Adaptability In Teaching And Learning During Covid-19

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted traditional learning from primary to tertiary levels. UiTM lecturers were forced to embrace online learning. Academics were asked to learn, create, and implement open and distance learning (ODL) using a variety of platforms, even if they did not feel adequately prepared or had previously expressed little interest in online teaching. The primary goals of the study were to investigate their readiness for online teaching as well as the challenges they faced. Two sets of survey questions were sent to all lecturers teaching in Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Shah Alam. The findings show that participants not only adapted to online teaching but also learned new knowledge during the online teaching and learning. Participants also stated that the main issues they encountered were internet connectivity among students and lecturers. This indicates that internet connectivity plays a major challenge during ODL. It is hoped that this research will serve as a guide for Akademi Pengajian Bahasa management in assisting lecturers who are still struggling with ODL.
Keywords: Adaptability, Challenges, Online learning

INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), an illness caused by a novel virus, was confirmed to have reached Malaysia in late January 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has struck traditional learning from primary education to tertiary education. On 31 May 2020, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) instructed all university lectures to conduct online teaching and

learning instead of face-to face- teaching and learning until 31 December 2020. However, exceptions are given to five categories of students : First, public and private university graduate students who are involved in research. Second, students who need to use physical laboratories, workshops and special equipment in their studies. Third, final semester/year students who are required to carry out clinical work, workshops, and use special equipment. Forth, students who do not have access to the internet and also require condusive environment for online learning. Fifth, new students for the 2020/2021 academic year in all institutions of higher learning.

In spite of the announcement by the Ministry of Higher Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA has taken the initiative to conduct online classes. Hence, UiTM moved all classes to open and distance learning (ODL) mode effective April 13 until the end of the semester for all its campuses nationwide. Open Distance Learning blend asynchronous (without real-time interaction) with synchronous (real-time interaction) online learning. UiTM lecturers were forced to embrace online teaching within a matter of weeks. Academics were asked to learn, create and implement open and distance learning (ODL) using various platforms even if they did not feel properly prepared to do so, or formerly had little interest in online teaching. Among the examples of ODL platforms identified which were suggested for use are voice message, short-message-system, phone, email, social media, live chat, learning management system and video conference application. Based on these, the main objectives of the research were to investigate lecturers' readiness in online teaching and problems faced by them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Covid- 19 pandemic has affected the education system globally and especially in Malaysia. Due to the shift of face to face classes to online learning classes, educators are forced to adopt suitable ways to teach their students. Within a short period of time, the educators have had to learn to prepare and conduct synchronous and asynchronous online classes. The educators are the key players in ensuring successful teaching and learning take place accordingly. They have the responsibility to ensure that students are able to comprehend the lessons taught during the on-going classes. However, there are a few issues concerning the educators in handling the online classes.

In a study conducted by Zhang et al. (2020), students and teachers in China encountered problems when studying and teaching at home. They faced problems such as distractions, incondusive learning and teaching space, insufficient hardware and unstable network at home. In another study done by Das et al. (2021), lack of previous experience on online teaching and stress were issues faced by teachers in India. They also conducted a study in Nepal where teachers there faced power and internet problems. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, the educators encountered constraints in adapting to the use of technological tools for online learning (Redjeki et al., 2021).

Additionally, some of the issues faced by Malaysians educators are the limitation of using technology, difficulty in assessing student's work, time commitment, student's engagement and feedback for the online classes (Musa et al., 2020). In another study conducted by Mohd Yusof and Ahmad (2020), it was found that less focus by the students, unsatisfactory platform/ medium of learning and unstable internet connection for both educators and students were among the challenges faced in online distance learning at The Islamic College University, Perlis. According to Izhar et al. (2021), teachers faced issues in preparing teaching materials, having limited internet access and limited experience in using technological teaching tools.

In comparison to issues faced by educators globally and Malaysian educators, both encountered similar problems such as lacking experience on online teaching and weak internet connectivity. Therefore, these issues need to be looked into seriously as these two factors mainly contribute to the success of online teaching and learning.

In this current situation, educators need to consider suitable teaching strategies and also other external factors that play major roles to the success of online teaching (Zhang et al., 2020). Online teaching and learning involve preparing, planning and designing the lesson to ensure the objectives of the lessons are achieved. Educators are expected to brace themselves in coping and managing online classes. Thus, in some parts of the world, for example in China, teachers are provided support by the Department of Teacher Education with a resource teacher package which include online teaching strategies,information technology applications, local teacher training cases and etc (Zhang et al., 2020).

Considering the problems faced by educators in conducting online classes, it is thus important to study the challenges that hinder the success of online teaching and learning; particularly the ones faced by educators.It is hoped the study of this research could help the educators to be aware of the obstacles faced by others , which could help them to ensure better planning for their online classes.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive concurrent mixed-method survey type was used for the evaluation of lecturer's readiness for online learning was designed. The survey question consisted of semi-structured and open-ended question. Two set of survey questions were distributed to Akademi Pengajian Bahasa Lecturers. The first survey was conducted between 18 to 23 May and the second survey was conducted between 15 to 21 June 2020. The rationale for sending two similar surveys was to investigate if similar issues occurred before and after the semester break.

The survey was divided into three sections; demographic section, time management for online teaching and learning and issues or challenges faced by the lecturers. A total of 159 respondents participated in the first survey and 79 for the latter. The survey was distributed via Google Form to all lecturers teaching at Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Shah Alam.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from this study were gathered from 238 respondents from Survey 1 and Survey 2. Descriptive statistics are used to describe the basic features of the gathered data. The questionnaire was set to allow multiple responses from respondents. This format was set to measure respondents' readiness on the five aspects focusing on ODL which are popular platforms, time spent on synchronous mode, time spent on asynchronous mode, adaptability, and issues and challenges in embracing ODL.

4.1 Popular Platforms

Table 1 Popular platforms

Platform	Survey 1 %	Survey 2 %
WHATSAPP	92.5	94.9
GOOGLE MEET	77.4	87.2
GOOGLE CLASSROOM	69.2	79.5
TELEGRAM	22.0	20.5

Table 1 features the findings regarding the popular platforms used by the respondents. Both findings from Survey 1 and Survey 2 indicate similarities revealing WhatsApp as the most frequently used platforms. More than 90 percent respondents preferred WhatsApp in survey 1 (92.5 percent) and survey 2 (94.9 percent). The next preferred platform was Google Meet (survey 1, 77.4 percent, survey 2, 87.2 percent), followed by Google Classroom (survey 1, 69.2 percent, survey 2 ,79.5 percent) and the least preferred is Telegram (survey 1, 22 percent, survey 2, 20.5 percent). This corresponds with a study conducted by Kholis (2020) to 40 students from The English Education Department, Nahdlatul Ulama University, Indonesia. In his study on the use of WhatsApp in distance language learning during the pandemic, the findings revealed WhatsApp assisted in language learning efficiently. He reported students were able to use the app as it required minimal usage of data and was easily accessible for distance learning. Furthermore, students were said to be very responsive and motivated in their learning. Another study conducted by The Star in 2016 also reported positive usage in using WhatsApp. It was found that 97 percent of the respondents used WhatsApp regularly while the rest used it less that once monthly. The report suggested that 62 percent of the respondents in Malaysia considered mobile apps the "most important" communication service available to them on a mobile phone. The study was carried out in the last quarter of year 2015 from a sample of 5,600 respondents (The Star, 2016).

4.2 Time Spent On Synchronous Mode

Table 2 Time spent on Synchronous Mode

Time spent	Survey 1 %	Survey 2 %
More than 2 hours	11.9	14.1
1.5-2hours	32.7	24.4
1-1.5 hours	30.2	32.3
30 MIN TO 1 HR	25.2	19.2

Table 2 describes the time spent on synchronous mode teachings. The first survey revealed the time spent from 1.5 to 2 hours as the highest percentage (32.7 percent) followed with 1 to 1.5 hours (30.2 percent) as the second highest. However, this pattern was reversed for the second survey which recorded 1-1.5 hours (32.3 percent) as the highest followed with 1.5 to 2 hours (30.2 percent) as the second highest. The evidence from this finding suggests that more than half of the respondents opted for synchronous mode within 1 to 2 hours. Likewise, the second survey revealed similar findings with the first survey regarding the time spent for more than 2 hours. Both surveys recorded less than 15% respondents opted for that option. As only a small number of respondents opted for more than 2 hours of real time learning, this is a good measure to conclude that students will not be overburdened with long real-time learning hours.

Fabriz et al. (2021) carried out a survey on the impact of synchronous and asynchronous online learning to students and lecturers in a German university. The findings from teachers' perception indicate that is less notable differences between synchronous and asynchronous teaching methods. On students' perception, it was found out that synchronous teaching methods allowed more peer-centered involvement and feedbacks.

4.3 Time Spent On Asynchronous Mode

Table 3 Time spent on Asynchronous Mode

Time spent	Survey 1 %	Survey 2 %
More than 2 hours	15.7	13.9
1.5-2hours	22.6	24.1
1-1.5 hours	22.3	41.8
30 MIN TO 1 HR	38.4	20.3

Table 3 displays the time spent on asynchronous mode teachings. The first survey revealed 30 minutes to 1 hour as the highest percentage (38.4 percent) followed with 1-1.5 hours (22.3 percent) as the second highest. However, this pattern was reversed for the second survey. Here, 1-1.5 hours (41.8 percent) was chosen as the highest whereas 1.5 to 2 hours (24.1 percent) as the second highest. For this aspect, more than half of the respondents were found to have a greater interest for asynchronous learning of within 30 minutes to 1.5 hours. With respect to this mode of teaching, it can be concluded that lecturers allow flexibility for students to digest information on their own time, which will also allow students to be more relaxed.

Rigo and Mikus (2021) carried out a study on asynchronous and synchronous in teaching English as a foreign language in Slovakia. The study used Edmodo for asynchronous and a combination of Edmodo and Google Meet for synchronous teaching learning platforms. In the study, they looked at the time spent in preparing the study materials for both modes. The findings indicated that for learning materials preparation time of within 30-60 minutes, distance learning synchronous lessons required lesser time in preparing for the materials which was 30 percent, while preparation of asynchronous learning materials was recorded as 48 percent. They restated that asynchronous mode allowed learners to be independent in managing their learning time.

4.4 Types of Challenges

Table 4 Types of challenges

Challenges/Problem	Survey 1 %	Survey 1 %
Internet access (Students)	99	91
Internet access (Lecturer)	33.3	32.7
Gadgets	31.8	24.4
Family	18.2	30.8
IT knowledge	24.2	16.7

Table 4 shows the proportion of survey 1 and survey 2 in their choice of challenges in facing online distance learning. There are differences and similarities in the selection of the challenges by both surveys. The biggest difference between the two surveys were factors regarding family and IT knowledge. In the selection of family, survey 1 made up 18.2 percent while survey 2 was 30.8 percent. However, the trend was reversed when it comes to IT knowledge. Survey 2 shows lower (16.7 percent) compared to survey 1 (24.2%) – this is probably because respondents were more prepared as workshops were conducted almost every week. A significant finding was found regarding the internet accessibility. Both surveys revealed the internet connection as the major challenges for students in online distance learning, while lecturers faced lesser problems compared to students which are 33.3 percent for survey 1, and 32.7 percent for survey 2. This finding suggests that the internet connectivity plays a major challenge during distance learning classes.

This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Husni Rahiem in 2021 to 80 students from The Faculty of Education of a state university in Jakarta, Indonesia. She carried out the study to determine students preferences during online learning.The finding suggested that although the students liked learning from home, one aspect the students disliked was regarding technological difficulties particularly when the internet connection was concerned. The issues of poor internet connection during COVID-19 online learning still remains

as a significant problem (Zhang et al., 2020; Mathew & Chung, 2021). A good internet connection is a prerequisite towards perfoming better during online classes as to avoid hindrances affecting the learning process.

4.5 Adaptability of ODL

With reference to the adaptability of ODL, it was found that 98.7 percent of the respondents answered YES for the first survey and 97.4 percent for the second survey respectively. The most obvious finding emerging from this outcome is that a majority of the respondents managed to adapt to ODL despite the challenges faced. This finding concurs with a study by Mardiana (2020) on her research in investigating the lecturers' adaptability to technological change and its impact on the teaching process. The result showed that 85 respondents opted to accept technological change and are willing to embrace the advanced techniques of technology.

The remaining percentage answered NO which are 1.3 percent for survey 1 and 3.6 percent for survey 2. These small numbers highlight that less than 4 percent of respondents face difficulties in adapting to ODL. Table 5 lists some of the direct quotes obtained from respondents who could not adapt to ODL.

Table 5 Reasons unable to adapt to ODL

No.	Reasons unable to adapt to ODL
1.	I am still trying to adapt to the current situation. I always use pre-recorded video of myself giving the lecture and at most of the time use the asynchronous ways of teaching.
2.	Anxiety and maybe panic attack. Sometimes with known reasons, sometimes with unknown and uncertain reasons. Never experienced this before. Stress is not the word to describe my situation. I believe that the right term is anxiety.
3.	Technical problems at the beginning of ODL. However, with the training provided by UiTM and APB, I managed to overcome this problem. The problems now is strained ayes as I need to spent more time looking at the computer.
4.	Problems with laptop/phone

5.	I feel that ODL requires more time for preparation to make it more interesting.

It can be cautiously deduced from Table 5 that the factors highlighted are basically due to lack of readiness in embracing ODL particularly in terms of technology readiness. As the percentage is only minimal (less than 5 percent), it can be concluded that respondents in this study are ready to adapt to the new norm. Technology readiness is very pertinent in ensuring a successful online learning (Husni Rahiem, 2021). Mathew and Chung (2021) depicted that it is without a doubt that lecturers face problems in adjusting to the new norm as the majority of them are first timers embracing ODL. Unstable network with 'connect and disconnect' episodes during synchronous lectures to name a few, will lead to the disrupted process of teaching and learning (Zhang et al., 2020). Technology readiness is a significant criteria in ensuring the success of e-learning implementation. With adequate facilities, more practices and trainings, lecturers will be able to execute ODL well (Mardiana, 2020).

4.6 Other issues/challenges faced by the respondents with regard to their students.

Besides the above-mentioned problems in adapting with ODL, there are some other issues gathered from respondents regarding their students. Table 6 shows the direct quotes obtained from respondents regarding their students in adapting with ODL.

Table 6 Other issue/challenges faced by the respondents regarding their students

No	Other issue/challenges faced by the respondents with their regard to their students
1	Identifying students who were online but not active. Some tend to send messages late because of internet problems/issues
2	Students' commitment and participation. They were also mentally tired.
3	Students' attitude. Only a few answered question when asked.

4	The students themselves may have problems adjusting to the asynchronous platform as they would join in at 9.00 am or later for classes that start at 8.00 am.
5	Lack of motivation among the students due to internet problems.

Based on Table 6, some issues notified are pertaining to students experiencing internet problems, students' motivation and students attitude in adjusting to ODL. The overall evidence from the factors are basically due to lack of readiness in adapting to ODL. Sim et al. (2021) carried out a survey on 156 students focusing on challenges during online learning to a public university in Sarawak. Among the challenges found were issues on internet connection, students' attitude, struggles and stress of online learning mode. It is crucially important to address these problems in order to ensure students' engagement and motivation in learning are not distorted. Readiness and obtaining high motivation in e-learning is a crucial factor for students. They must possess positive mindset and motivation in embracing the new norm (Hamzah et al., 2021). By highlighting the problems, some efforts can be carried out to reduce the obstacles in teaching and learning. Consequently, the quality of ODL could be enhanced for both students and lecturers.

CONCLUSION

Switching from traditional classroom and face to face lessons to open and distance learning (ODL) make the teaching and learning experience entirely differently not only for students but also lecturers. Lecturers are required to adjust and adapt to the new norm in teaching and learning. Students also need to change their mindset- they need to accept ODL with open hearts to experience meaningful outcomes.

Lecturers are not able to conduct online classes in synchronous mode most of the time due to limited internet access or probably low bandwidth experienced by the students. In addition, some students also do not own computers for online learning. Therefore, lecturers who teach these students should identify the problems and find more suitable platforms to be used. Time management is an important issue in ODL for both lecturers

and students. Online courses require a lot of time and intensive work. In addition, both parties also will be occupied not only with classes but also other daily commitments. Thus, it is advisable to have a schedule or regular planner to help as reminders for their class activities and deadlines.

Lecturers also can act as motivators and counselors to students who are not motivated to learn in ODL mode. They need to encourage the students to face challenges for their future. Although it is hard to learn through a fully online mode, they need to learn that ODL is a necessity in this pandemic outbreak. In a nutshell, for more conclusive results, future research can be carried out in getting insights from both lecturers and students, particularly in the form of a revisit after a year of embracing online learning and ODL implementation.

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