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Students' Perception towards Online Distance Learning(ODL) during COVID-19 Pandemic in Undergraduate Students of Faculty of Health Science

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Abstract

The educational system in Malaysia, including schools, colleges, and universities, is based on a traditional system. The outbreak of COVID-19 has an impact on the educational system across the world because it was forced to shut down during pandemics and changed from traditional methods to online and distance learning(ODL) or non-face to face. Due to this nature, COVID-19 tremendously affected the personal interaction of lecturers and students. The absence of traditional classroom teaching and computer-based learning has emerged as the closest replacement for offline teaching and the students' perception and readiness about the online distance learning adopted during the covid -19 pandemic, mainly laboratory-based courses in the Faculty of Health Sciences. In the present study, 265 diploma students of Faculty of Health Science, University Teknologi MARA, Pulau Pinang Branch, Bertam Campus were collected through the online questionnaire from October to November 2020. The findings revealed students' perception of e-learning and how their willingness to accept the e-learning without lab basis in the time of the COVID-19 crisis. E-learning has new emerging to adopted in a pandemic. Many academic institutions were reluctant to change their traditional pedagogical approach. However, they have no choice but to shift entirely to online and distance learning (ODL) because of this pandemic. Our findings will facilitate educational institutions and policymakers to take this ODL better to the next level.

Keywords: Students' Perception, Covid-19, Traditional Classroom Learning,Online Distance Learning

Introduction

COVID-19 effects are felt globally and caused chaos worldwide, including the education systems. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of online technology in education has increased due to the closure of educational institutions. This has raised challenges in online learning, especially for students with limited resources like those in rural areas. The continuous lockdown or movement restriction control affects the student's education. (Sá &

Serpa, 2020). Today, students are still in online and distance learning mode compared to traditional face-to-face because of the COVID-19 situation in Malaysia (Khan et al., 2021; Zayapragassarazan & Zayapragassarazan, 2020). This pandemic has profound implications in education whereby it will affect the students' quality and preparation to start working. In this challenging time, most countries have implemented measures that aim to improve the various effects implicated by the pandemic. Educational institutions and students worldwide, including Malaysia, use and appreciated online platform learning or ODL. This acceptability is because of the ease of use, learning flexibility, and a controllable environment and daily situations. ODL gives multiple advantages; there are quite a few limitations of e-learning, such as social isolation, face-to-face interaction, and students who need laboratory practice (Bedford et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2021). This applies to the Faculty of Health Sciences diploma students or related courses that need hands-on practice. During this pandemic crisis, most educational institutions are exploring and approaching e-learning to facilitate students to work out new routines and make sure they can also adapt to new norms (Muzaffar et al., 2020).

Literature Review

E-Learning in higher education

In recent times, the research exploring students' perception and their expectations from e-learning education has evolved. Previous studies showed that e-learning had been satisfactorily accepted among the students, but the effectiveness of communication between them and the educators shows the barrier (Khan et al., 2021; Pérez-Pérez et al., 2020). In a university learning environment, innovations and all the opportunities are created to ensure engagement with students and lecturers (Muzaffar et al., 2020; Zayapragassarazan & Zayapragassarazan, 2020). E-learning offers a web-based learning platform with a practical and flexible approach which strengthened both learners and lecturers. To improve accessibility to higher education and bring efficiency in the quality of learning across universities, the university education system in UiTM has implemented e-learning tools (Endut et al., 2012). Time, place, and people are needed in the traditional learning system, while e-learning has no boundaries of learning. This could be implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic because of its limitless learning system that could be accessed any time and anywhere. In this situation, students' perception of their engagement is essential to ensure that they will experience these new norms efficiently. Previous studies also revealed that learners' perceptions are affected by various factors such as age, gender, prior knowledge, and individual learning styles. Likewise, many studies discussed the theories of "technology acceptance" to study students' perceptions (al Kurdi et al., 2020).

Students engagement in E-learning

The new adaptation of online distance learning or e-learning has been ongoing identified by several researchers (Abbas, 2016; Alkharang, 2020.; Pérez-Pérez et al., 2020). The study sought to assess the association between university students' intention to use e-learning and specific attributes like "social influence, perceived enjoyment, self-efficacy, perceived usefulness, and perceived ease of use." In addition, knowing the e-learning perceptions of university students would have implications for a university or an educational practitioner to enhance the adoption of e-learning activities for the students. Student engagement impacts both instructor presence and learner interaction to make sure the students can sustain through e-learning experience (Gray & Diloreto, 2016). ODL is still new, and it is continuously

changing technologies and is improving year by year, and now it shows the importance and need of online learning. All online educators require more effort to integrate pedagogy with technologies in order to enhance student learning. Online activities will benefit if both educators and students are actively engaged and the educators understand how the students learn from the online environment with their available resources (Alariqi et al., 2019; Zhu, 2018).

Method

This is a quantitative study, and primary data were used for the analysis. A questionnaire has been used to collect data from 265 students enrolled in the Faculty of Health Sciences, University Teknologi MARA, Pulau Pinang Branch, Bertam Campus. The questionnaire was randomly distributed through an online Google form. The respondents were students who are actively using e-learning platforms for their regular course during COVID -19 lockdown. The study was conducted during the semester from October to November 2020. The questionnaire consisted of students' personal information and their perception and attitude regarding the effectiveness of e-learning during COVID-19. The pilot study was conducted, and it was finalized with minor changes to the feasibility of the survey.

Results

A total of 265 valid responses were recorded that qualified for data analysis. The respondents from various programs in Faculty of Health Science students. The students' device uses to access online learning, duration of using the computer, and students' perception and attitude regarding e-learning are presented below.

Respondents' profile based on diploma programs of Faculty of Health Sciences

This section presents students' profiles from different diploma programs offered by the Faculty of Health Sciences. Table 1 shows the willingness of students to return to Campus or to remain at home and continue e-learning. The majority of the respondents, i.e., 245 (92.5%), expressed their willingness to return to university for their learning purposes. However, 20 (53.0%) would like to remain at home and continue e-learning. The majority of the students would like to return to Campus because of the need for hands-on techniques and practices.

Table 1: Respondents from Faculty of Health Sciences

Program	Students (n= 265)	Willing return to Campus	Remain to stay at home with e-learning
Medical Laboratory Technology	71	60 (84.5%)	11 (15.5%)
Nursing	69	60 (84.5%)	8 (11.6%)
Occupational Therapy	41	40 (97.6%)	1 (2.4%)
Physiotherapy	38	34 (92.1%)	4 (7.9%)
Environmental Health and Safety	46	31 (67.4%)	15 (32.6%)

Students Perceptions During E-learning

Table 2 depicts that the highest response rate, i.e., 159 (60.0%), is due to challenges they have to endure to understand practical sessions. This is because of the lack of instruments at home since they need to handle hands-on practicals. The findings also demonstrate problems encountered through e-learning media, such as internet access problems i.e., 143 (53.0%),

and difficulties engaging with group discussion, i.e., 131 (49.4%). This shows that e-learning has its problems and challenges for most students, although teaching and learning activities are independent of any geographical location, time, or students' pace. The educational value was perceived to come from interaction and engagement from peers and faculty for these students.

Table 2: Students Perceptions towards e-learning

Students perception of E-learning	***(N=265)***
Stressnous	88
Internet problem	*143*
Family problem	*50*
Difficult to form group discussion	*131*
Financial problem	*32*
Challenging to understand practical sessions (related to lack of instruments)	*159*
Others	***40***

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study analyses the perception and preference of students towards e-learning during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The study reveals students' preferences for face-to-face learning. They were having problems connecting with their lecturers and fellow students and engaging because of limited time and connection problems. Easy access to study resources is one of the primary reasons for the students to opt for face to face compared to e-learning. This study indicates that although e-learning technology enables easy accessibility to information, only a small number of students could effectively be involved. This finding is based on the importance of usefulnees of online distance learning, the ease of use, and how the students behaviour and limitations regarding online distance learning.

Furthermore, the study illustrates that students still perceive e-learning as face-to-face learning done through physical classroom teaching. This is based on their previous traditional classroom teaching, which agrees with past research conducted by Abbas (2016). Furthermore, without face-to-face interaction and digital technology available for e-learning during pandemic COVID-19, students could not graduate quickly. Therefore, necessary measures on how the students accepted during ODL should be adopted to improve the quality of online distance learning to help with better student learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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