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DISTANCE LEARNING TOOLS PREFERENCES - AMONG OFFICE MANAGEMENT LECTURERS (UiTM PAHANG)

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ABSTRACT: This study is about discovering the most preferred teaching tools amongst selected lecturers during the Open Distance Learning (ODL) exercise due to COVID-19 Pandemic starting from the early 2020 through the early 2022 and the reason behind the preferences. Base on the findings it was discovered that Google Meet is the most favored tool used followed by WhatsApp.

Keywords: Teaching Tools, Open and Distance Learning, Google Meet, WhatsApp, COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

During the outbreak of viral pneumonia in Wuhan, China (Li et al., 2020), Malaysia has taken measures to control the pandemic by introducing Movement Control Order (MCO). In relation to it, most of the higher institutions have already implement online learning to supplement traditional face-to-face lectures, but the recent Covid-19 pandemic outburst has forced institutions to halt physical classes and continue with fully open and distance learning (ODL). This is because of, the Movement Control Order (MCO) and Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO). Public and private universities were required to discontinue any physical lessons during the pandemic time. However, things might not run smoothly as envisioned, and there are a lot of considerations that need to be considered in order to conduct efficient, fully online courses.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has been accelerated globally at an unprecedented speed and haste since COVID-19 pandemic attacks. With the new norms in education, come new experiences and challenges. The demands in online learning have pushed both students and educators to maximize their ICT skills and some to be unwillingly ready for the new normal. Lecturers and students have no choice but to keep up with the requirements and challenges of Open and Distance Learning (ODL).

ICT facilities and resources have always been an issue and a tremendous challenge for the Ministry of Education in Malaysia since there is still a huge gap between urban and rural schools in terms of Internet connection and network resources (Jamil, Razak, Raju, & Mohamed, 2011). In 2013, data from the Centre for Educational Research Institute recorded that less than 20% of teachers in Malaysia reported using technology for students' class projects (OECD, 2018). Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic situation, most institutions, educators and learners are forced to fully utilize Internet resources and upgrade their ICT skills in response to the requirement of fully open and distance learning (ODL) to ensure that learning still takes place in times of crisis. Students and educators have no choice but to keep up with the new norms and challenges of ODL.

Educational institution and workplace were forced to run at home via online (Prem et al., 2020). Online learning is where education which takes place partially or fully through the Internet, using variety of software communication to substitute face to face meeting (Means et al., 2009). Examples of such applications are namely Google Meet, WhatsApp, Zoom, Webex, Classroom and may other freely available in the market.

This sudden transition demands educator to adapt their teaching practices into the online environment, and some found out they are challenged with difficulty to adopt to the new teaching mode technology (Kreijns et al., 2014). Nonetheless these challenges also have the positive side where educators must adapt fast and venture into new technology during the online learning session. Resulting into educators use whatever tools available and that can fulfill the need for them and their students. Taking into consideration also on the capability of Internet access, hardware and software that can support the situation.

Organization such as University Technology MARA (UiTM) immediate adapt to this situation and use the terminology of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) to support its business operation as an education institution. In conjunction to ODL, and the restriction due to pandemic, each UiTM lecturer may have to use their organization existing tools to continue online teaching.

However, in times of crisis, UiTM per say allows the tool of choice to facilitate the ODL class as per suitability of the educators and the students, in their individual classroom. This case study would identify which tools most preferred in terms of usage throughout the pandemic period from the early 2020 until the early 2022. It would also identify the cause of using which type of tools preferred.

METHODS

A study has been done by Vloreen & Ellen (2021), shows that majority of students had average quality of internet connection with the highest percentage of 46.9% and the least with poor internet connection quality, 6.3 %. Some students indicated that ODL should not be continued in the future semester, due to problems such as poor internet connection, budget constraints and time management issues. Based on previous research done by Norazrina (2020), it was found that the most preferred online learning platform by the students was Google Classroom (86.8%) and followed by Whatsapp (77.9%). This indicates that the students really like using Google Classroom and essential communication apps like Whatsapp and Telegram. When the students were asked further why they preferred Google Classroom, they mentioned that it is easier for them to manage and keep track of their learning tasks and activities.

In relation to this study, data collected was about the type of tools used and the reason for the selection. Data collection was amongst lecturers from Faculty of Business and Management teaching code BA118 and BA232. Method on data collection is questionnaire collected using Google Form. Data analysis method used is the descriptive statistics by measuring frequency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This case study identified which tools have been use throughout the pandemic period from the early 2020 until the early 2022. Comments by respondent discovered the reason behind preferred tools for ODL. The case study analysis was based on five semesters ODL sessions, starting from Mac-August 2020 until Mac-August 2022.

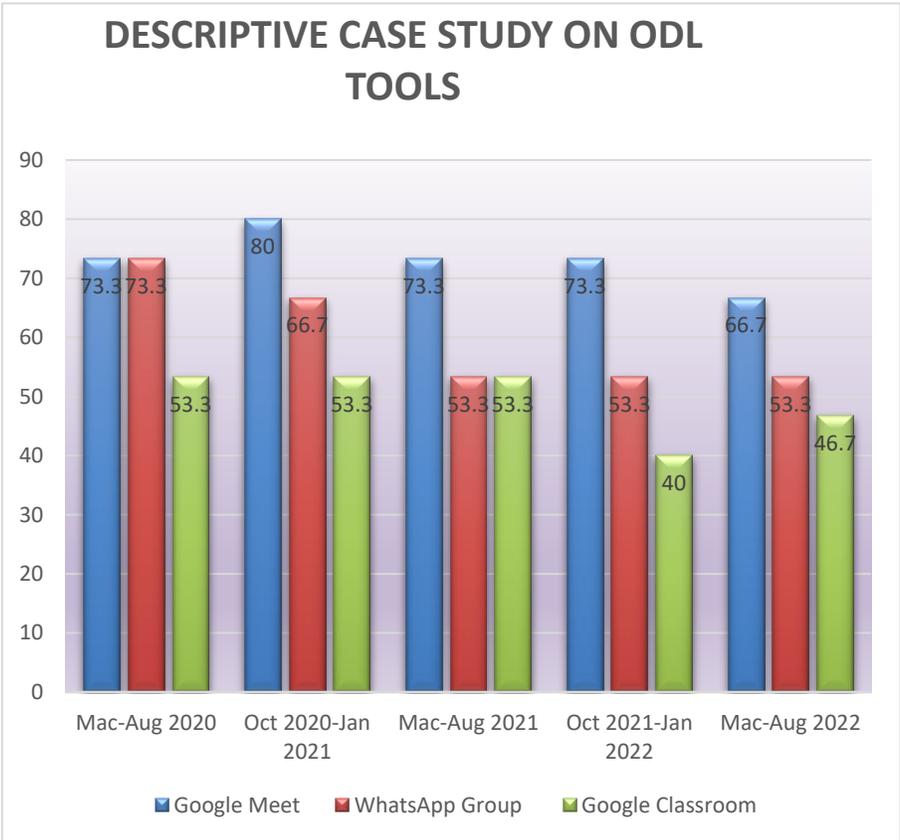


Figure 1: Comparison Graph for 5 Semester (Most Preferred ODL Tools)

Based on the findings we can identify that in *Mac-August 2020 (73.3%) majority of the lecturers prefer using Google Meet and WhatsApp Group* as their tools for ODL which indicated the highest result. Followed by (53.3%) prefer to use Google Classroom and (6.7%) prefer to use FB Live Streaming. In *October 2020-January 2021, (80%) of lecturers prefer to use Google Meet*, followed by (66.7%) WhatsApp Group and (6.7%) prefers to use FB Live Streaming, YouTube Channel and Zoom. We discover that on *Mac-August 2021, (73.3%) of lecturers prefer to use Google Meet*, followed by (53.3%) prefer to use WhatsApp Group and Google Classroom and (6.7%) prefer to use YouTube Channel and U-Future for their ODL sessions. In *October 2021-January 2022, (73.3%) of the lecturers prefer to use Google Meet* followed by WhatsApp Group (53.3%) and only (6.7%) prefer to use U-Future. Finally, in *Mac-August 2022, (66.7%) of the lecturers prefer to use Google Meet* followed by (53.3%) prefers WhatsApp Group and (6.7%) prefers to use YouTube Channel and U-Future.

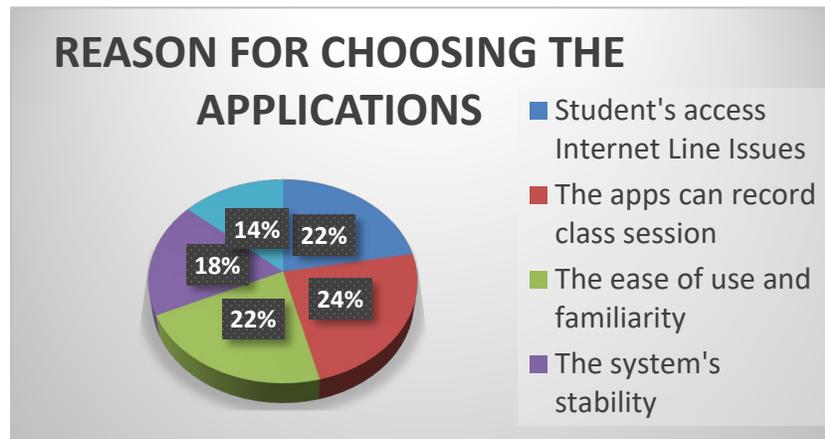


Figure 2 : Reason for The Choice (ODL Tools)

We also manage to identify comments regarding challenges in using the tools such as unstable Internet access to a few students due to affordability, weather, and locality. Lack of infrastructure to conduct online class and poor Internet line connections and lack of student’s commitments during ODL class session.

CONCLUSION

Majority of lecturers prefer to use *Google Meet and WhatsApp* as their main tools because the applications can record the class session (even though the announcement in early 2022 Google cease to allow free recording, Google Meet maintain the most popular tool used) and the ease of use, respectively. This is due to technology familiarities and in consideration to student’s Internet line access issue.

Looking at the trend over the five semesters period, it can be seen that “Google Meet” has become the most preferred tool in “ODL”, but further study needs to be done as the teaching and learning process needs evidence for auditing purposes. It is a concern when recording is no more available for users. This situation may involve cost, and ease of use challenges, for both students and educators.

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