

REVEALING STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN CLASS: AN ONLINE DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) PERSPECTIVES

Faddliza Mohd Zaki^{1*}, Nurhidayah Nasharudin, Zailani Shafie, Amirah Haji Abu Hassan, Muhammad Noor Hussin², Noor Azila Mohd Zaid³

¹Information Science Studies, College of Computing, Informatics and Mathematics

²Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (ACIS)

³Faculty of Business and Management

Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Rembau, 71300 Rembau, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: faddliza@uitm.edu.my

Abstract

Online Distance Learning (ODL) is a prominent method used in conducting online class for institutions of higher learning (IHLs) in Malaysia since COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it is vital to understand students' emotional engagement during online class to improve learning. This study focuses on university's students' preference in participating during online class and their emotional reactions by identifying their positive or negative feelings toward online class participation. A quantitative method was used and questionnaire was addressed to 163 Information Science Studies students from College of Computing, Informatics and Mathematics, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Negeri Sembilan Branch, Rembau Campus. The results showed that 65.6% of students prefer to participate actively during online class with positive feelings as revealed by the study where 17.8% students enjoy being acknowledged and feels appreciated if lecturer call upon their name in class to share their opinions and ideas or answer questions given to them. In addition, 14% students stated this action can boost their confidence and enhance their communication skills. These findings are in line with previous research that showed interpersonal relationships and interaction between students and lecturers have a pivotal role in inducing students' confidence and involvement. Active communication between lecturers and students can promotes students' sense of belonging which make them more interested in capturing the information and knowledge convey in class. Hence, the findings may spark interests for lecturers or educators to engage students learning so active learning session can be developed and benefits both parties. Thus, may give positive influence on lecturers-students relationship.

Keywords: Emotional engagement, Online Distance Learning (ODL), Students' engagement

Article History:- Received: 08 September 2023; Revised: 20 September 2023; Accepted: 21 September 2023; Published: 31 October 2023

© by Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, 2023, e-ISSN: 2289-6368

Introduction

The corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic give a massive impact to activities conducted in our life. Educational activities is no exception on this situation. Most of the countries declared lockdown to ensure the virus from spreading all around the country. This situation contribute to Online Distance Learning (ODL), a teaching-learning practices applied widely since lockdown. Both the educators and students have embraced varieties of technology platforms where students can actively participate in learning (Chadda & Kaur, 2021). Though online learning or e-learning is not a new concept, to adopt in a new method known as ODL with no possibility to reach for each other physically is definitely a new approach to be used in Malaysia's learning system. However, the pandemic requirements for safety by implementing physical distancing and distance learning made ODL a better and safer teaching-learning method in campus education (Nikou & Maslov, 2021).

Even though the learning process occurs online, students' engagement during online class should not be overlooked. Teaching-learning process should be conducted with active participation from students as in physical class. Moreover, students' engagement in class is important in academic performance (Wang & Holcombe, 2010). Conducting online class should also prioritize students' engagement. Students' engagement in class involves students' cognitive, emotional and behavioral engagement (Gunuc, 2014). Cognitive engagement includes investment in learning, value given to learning, learning goals, self-regulation and planning (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2014). Emotional engagement involves students' responses to the teacher, peers, course content and to the class which all include attitudes, interests and values (Bryson & Hand, 2007). It also refers to students' emotional involvement with classroom activities, such as feeling of enjoyment in classes and identification with the teacher, classroom and institution (Van Uden et al., 2014). Behavioral engagement includes students' participation in academic, their efforts, their attendance in classes and their participation in class (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2014). Thus, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagements had a strong relationship with academic achievement (Gunuc, 2014). Furthermore, students' emotional and cognitive engagement is considered the fundamental determinant of experienced well-being and achievement (Pietarinen et al., 2014). It is important for lecturers to recognize why students reluctant to participate actively in online class especially during discussion. This is crucial to elevate enjoyment in teaching-learning activities in online class. Understand the students' feeling will give lecturers a clear view on the students' emotional responses to help lecturers in varied their pedagogical practices.

In Malaysia, the Movement Control Order was enforced in March 18, 2020 by the Government of Malaysia (Malaysian National Security Council, 2020). Consequently, the MCO affected the learning system in institutions of higher learning (IHLs) in Malaysia whereby all the teaching-learning activities should be conducted in distance and virtual contact. The sudden change on learning system during pandemic situation affected both lecturers and students. Both parties were forced by situation to ensure teaching and learning process carried out successfully even most of the activities were shut down during pandemic. ODL is the best option to be used when face-to-face learning is impossible to prevent any physical contact that may spread the COVID-19 virus. Although online learning is no longer unfamiliar among lecturers and students in teaching-learning practices, however to not seeing each other's face in physical class for the whole semester in ODL is new thing that they have to adapt during pandemic. The students' emotional engagement while having online class is vital to ensure a good teaching-learning process. So, the present study was conducted to reveal the students' emotional engagement in online class during ODL.

In sum, this study attempts to achieve the following objectives: (1) to determine students' preference in participating during online class and (2) to identify students' emotional reactions on their positive or negative feelings when they are being encourage to participate actively during online class. Thus, the present study provides an understanding on the variety of students' emotional reactions when participating in class.

Methods

This study adopts quantitative methods. A survey was used to determine students' preference in participating during online class and identify their emotional reactions. Population for this study are Diploma's students from Information Science Studies, College of Computing, Informatics and Mathematics, UiTM Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Rembau. 163 students from Semester 1 to Semester 5 were selected at random as the sample of this study. An analysis has been conducted based on the data extracted from the questionnaire. All the findings were analyzed using IBM SPSS 25.0 software. Questionnaire was distributed to 163 Diploma's students from Information Science Studies, College of Computing, Informatics and Mathematics, UiTM Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Rembau.

Result and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 reveals the demographic profile of the respondents who are grouped into the following profiles such as gender, semester, residence, ownership of laptop/ desktop and type of internet access. The result indicates that the respondents in this study are dominated by female students (76.7%) compared to male students (23.3%). As for *semester* tabulation, more than half of the respondents are from semester 5 (55.8%). Regards to the residence, most of the respondents are from Urban (71.2%), while the balance of 28.8% students came from Rural. For the type of internet access used by students during ODL, most of the students used both mobile data and Wi-Fi to joined ODL (45.4%).

Table 1. Demographic's Profile

Profile	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	38	23.3
	Female	125	76.7
Semester	1	7	4.3
	2	51	31.3
	3	11	6.7
	4	3	1.8
	5	91	55.8
Residence	Urban	116	71.2
	Rural	47	28.8
Laptop/ Desktop	Yes	162	99.4
	No	2	0.6
Access of Internet	Mobila Data	43	26.4
	Wi-Fi	46	28.2
	Both (Mobile Data & Wi-Fi)	74	45.4
Preference of Students	No	56	34.4
	Yes	107	65.6

Students' Preference in Participating during Online Class

This section reports and discusses the findings of the study which is to determine students' preference in participating during online class. Table 2 shows that more than half of the students are happy if lecturer call upon their name in class to share their opinions and ideas or answer questions given by the lecturer which is 65.6% while the rest 34.4% are not happy to participate actively during online class. To identify the differences between students' preference in participating during online class based on students' profile, this used chi-square test of independence. Results are discussed as below.

Based on result in Table 3, this study also found that there is a significant different between preferences of students in participating during online class based on gender. The p-value is less than significant level ($p = 0.006 < \alpha = 0.05$) consider as significant. While the other factor of semester, residence, ownership of laptop/ desktop and type of internet access are not statistically different since all the p-value greater than significant level ($p = 0.006 > \alpha = 0.05$).

As overall 65.6% of students prefer to participating actively during online class with the different of preference based and male or female students. They are happy if lecturer call upon their name in class to share their opinions and ideas or answer questions given to them. This section has support and achieve the research objective one (1) in this study.

Table 2. Students’ Preferences in Participating during Online Class

Do you happy if lecturer call upon your name in class to share your opinions and ideas or answer questions given by them?	Frequency	Percentage
No	56	34.4
Yes	107	65.6

Table 3. Differences between Students’ Preference based on Students Profile

Students Profile	Students’ Preference		P-value
	No	Yes	
Gender			0.006
Male	6	32	($\chi^2 = 7.574$)
Female	50	75	
Part			0.139
1	2	5	($\chi^2 = 0.139$)
2	12	39	
3	2	9	
4	1	2	
5	39	52	
Residence			0.611
Urban	42	74	($\chi^2 = 0.434$)
Rural	14	33	
Ownership Laptop/ Desktop			0.527
No	0	1	($\chi^2 = 0.527$)
Yes	56	106	
Internet Access			0.453
Mobile Data	14	29	($\chi^2 = 1.586$)
Wi-Fi	13	33	
Both	29	45	

Students’ Emotional Reactions

This section discusses the findings of the study which is to identify students’ emotional reactions on their positive or negative feelings. Table 4 reveals the category of emotional reactions among students. Most of the students enjoy being acknowledged and feels appreciated which is 17.8%, while there are 16.6% of students feel anxiety when their lecturer call upon their names to be participated during online class. There are 1.8% of students are not happy when lecturer call upon their names during online class because they are having internet connection issue whereby they indicates that this will interrupt the communication and 0.6% student do not know about he/his emotional reactions.

Table 4. Emotional Reactions among Students

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Anxiety	27	16.6%
I don't know	1	0.6%
Internet connection issue	3	1.8%
Lack of knowledge	5	3.1%
Low self-esteem	20	12.3%
Able to share ideas	19	11.7%
Boost confidence and enhance communication skills	23	14.1%
Comprehend learning	18	11.0%
Enjoy being acknowledged and appreciated	29	17.8%
Help to remain focus in class	18	11.0%

Based on students' emotional reactions, whether they are preferring to participate actively during online class with positive or negative feelings are identify using chi-square test of independence. The findings indicate that 100.0% of students not preferred to participating actively during online class have negative feelings. While 99.06% of students have positive feelings to participating actively during online class. As prove to the mention results, the chi-square test shows that there is a significant different between preferences of students in participating actively and student's emotional reactions during online class. The p-value is less than significant level ($p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$) consider as significant. This section has support and achieve the research question two (2) in this study. As overall, students with positive emotional reactions are more likely prefer to participate actively during online class compared to students that have negative emotional reactions.

This study's outcomes show that students happy if lecturer call upon their names in class to share opinions and ideas or answer questions given to them. The findings are in line with previous research that showed interpersonal relationships and interaction between students and teachers have a pivotal role in inducing students' confidence and involvement (Dahleez et al., 2021). Furthermore, the positive feelings responses such as 'enjoy being acknowledged and appreciated' and 'boost confidence and enhance communication skills' are confirm with the previous research cluster analysis findings that found that there are 'individually-engaged' students who emotionally connected with the learning process and are self-motivated to participate in the learning activities within the virtual classrooms (Gupta, 2022). There is necessary to build a strong relationships amongst teachers and students, particularly in distance learning to overcome the negative feelings on students' emotional reactions such as 'anxiety' and 'low self-esteem'. Thus, to enhance the emotional engagement of students, teachers could adopt relatedness-supportive strategies such as having one-on-one audio/video chats with students and sending them personalized emails. Such strategies can help establish better relationships between the teacher and students that can in turn foster students' emotional engagement in virtual classes (Harris et al., 2022).

Table 5. Different between Students' Preference and Emotional Reactions

	Students' Preference		P-value
	No	Yes	
Students' Emotional Reactions			0.000
Negative	56 (100.0%)	1 (0.94%)	$(\chi^2 = 158.644)$
Positive	0 (0.0%)	106 (99.06%)	

Conclusion

Results from the analysis showed that 65.6% of students prefer to participate actively during online class with positive feelings as revealed by the study where 17.8% students enjoy being acknowledged and feels appreciated if lecturer call upon their name in class to share their opinions and ideas or answer questions given to them. In addition, 14% students stated this action can boost their confidence and enhance their communication skills. Another positive feeling by students if participate actively during online class are enable them to share ideas (11.7%), enable them to comprehend learning (11%) and help them to remain focus in class (11%). However, there are 34.4% students are not happy to actively participate in class with varieties of negative feelings. The study identified that the negative feelings are students feel anxiety when lecturer call upon their names to participate actively during online class (16.6%), they have low self-esteem to share ideas (12.3%), lack of knowledge (3.1%) and the issue of internet connection (1.8%). There is 1 student (0.6%) indicated he/she do not know his/her feelings. Based on the study, to decrease the negative feelings on students' emotional reactions, monitoring of the students must be done, and students should be encouraged to actively participate in the e-learning process by providing them the opportunities to share their opinions (Chadda & Kaur, 2021) hence will increase students' willingness to participate in future classroom activities (You, 2011). In addition, the information from this study may be useful for improving lecturers-students relationship and assist lecturers in shaping a great educational experience and adopted varieties of pedagogical practices to facilitate students' satisfaction in online class and drive to study. Moreover, the findings may spark interests for lecturers or educators to engage students learning so active learning session can be developed and benefits both parties.

Acknowledgement/Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research.

Author Contribution

Faddliza Mohd Zaki – Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft; **Nurhidayah Nasharudin** – Writing – original draft, Writing (review & editing), Formal analysis; **Zailani Shafie** – Writing (review & editing), Formal analysis; **Amirah Haji Abu Hassan** – Writing (review & editing), Formal analysis; **Muhammad Noor Hussin** – Writing (review & editing); **Noor Azila Mohd Zaid** – Writing (review & editing)

Conflict of Interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Bryson, C., & Hand, L. (2007). The role of engagement in inspiring teaching and learning. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 44(4), 349-362.
- Chadda, I., & Kaur, H. (2021). COVID pandemic and virtual classes: A Study of students from Punjab. *Asian Association of Open Universities Journal*, 16 (2), 193-210. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAOUJ-02-2021-0017>
- Dahleez, K.A., El-Saleh, A.A., Al Alawi, A. M, & Abdelfattah, F.A. (2021). Higher education student engagement in times of pandemic: The role of e-learning system usability and teacher behavior. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 35(6), 1312-1329. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-04-2021-0120>
- Gunuc, S. & Kuzu, A. (2014). Student engagement scale: Development, reliability and validity. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 40(4), 587-610.
- Gunuc, S. (2014). The Relationships between student engagement and their academic achievement. *International Journal on New Trends in Education and their Implications*, 5(4), 216-231.
- Gupta, K.P. (2022). Exploring student engagement in virtual classrooms: A person-centred approach using cluster analysis. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 37(1), 117-134. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-08-118>

2022-0309

Harris, L., Dargusch, J., Ames, K., & Bloomfield, C. (2022). Catering for ‘very different kids’ : Distance education teachers’ understandings of and strategies for student engagement. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 26(8), 848-864.

Malaysian National Security Council. (2020). *Movement control order*. https://covid-19.moh.gov.my/faqsop/faq-umum/1.%20FAQ%20MKN_17%20Mac%202020.pdf. [Access online 30 July 2023].

Nikou, S., & Maslov, I. (2021). An analysis of students’ perspectives on e-learning participation – The case of COVID-19 pandemic. *The International Journal of Information and Learning Technology*, 38(3), 299-315. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJILT-12-2020-0220>

Pietarinen, J., Soini, T., & Pyhältö, K. (2014). Students’ emotional and cognitive engagement as the determinants of well-being and achievement in school. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 67, 40-51. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2014.05.001>

Wang, M., & Holcombe, R. (2010). Adolescents perceptions of school environment, engagement and academic achievement in middle school. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47, 633-662.

You, S. (2011). Peer influence and adolescents’ school engagement. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 29, 829-835. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.11.311>

Van Uden, J.M., Ritzen, H., & Pieters, J.M. (2014). Engaging students: The role of teacher beliefs and interpersonal teacher behavior in fostering student engagement in vocational education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 37, 21-32.