

**THE LEARNING CHALLENGES FACED BY UITM STUDENTS IN COVID-19  
POST PANDEMIC  
CABARAN MAHASISWA DALAM MENDEPANI PASCA PANDEMIK COVID-  
19**

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**Abstract**

In late 2019, the world was shaken by the outbreak of an unprecedented infectious epidemic namely Coronavirus Disease or Covid-19. Due to this, all Malaysians are required to comply and adopt to the new norms based on the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health of Malaysia (MOH). The entire national system is affected by this concerning development and the structure of Teaching and Learning (PdP) in the field of education is no exception. The structure of PdP, previously conducted conventionally or face-to-face, centered on educators and students directly, has changed its implementation to virtual and digital using the methods of Teaching and Learning at Home (PdPR) or Home-Based Learning (HBL) to ensure continuity in students' learning. Thus, this study aims to identify the main obstacles faced by UiTM Melaka Branch students in their learning process as they dealt with COVID-19 and the challenges that comes with the pandemic. This qualitative study applies library methods, observation, interviews and analysis methods. The study was conducted by administering a questionnaire to several students of UiTM Melaka Branch to obtain accurate feedback. The findings of the study showed that students' challenges are limited access to communication technology, changes in the reading and reference material search system, spending too much time in front of the screen, changes in students' daily lifestyles and external interference while completing their online tasks.

**Keywords**

Online learning, challenges, pandemic, covid, teaching and learning

**Abstrak**

Pada lewat tahun 2019, dunia telah digemparkan dengan penularan wabak berjangkit yang belum pernah ditemui sebelum ini iaitu Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19). Rentetan dari itu, seluruh rakyat Malaysia diwajibkan untuk mematuhi dan mengamalkan norma baharu berdasarkan garis panduan yang telah dikeluarkan oleh Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia (KKM). Seluruh sistem negara terkesan daripada perkembangan ini dan struktur Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran (PdP) dalam bidang pendidikan juga tidak terkecuali. Struktur PdP yang dahulunya berlaku secara konvensional atau bersemuka dengan berpaksikan pendidik dan pelajar secara langsung telah diubah kepada pelaksanaan di alam maya menggunakan kaedah Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran di Rumah (PdPR) atau Home-Based Learning (HBL) untuk memastikan kesinambungan pelajar. Justeru, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti halangan

utama mahasiswa universiti UiTM Cawangan Melaka dalam tempoh norma baharu terhadap pengajaran dan pembelajaran dalam mendepani pandemik COVID-19. Kajian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif iaitu menggunakan metode perpustakaan, observasi, temubual dan metode analisis. Kajian telah menjalankan dengan mentadbir soal selidik kepada beberapa orang mahasiswa UiTM Cawangan Melaka untuk mendapatkan maklum balas yang tepat. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan cabaran mahasiswa adalah akses kepada teknologi komunikasi yang terhad, perubahan sistem pencarian bahan bacaan dan rujukan, masa terlalu lama diluahkan di hadapan skrin, perubahan cara hidup harian mahasiswa dan gangguan ketika menjalankan urusan melalui atas talian.

**Kata Kunci**

Pembelajaran dalam talian, cabaran, pandemik, covid, pengajaran dan pembelajaran

**1.0 Introduction**

Malaysia is facing a post-Covid-19 epidemic problem. Initially on 23 January 2020, 3 patients were suspected of being infected with the coronavirus. The number of cases of covid-19 positive patients continued to increase dramatically from that point on. Until March 18, 2020, Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin decided to implement the Movement Control Order (PKP) where people are not encouraged to leave the house unless necessary, to buy food or seek medical help. During the unprecedented time, all small business shops such as grocery stores, eateries and barbershops as well as shopping malls were ordered to close for a specified time. Not only that, but schools, universities, banks and office operating hours are also affected. In order to prevent the spread of the virus, people from all walks of life cooperated by following the standard operating procedures (SOPs). However, this situation continues to cause socio-economic imbalance to the country. After tireless deliberations with the country's Covid19 workforce, the prime minister announced permission for businesses to operate for the states with the lowest cases reported. However, business owners must abide closely to the SOPs and operates daily under the practice of the new norms. As a result, various organizations and parties have opted to conduct their businesses and tasks through via online. This includes education systems of the local public university, as they are also affected by this pandemic.

Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) is one of the largest public universities in Malaysia. On 23 April 2020, this educational institution has implemented Learning and Teaching (PdP) via online or remotely. In order to manage the online learning process as a whole, it requires an organized level of management. Thus, the educators and administrative staff also conduct online meetings to obtain information related to issues and challenges of students so that the Learning and Teaching (PdP) process runs smoothly. Although UiTM has started online learning before, there are still various issues and challenges to ensure the learning process runs smoothly and fully implemented especially among the students who are badly and directly affected by the pandemic. This is because such organization encompasses a large number of staff and organizational chart that runs extensively. It is highly believed that the sudden change of teaching and learning method can create communication struggle among the students and this area is worthy to be further explored.

#### **4.0 Research Methodology**

This study used a number of specific methodologies to obtain the necessary information and data in preparing and completing the whole research. It involves the use of several methods, namely:

##### **4.1 Data Collection Method**

This method is used to obtain information that is accurate, concrete and appropriate to answer the problem underlying this study. In addition, ensuring that it has value in terms of its objectives and validation. In order to collect the data, this study uses the following methods:

###### **i. Library Research Method**

This method is a process that involves efforts to find and collect data and facts related to the research problem. It is a technique by which a researcher obtains data, information and evidence that coincide with the subjects of the study through against documents and records (Mohd Shafie Abu Bakar, 1991). Therefore, this method is very important for this study in order to collect data and information to achieve the objectives of the study.

Library study is needed to find relevant documents. In general, the documents used are from the first source and the second source. For instance, the documents are the Quran, Hadith, theses, journals, books, magazines, conference papers and writing materials that are relevant to the whole study.

##### **4.2 Data Analysis**

Once all the information and data obtained and collected, the authors will first ensure that the sources of all the data and information is authoritative. Next, the process of processing, analyzing and drawing conclusions were done based on several methods below:

###### **i. Inductive Method**

The inductive method is a process of understanding a research problem or finding a solution which occurs generatively or continuously in which information is collected and continues to be collected until the problem is clarified or a solution is formulated. In other words, this process is similar to building a pyramid by arranging the bricks one by one until the building is complete. Therefore, this study chose this method to draw conclusion and make deduction. This conclusion will later form the theory of the solution that will be discussed further in this paper.

###### **ii. Deductive Method**

Deductive method is a method of proof used based on thinking patterns to analyze data by producing specific conclusions and deductions from data that are general in nature. This method also serves to explain a question to the problems that arise in detail.

Based on the approach of this method, the authors use this theory to carry out the analysis of this study. Thus, this theory needs to be better understood in depth before adapting or matching them to the research problem. This method is used fully so that the result description has quality and clarity.

## 5.0 Results And Findings

The Covid-19 pandemic had a direct impact on the national education system. Following the spread of this epidemic, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) was no exception when the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) chose to close all higher education campuses in the country. This unprecedented decision had a huge impact on the education system in this country. In this part of the paper, the challenges faced by students during online learning is explained and discussed.

### 1. Limited Access to Communication Technology

The change in the learning environment in the national education system due to the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) has a very significant impact on the learning system in Malaysia for educators and students. The introduction of open and distance learning systems or better known as Open Distance Learning (ODL) is no longer a new thing as a learning method used for all levels of study. This change in learning methods by ODL has been implemented at all levels in the national education system involving learning sessions for starting from kindergarten, primary and secondary school students and university students (Siti Hafsa Zulkarnain, 2020).

An e-learning approach has been taken to replace face-to-face lectures. According to Yusup Hashim (2012), e-learning pedagogical methods include online learning, blended learning, distance learning, web-based learning, individual learning and so on. This can be seen and acknowledged by its existence and adopted by all students and instructors today.

These new changes have opened up space for virtual learning standards. This virtual Learning and Teaching (PdP) process is the most ideal option as it is a different option from the traditional type of PdP, which teachers and students all very familiar with. Educators have shifted to using electronic gadgets as an important guiding tool. All colleges are close and students are encourage to stay home as not to be infected or become carriers of Covid-19.

Although e-learning is very beneficial to the public, but it still has shortcomings in some areas. Some UiTM students have limitation problems. Some of the problems are to provide good technological materials and internet access disruption. This is supported by Muhaamad Hafis Nawawi (2020), that most of the students unable to follow online learning activities or e-learning due to limited access to communication technology. One of them is the need for stable internet access. E-learning is closely related to the internet, e-learning cannot be carried out without internet access. E-learning activities require stable internet connection during online meetings through various platform used such as google meet, cisco webex and microsoft teams applications. This is because, online video meeting applications require a lot of internet data to view the video on the moving screen and also hear the audio output clearly. Apart from that, substandard internet network issue is more concerning in rural and remote areas.

In addition, there are facilities required in order to conduct e-learning successfully. Conducting e-learning requires pricey equipment such as mobile phones, laptops or tablet computers that are more portable (Yusup Hashim, 2021). Mobile phones are used to communicate with lecturers and colleagues in discussing assignments. Laptops are very much needed by students for the convenience of them doing work online. However, there are students who had to share their electronic gadgets with their

families because the cost to buy a laptop is high and demanding for some people. Indirectly, it makes it difficult for students and families to follow classes and complete the assessments. Therefore, they have to take turn to use the laptop of smartphones and they have to organize their class schedule among their siblings. This is to avoid conflict as to whom has the privilege in using the shared laptop.

## **2. Changes to the Reading and Reference Material Search System**

In the PKP period, library management is deemed as one of the "non-essential" services. Face-to-face administration which is the basis of library activities must be stopped and closed for a while to control the spread of Covid-19 disease. Following the request, library officers were instructed to work from home (Rosmieni Che 'Mat, 2020). Library services have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in which all face-to-face services were completely shut down. However, the information boom has caused society to turn to virtual information search available at their fingertips or digital platforms especially books and online reading materials such as e-books, e-journals and so on (Nancy, 2020).

Nevertheless, there are challenges for students to choose reliable source of reference application. Students will be confronted with the authenticity or validity of information available on social media. As we all know, we are in the digital era where information is easily accessible at the fingertips, especially the youths. At the same time, they are exposed to various forms of news or false information. If the reader is not careful in determining the authenticity of the information, it will result in the information becoming viral or widespread. Until finally to some extent, the sharing of such unauthentic information will affect or harm the party involved in the sharing of such information (Nadia Fauzi, 2017). In addition, another challenge for students is to be skilful in mastering an application. They need to be able to think fast and critically. This is because the skill to find relevant sources or information is very important to ensure that the search for reference sources can be applied effectively (Yusup Hashim, 2021).

## **3. Spending Too Much Time in Front of the Screens**

Teaching and Learning is a continuous process via online using technologies such as smartphones, ipads and computers. This is a concern for parents because their children spend a long time looking at the screen which resulting to longsightedness and in the need to wear glasses. Some also suffer from dizziness, eyesore and backpain. However, this was unavoidable because this was the only way they could continue the lessons smoothly during the community's recovery period from being infected with the Covid-19 outbreak.

In addition, education or learning through a computer screen for too long will also affect mental, physical, emotional and social health. According to Mimi Fitriana Zain (2020), when a person especially students are not able to balance the use of computers, then they will be unable to see the phenomenon of learning as something positive. The impact on the psychology of the students themselves will be cognitive problems, especially in terms of decision making. If a person spend too much time in front of a computer screen, then it can damage the condition of the eyes physically and then emotionally.

In addition, it can also disrupt the habit of students who do not adopt a proper eating habit and poor schedule while studying at home. This is because there are students

who prioritize their work over the need to eat on the grounds that they feel more comfortable to eat if their assignments have been completed. As a result, they suffer from gastric disease, dizziness and stress. This is a great concern for many parents. The child's desire not to be on time for meals should not be encouraged by parents instead they should insist on mealtimes so that they can continue their studies with a comfortable stomach and calm emotions before ensuring a healthy learning environment for them. Students at home still need parental guidance even if they have studied at university.

Due to online PdP, students receive more coursework as compared to face-to-face classes. Thus, students spend time in front of the screen to complete the coursework. This is once again a concern because students do not spend time with their families. This can lead to strained relationships between family members. For Muslims, friendship and relationship among human beings is highly demanded, which means taking care of the relationship among the family members is also a big responsibility. Naturally, this should not happen because Allah SWT has instructed us to maintain good relations among human beings, especially among family members. In fact, this can be avoided if students manage their time wisely and set aside time to spend with family by practicing congregational prayers (pray together with family members), eating together, do leisure activities together and so on.

#### **4. External Interference While Completing Tasks Online**

Almost the entire number of students having their online class at home. Therefore, there will inevitably be interference from parents, siblings, housemates and so on. An issue has been raised stating that half of the students face a dilemma when there are parents are not well-versed with the nature of online learning process. As a result, the parents will disturb the students who while attending classes and cause the students to be left behind in their learning.

As students are learning and spending all their time at home, their responsibilities have been divided into two. Namely the responsibilities as a student and also responsibilities as a child or an older sibling where free time is spent to take care of other younger siblings. Some students have no choice but to share the study space because they have a large household which leads to class disruption and resulting them having difficulties to focus during class or while studying. Therefore, this can be stressful for students and can lead to ineffective learning.

#### **6.0 Strategies For Dealing With Issues And Challenges**

6.1 Respond to issues and challenges first, for those with stable and good internet access, UiTM lecturers and students are encouraged to use synchronous e-learning methods such as zoom, webex and google meet. The online test can be done through ufuture, kahoot, google form or quizizz. Meanwhile for low and unstable internet access areas, it is recommended to use asynchronous or asynchronous e-learning such as google classroom and edmodo. These learning interactions occur not in real time, as lecturers and students do not have to be present all at the same time. An example of a method that can be applied is by making a recording in the form of audio or video and then upload it to facebook, youtube, whatsapp, telegram, email and share with students. Meanwhile, for areas with no internet access or very poor internet access, the

lecturers and students are advised to use short message service (sms) as a PdP medium although its use is quite limited.

6.2 Next to resolve the second issues and challenges, UiTM librarians need play a role and responsibility to ensure that students and teachers, especially UiTM staff are provided with continuous services Teaching and Learning (PdP) materials and sources. The digital library platform is activated to provide facilities for students and lecturers to obtain trustworthy reading and reference materials. Therefore, the UiTM library always ensures that the materials provided are of good quality and competitive at the global level (Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, 2020).

6.3 Therefore to answer the third issue and challenge, to address this challenge, e-learning need to be conducted informally and the university needs to set a time period for students to follow e-learning. For example, Singapore has set primary school students to study at home for four hours a day, secondary school students five hours a day and tertiary students six hours a day. This is important to avoid harmful effects due to the long hours of facing the computer or laptop screen (Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, 2020).

6.4 Lastly for the fourth issue and challenge, this issue should be highlighted by both students and parents by expressing and communicating their feelings to each other even on the smallest things. Through communication, we can understand each other and at the same time can strengthen family ties. Otherwise, any feeling left unexpressed can provoke disputes and crack the family bond.

## 7.0 Conclusion

As a conclusion, the issues and challenges of communication in the education system among students while adapting with the new norms must be taken into account by the ministry and the university so we all can adapt to the learning system based on technology and the current situation. The ministry and the university need to find ways to make it feasible for educators and students to communicate smoothly and effectively throughout the learning sessions. The modification of teaching and learning methods (PdP) need to be carried out as well as the inclusive of technology and the availability of appropriate platforms for all educators and students. Therefore, the ministry and the university must make initial preparations to face more sudden norm changes in the future, so that students and educators will no longer face issues and challenges that can deprive them from having quality education that they deserve as provided by the education system in Malaysia.

All in all, online learning is this right passage through advancement in this unprecedented time as compared to the conventional learning. This is because any one is free to acquire knowledge albeit the time or the place with minimal requirement such as a smartphone. Clearly, online learning can lead to many changes in the education system and in this time of pandemic, students and lecturers need to be given time and space to adapt to online learning so that no one will be left behind in obtaining education and gaining knowledge.

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