CHALLENGES OF OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) AMONG ENT530 STUDENTS

Zainuddin Mohd Piah
zainuddin.mpiah@uitm.edu.my
Department of Business Studies
Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah

Siti Noor Syalwani Mustapa
ssyalwani@uitm.edu.my
Department of Business Studies
Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah

Azyyati Anuar
azyyati@uitm.edu.my
Department of Business Studies
Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah

INTRODUCTION

The global crisis due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 has delayed conventional teaching and learning. Still, it has made the lecturer's task more challenging as they have to adapt new norms that require the teaching and learning process by implementing Open and Distance Learning or so-called ODL. ODL is any learning activity within formal, informal, and non-formal learning activities facilitated by information and communication technologies to lessen distance, both physically and psychologically, and increase interactivity and communication among learners, lecturers, and learning sources (IGI Global, 2020). Similarly, as defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2016), distance education offers participation in open access through the internet and other networks, and it is also known as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). In other terms, it could be a virtual classroom, online learning, e-learning, etc. According to Kim and Bonk (2006), technology has played and continues to play an essential role in the development of online education. The way technology is being used for teaching and learning has enhanced people's knowledge and also proved to have a positive impact on the education process.

While technology can consistently help with teaching and learning, some challenges and obstacles need to be met among lecturers and students throughout the ODL. UiTM itself has decided to implement ODL due to the massive attack of COVID-19 in Malaysia effective 13th April 2020. As a consequence, it has brought many impacts to the lecturers, staff, as well as the students. For instance, some examinations were postponed and all assessments were rescheduled according to the requirements of every course, including Principles of Entrepreneurship subject or ENT530. This subject is a non-final course, and students are 100% assessed by the projects and assignments. All assessments for this course have been changed, and lecturers need to give instructions for new assessments through online. With new arrangements being made on this subject, it has impacted students to meet the challenges of implementing this ODL. Therefore, ENT530 lecturers have taken the initiative to conduct a survey to identify some of the difficulties and challenges facing by students.

CHALLENGES OF ODL

In line with the Movement Control Order (MCO) implemented by the Malaysian government to curb the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak, online learning is a must. Most local universities, both public and private, including schools in Malaysia, have no choice but to use online teaching and learning methods to ensure that the syllabus of teaching is best delivered and that learning sessions are not delayed. This includes UiTM itself, where lecturers and

students are directed to perform ODL throughout the semester. However, students face some challenges in implementing ODL based on a survey conducted by ENT 530 UiTM Kedah lecturers. Below are some of the challenges students have to face:

i) Limitation of Internet Coverage

From 18 March 2020 to 30 June 2020, the learning process has always become an obstacle for their studies because of the geographical area and digital divide. The digital divide in Malaysia refers to the gap between people who access certain technologies (Merriam Webster, 2020). Hence, the survey shows that not all students have good internet access in their homes, especially in the villages and in the rural area. Malowa (2009) also supported that the underdeveloped areas face challenges in accessing information technology as a result of poor infrastructure. Other situations encountered are adverse weather conditions such as heavy rain, lightning, and floods that have affected the internet connection. Therefore, the lecturer is responsible for ensuring the best method to be used for students throughout the ODL process.

ii) Platform of Communication

 The communication platform is also one of the barriers during the process of ODL. This method of learning meets with an application for both sides to interact between lecturer and students. Mostly, the platform of communication is utilized by using WhatsApp, Google Meet, Zoom, Google Classroom, etc. Reinforced by Mansbach (2015), online lecturers can use multiple technologies and activities such as Google Docs, Discussion Forum, and Blackboard to develop students' critical skills. With the variety of e-learning processes, the ODL becomes more enjoyable rather than using the same method. However, some students have difficulty in operating some types of applications or platforms for ODL learning. This trouble has caused students to miss many things and have problem understanding the subject taught especially when using live chat. Supposedly, students must be provided with training opportunities such as the method of using loom, zoom, Google meet, Google classroom or any other platform that is used throughout the ODL. However, due to some of the constraints, students were forced to learn and master the technology skills throughout the ODL process.

iii) Overflow of Assignments

Additional issues arise among students throughout the ODL is when dealing with the overflow of assignments that focus not only on ENT530 assignments but also on assignments for other subjects. Since final exams are postponed and students are fully assessed based on ongoing assessments, students are facing difficulties in time management because they need to meet the overflow of assignments. Consequences of this situation prompting the changes of the university education and syllabus. Students are instructed to complete the assignment given since this subject does not have final exams. Subsequently, the overflow of assignments has demotivated students to complete the tasks because some of them have a problem managing their time wisely. Supported by Raaheim et. al. (2019), uncertainty about the procedure of administration outstanding assignments, projects, and other continuous assessments increased the difficulty level for students and university.

iv) Disturbance In-Home Learning

Students indicated that they are having trouble when learning at home since they are still in culture shock using this new norm of education style. Washing, cooking, and taking care of younger siblings for their mothers are among the students' reasons that are affecting their participation in the ODL class. Having these activities and at the same time attending online courses, causing them not to focus on the topic presented by the lecturer. The majority of the students agreed that they have convergence problem in handling house chores and at the same time to concentrate during the ODL class. Taking into account the challenges of whether students are still on campus or have been at home, demanding students to be more disciplined and have high resilience. Alternatively, students need to organize the schedule more systematically as to ensure there is no redundancy between house duties and ODL classes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, four challenges in implementing ODL have been identified despite the fact that there are other unknown problems. Thus, it is of utmost importance both students and lecturers should always be prepared to meet new norms in unprecedented situations. In this regard, students and lecturers need to be more creative and innovative in using various methods to enable ODL implementation to run effectively and efficiently. Undeniably, there are some benefits of using technology for online teaching and learning. First, learning at your own pace. Hegarty (2006) mentions, students report benefits of using learning technologies such as the opportunity for them to learn at their own pace, learn independently and have fun. Second, it promotes interaction. Hyo-Jyeong (2010) stated that the use of interactive technology with two ways of the communication might provide more interactions for online learners, leading to enhanced learning outcomes. Third, promote higher-order thinking skills. Various researchers in their studies found that technology can develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills among students. Although the implementation of ODL is the first time being fully applied to all subjects, there are certainly some shortcomings that need to be improvised, especially in the subject of ENT530 where students have been active in online and offline businesses. Nevertheless, due to the announcement of MCO by the government, students have had to find other alternatives to run their businesses completely online. Therefore, lecturers and students need to take this matter positively and openly by not taking COVID-19 as a reason for lecturers and students to complain about the ODL.

REFERENCES

IGI Global. (2020). What is Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Retrieved July 9, 2020, from IGI Global website: https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/open-and-distance-learning-odl/21157

Kaplan, Andreas M.; Haenlein, Michael (2016). Higher education and the digital revolution: About MOOCs, SPOCs, social media, and the Cookie Monster. Business Horizons. 59(4): 441–50. doi:10.1016/j.bushor.2016.03.008

Meriam Webster. (2020). Digital Divide. Retrieved July 9, 2020, from https://www.merriam webster. com/dictionary/digital divide

Raaheim A, Mathiassen K, Moen V, Lona I, Gynnild V & Bunæs BR, Hasle ET. (2019): Digital assessment - how does it challenge local practices and national law? A Norwegian case study. Eur J High Educ. 9:219-231. 10.1080/21568235.2018.1541420

Hegarty, C. (2006). It's Not an Exact Science: Teaching Entrepreneurship in Northern Island. (M. H, Ed.) *Education + Training: Special Issue on Entrepreneurship Education*, 48(5), 322 - 335.

Hyo-Jyeong, S. O. (2010). Towards Rigor Of Online Interaction Research: Implication For Future Distance Learning Research. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 9(2).

Kearns LR. (2012). Student assessment in online learning: challenges and effective practices. *Merlot Journal of Online Learning and Teaching.* 8(3): 198-208.

Kim, K.-J., & Bonk, C. J. (2006). *The Future of Online Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.* Educause Quarterly, 22-30.

Mansbach, J. (2015, September 14). *Using Technology to Develop Students' Critical Thinking Skill*. Retrieved September 10, 2016, from http://dl.sps.northwestern.edu/blog/2015/09/using-technology-to-develop-students-critical-thinking-skills/

Molawa, S. (2009). The 'first' and 'third world' in Africa; knowledge access, challenges and current technological innovations in Africa. *First International Conference on African Digital Libraries and Archives.* Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.