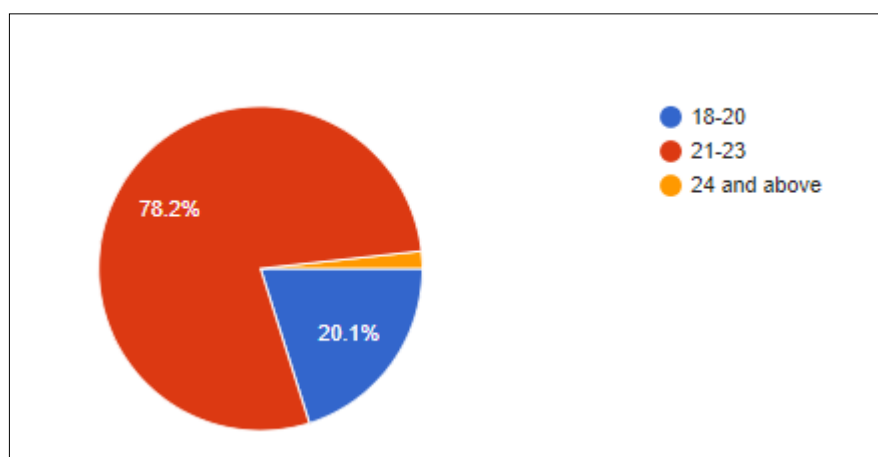

Figure 1: Respondent Age

Respondents' Activities During The COVID-19 Pandemic

Prior to this study, the Movement Control Order (MCO) 2.0 has been applied all over Malaysia where all citizens are not allowed to move more than a 10 km radius from their home location without a permission letter from the authorities. Hence, the students have to stay at home and focus on their studies or anything related to their daily routine. The study showed that most of their time is allocated to complete tasks, to do their assignments, and the rest are focusing on giving extra hands to their parents, killing time by surfing the internet and playing games.
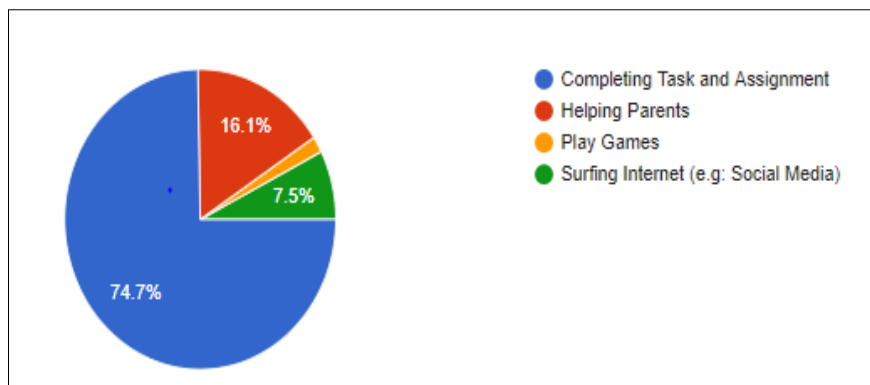

Figure 2: Respondent activities

Respondents' Emotional Situation

The emotional situation of the respondents is quite worrisome as 66.7% of them feel worried constantly and another 32.2% of the students feel that they are not able to take this online learning approach anymore. There are also 42.6% who feel restless with this online learning approach. This is very crucial as constant worry can lead to emotional burnout and depression. A study by Hegde et al. (2020) proved that in this outbreak, students keep worrying about their academic performance, their health and their loved ones', while also suffering from difficulty in concentrating and disruption in their sleeping pattern. These situations are very alarming as they can lead to other mental health problems such as depression, stress, and anxiety (Zandifar & Badrfam, 2020).
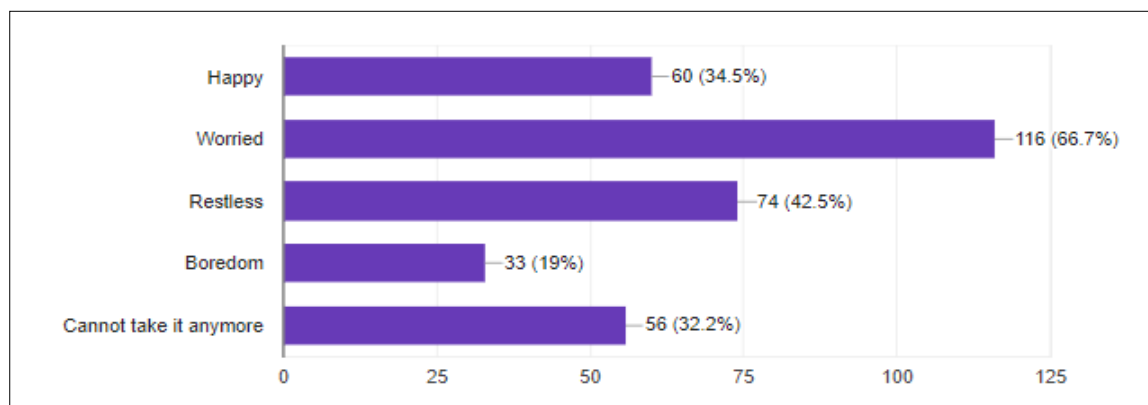

Figure 3: Respondent's emotions

Most Burdening Online Platform for Respondent

Various mediums have been used by the lecturers in the lesson transfer process in this pandemic situation. Some of the mediums are concerning too much internet data and are time-consuming for both students and lecturers. This study showed that 47.1% feel burdened with the use of virtual meeting platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, Webex application, and other platforms. Followed by UFuture which is an application launched by UiTM where all notes, examinations, assignments and all course information can be accessed. A few students feel mediums such as Telegram, Padlet, Google Classroom and Youtube are also a burden to them.
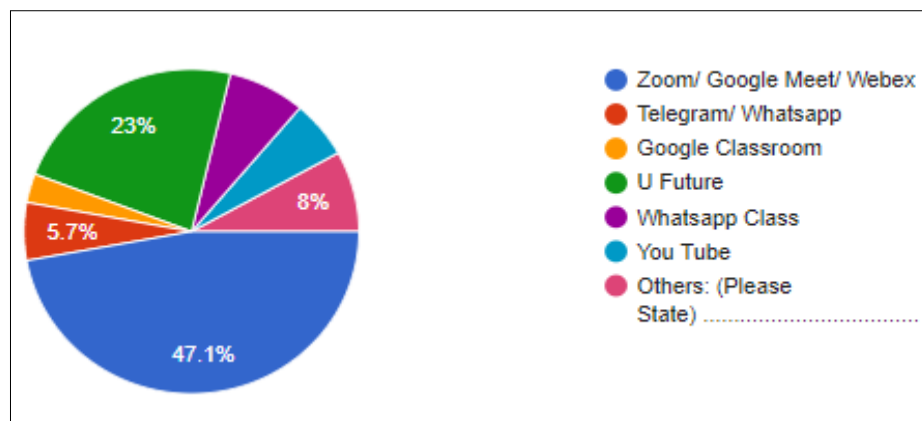

Figure 4: Most burden learning medium

Respondents' Preferable Learning Medium

Most respondents are more likely to feel comfortable using online lectures and recorded lectures in the lesson transfer process compared to study groups, UFuture, Classes' Whatsapp Group and YouTube.
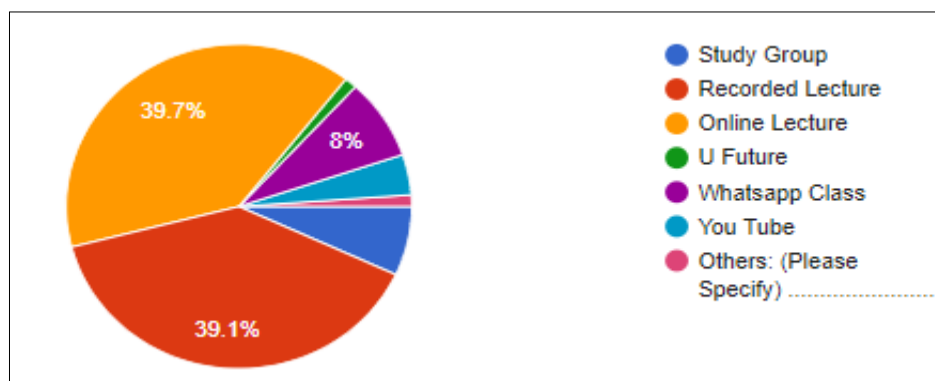

Figure 5: Most preferable learning medium

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Learning Motivation Survey

The learning motivation survey was given to 174 students of the higher learning institution at degree level with five indicators namely the desire to succeed, the encouragement and need in learning, the hopes and dreams in future, the activities that are interesting in learning and also the existence of a conducive learning environment among students.

Table 2: The result of the Students' Learning Motivation Survey with Online Learning during Covid-19

Indicator	Items	Percentage	Criteria
There is desire and desire to succeed	Looking for information related to the material	50.0%	Enough
	Passion in conveying ideas	41.7%	Enough
	Enthusiastically asked the lecturer	40.0%	Enough
	Fix the task until it is correct	56.0%	Enough
There is an encouragement and need in learning	Have a passion for learning	55.4%	Enough
	Collect assignments on time	46.3%	Enough
	Learning without coercion	44.0%	Enough
	There is a desire to succeed	58.9%	Enough
There are hopes and dreams for future	Be serious about your assignment	52.6%	Enough
	Able to answer or do well on assigned tasks	48.6%	Enough
	Have the desire to get the best score from each assignment	45.1%	Enough
There are activities that are interesting in learning	Able to be responsible for tasks performed	52.0%	Enough
	Active every learning discussion	39.4%	Not Good
	Be serious in working on assignments during lectures	41.7%	Enough
The existence of a conducive learning environment	Comply with lecture regulations	46.9%	Enough
	Follow learning activities well	49.1%	Enough
	AVERAGE	**47.98%**	**Enough**

Table 2 shows the result of the students' learning motivation survey with online learning during COVID-19. The result from this study using an indicator as stated in Table 1 above which indicates form 0%-19.99% result to 80%-100% range which reflect from very poor to very good. All those indicators are crucial to be examined in this study towards these particular respondents are in terms of their studies during ODL.

All results in these indicators showed in "enough" criteria with the range of 40%-59% except for in items of activities in learning discussion where the respondents feel not good enough. The aspects

of the desire to succeed that were studied are all in "enough" criteria which consists of 1) Looking for information related to the material, 2) Passion in conveying ideas, 3) Enthusiastically asking lecturers, and 4) Fixing the task given until correct, all elements could be interpreted that students do not have the courage to ask questions so active learning is only at enough result. Indicators related to enthusiasm for learning, motivation and enthusiasm for learning have a very important relationship in learning activities, this shows that both lecturers and students must show high enthusiasm for every online learning activity (Ritonga, 2020).

In terms of other indicators such as encouragement and need in learning, hopes and dreams in future and also the existence of a conducive learning environment, students experienced enough situations which can be interpreted that they are not in a very good motivation level which caused the students to not be able to actively engage in every learning discussion. Hence, based on the results we can see that most respondents are more likely to feel comfortable using online lectures and recorded lectures in their lessons at home. Besides, more than 50% of respondents have the desire to succeed even though 66.7% said they are worried about ODL. According to Ritonga (2020), even though the COVID-19 pandemic has hit the world, it would not be a reason for students to not attain high motivation in the learning process. Even though they are facing many obstacles in real practice, they are doing their very best to optimize online learning. The student motivations are abruptly low drastic changing in education systems.

Both lecturers and students must show high commitment to every online learning activity that resulted in enthusiasm for learning activities and motivation. Kuntarto (2020) showed that online learning models have provided new experiences that are more challenging than conventional (face-to-face) learning models. Unlimited time and place to study give students the freedom to choose the right time in learning based on their interests, so that the ability to absorb learning materials is higher than learning in class. Nevertheless, to achieve mutual success in this pandemic era, both students and lecturers have to be in the same direction. Students have to give extra effort in completing their study and for the lecturer's part, extra time, detailed notes, as well as no short-notice assignment or task might give huge help to this student. Therefore, this study proved that the students feel tired, restless, worried, and eagerly want online learning to be finished early, but the student still wants to perform their best in every task given and every lesson taught to them. This can be said that the learning process is not a burden to them, but, other factors such as learning environment, internet connectivity and perhaps study group are the reasons why students would want to put an end to this online learning method.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The first year of learning experience during Movement Control Order (MCO) in the COVID-19 pandemic situation has taught many lessons for both lecturers and students in utilizing the online learning platform. Hence, Wardani (2018) showed that blended learning can help students to become more active in the learning process in class and online, and also be able to aid the learning process to be more enjoyable. If the teachers were able to make the learning process fun, then students will be more interested in following the lessons. Therefore, regardless of demographic background, the technology preferences and the lecturer or instructors' capability to deliver the lesson do play crucial parts in the success of online learning (Jaques & Salmon, 2007).

Therefore, other than choosing the most appropriate learning medium and most preferable teaching technique for the students, the higher education institutions also might need to work hand in hand to provide a mental health support system that specifically focuses on students' mental issues, both psychiatric and psychology based on every campus with additional of online access (Irfan, 2020). These designs of services will be needed both on a formal and informal basis and these are believed to be able to help students who are in need.

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Lastly, this study hopes to bring contributions to the students, lecture, as well as higher institutions as these new hybrid learning systems, are now being part of our normality. The researchers also want this study to be expanded to a wider scope of students, not only in higher educations, elementary schools or any level of formal education that happen to embrace a similar situation as well.

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