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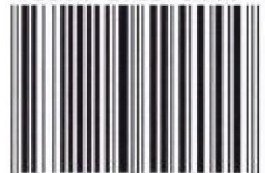
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PARADIGM SHIFT: ONLINE DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL)

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World Health Organization (WHO) has proclaimed the 2019 novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as a pandemic. The statistics of infected individuals with COVID-19 has expanded suddenly all over the world. Many countries have announced lockdown and Movement Control Order (MCO) to manage and flatten the curve of the infection. One of the most affected service sectors in Malaysia is the Education Ministry whereby all schools, colleges and universities have been instructed to close for teaching and learning activities. It had taken several months until the government urged all related parties in education to move from the traditional face-to-face teaching to online distance learning (ODL) method.

The concept of ODL refers to a method of instruction and gaining of knowledge using computer and technologies through the internet (Mathew & Iloanya, 2020). The role of these technology and tools is undeniably important in education especially during the pandemic. The strategic advantages of ODL are the platform provides students with learning adaptability, convenience and easy virtual learning process. Students do not need to go to a physical lecture hall and this alone is actually cost-effective because students do not have to spend on transport, accommodation and meals.

Despite this, and the fact that ODL is gaining wider popularity in educational institutions, in reality it has its own constraints involving having access to suitable devices and internet connectivity for both the educators and the students. There are many reported cases especially among the students that they have faced difficulties during ODL especially regarding internet connectivity and affordability of internet plans. Some have claimed that areas where they reside have low and unstable internet connection, which prevents them from being actively engaged with ODL. For instance, students especially in the rural and suburban area are faced with various difficulties in getting the internet connection due to lack of infrastructure and coverage.

Initially, educators and students are both confronted with the challenges to adapt to the technology of online teaching and learning. Eventually, both parties are learning in leaps and bounds especially at the tertiary level, due to the pressing need of the curriculum. ODL is unique in its philosophies and procedures, being fundamentally different from typical distance education in several ways (Abdulrahman Essa Al Lily, et al., 2020). Due to this, everyone needs to acknowledge such an initiative as the new norm of teaching and learning and it will certainly play its role as a defensive tool in the fight against the outbreak. In light of this, everyone in the education system needs to ensure that the teaching and learning process is undertaken effectively online.

Admittedly, there are some hiccups in ensuring the smooth-running process in the transformation of face-to-face teaching to ODL. In handling this, both educators and students should be open for viable and creative initiatives. From the educators' perspectives, they have to try out several teaching platforms that are suitable, user-friendly and effective for both parties especially the students. Some educators have already started to search and purchase computer accessories to ensure that students get the best audio and visual content for the delivery of information. In addition, educators are using several combinations of teaching methods and

platforms from having audio and video recording applications, organising Google classroom and forming WhatsApp group among others. On the other hand, the students also need to play their roles in ensuring that they have the proper devices for learning as well as a stable and strong internet connectivity. Certain universities have already taken certain positive actions by offering students to stay on campus especially for those who face internet connection issues at homes. This initiative will only be effectual and safe if the students observe all the SOPs and other rules required by the universities.

In conclusion, the pandemic has created chaos in the education system. However, the government has taken serious actions in ensuring that the education system runs smoothly by implementing ODL and other suitable actions. To strengthen the learning process, a strong collaboration between educators and students is a must to significantly ensure the teaching and learning process is efficacious. It is also firmly suggested that the government further looks into areas with low internet connectivity because this problem has been identified as one of the main challenges for students to join the online teaching platform.

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