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Abstract

This study looked at three primary perspectives: 1) to explore IIUM TESL postgraduate students' experience on remote teaching and learning (RTL) during the COVID-19 pandemic, 2) to identify the challenges of RTL among IIUM TESL postgraduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 3) to determine some of the appropriate solutions to the RTL-related issues that IIUM TESL postgraduate students faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data collection procedure adopted by the study was an in-depth online qualitative questionnaire. This study utilised the qualitative research design involving six students from Kulliyyah of Education at International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) as the research participants. The data were analysed thematically based on those, as mentioned earlier, three major research perspectives. The overall results of this study indicated that IIUM TESL postgraduate students found RTL challenging. They faced many problems and difficulties during the RTL classes, which were deemed as significant obstacles to their teaching and learning outcomes. The study also suggests that conducting new research and developing new ideas are necessary for students to better adapt to the RTL mode. As for teachers, they should be cooperative and supportive of the RTL classes by ensuring robust internet connectivity, keeping communication clear with the students, conducting engaging and fun lectures, having a shorter class duration, and offering longer breaks. As a result, the students would enjoy and pay more attention during the RTL classes, which could help achieve the aims and objectives of teaching and learning.
Keywords: ESL, Higher Learning, Learning Experience, Remote Teaching and Learning, Covid-19

Introduction

Remote teaching and learning (RTL) is a platform where students and instructors are not physically present in the traditional classroom (Surveillances, 2020). However, according to Toquero (2020), the rapid spread of COVID-19 has forced the government to shut down educational institutions and implement the RTL system. In the traditional classroom environment, distance learning occurs when the student and the teacher or the source of knowledge are not on-site (Osman, 2020). According to Schlesselman and Psych (2020), RTL is used to improve and enhance student learning outcomes while overcoming resource

constraints, especially in higher education. Nevertheless, many higher education institutions cannot adjust courses online due to inadequate infrastructure. If educational institutions implement distance learning, many students will not access it regularly because they do not have laptops, expensive data costs, and a poor internet connection and internet quota (Miguel & Santos, 2019). Trust and Whalen (2020) stated that students could choose to attend online courses in the comfort of their own home or any other location.

Distance learning also allows students to obtain credible certification which can enhance their qualifications and help them progress in their careers. According to Id et al. (2018), there are two suggestions for future research: first, the main challenge of RTL is the technical problems faced by students; thus, helping students overcome this challenge will enhance student enjoyment towards innovative learning models encourage RTL motive. In line with Ananga and Biney (2017), a structured learning environment is a characteristic of RTL, improving and expanding educational opportunities. RTL improves the teaching of technical skills by instilling technical literacy in academic learning content, provides lecturers with opportunities for professional development, including guidance and learning in educational institutions, and provides opportunities for students with conflicting subject arrangements at the same time (Zhou et al., 2020). Therefore, according to transaction distance, RTL is an essential concept that students must interact with and understand their learning process.

When enrolling in RTL courses, students of the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) face a series of obstacles, especially international students (Khamparia & Pandey, 2018). In order to achieve their academic goals and objectives, students, especially foreign postgraduates, face some typical problems in distance teaching and learning courses. These must be resolved through reasonable efforts (Atkenson, 2020). First, the problems of adaptability: the shift from the conventional classroom or face-to-face teaching to the virtual classroom (Pham et al., 2018). Hence, the adaptability of the remote teaching and learning process is more challenging for the IIUM international postgraduate students (Basak & Wotto, 2018). When the quality of internet monitoring services is low, and most IIUM postgraduate students are outside the campus, they cannot keep up with the course's technical requirements (Mtebe & Raphael, 2021). Second, especially IIUM international TESL postgraduates, students seriously lack technological knowledge. Even though most students are proficient in technology and can operate computers properly, a lack of computer expertise is a big problem (Principi & Esposito, 2020). Third is time management, which is another massive challenge for international postgraduate students as the RTL system requires a lot of time and energy (Watkins, 2020). Fourth is self-motivation, which is another crucial requirement of RTL, although many RTL students fail to realize this (McKibbin & Fernando, 2020). International students must find the motivation to better keep up with current educational trends to prepare them for future academic and professional challenges. Only a positive attitude can enable them to overcome the challenges of RTL. Although it is challenging to implement, students must realize the importance of benefiting from it in the future (Paterlini, 2020).

Aside from this, some international students are still dissatisfied with the use of RTL in English classrooms. Students gradually believe that face-to-face instruction is better than RTL training. International students who face problems such as poor access to the network in certain areas or suburbs of their country often find it difficult for them to keep up with the progress of the lectures (Surveillances, 2020). Moreover, most students trust that face-to-face learning is more successful than online teaching. Similarly, evaluating the effectiveness

of RTL among international students in IIUM is critical to assess whether this research can help develop long-term solutions and inform teachers on the use of RTL methods to teach English. Additionally, research on other factors that influence the use of English with ICT in RTL systems is still lacking (Sintema, 2020).

Research Objectives
  i. To explore TESL postgraduate students' experience in remote teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 ii. To investigate the challenges of RTL among the IIUM TESL postgraduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic.
iii. To identify the appropriate solutions to RTL-related issues IIUM TESL postgraduate students face during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions
  i. What is the TESL postgraduate students' experience in remote teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?
 ii. What are the challenges of RTL among the IIUM TESL postgraduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic?
iii. What are the appropriate solutions to RTL-related issues IIUM TESL postgraduate students face during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Theoretical Framework
This research has adapted Kolb's Cycle of experience learning theory, which David Kolb developed in 1984, emphasizing internet teaching and learning, incredibly remote teaching and learning (RTL), including four significant steps, such as concrete learning and reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Therefore, Figure 1 depicts the four major components of Kolb's empirical learning cycle theory.
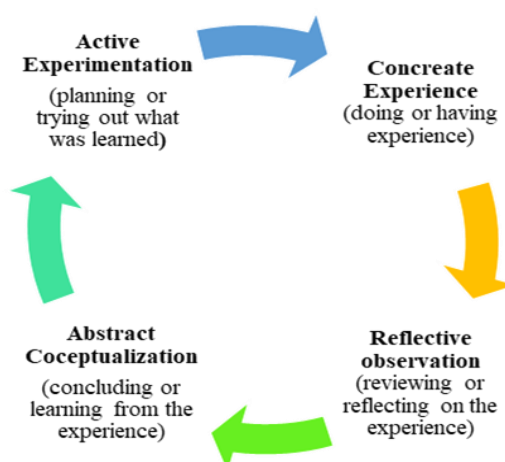
Figure 1: Kolb's Cycle of Experiential Learning Theory

This theory provides a valuable foundation for developing training practices, especially RTL. Moreover, the cycle includes four experience-based learning phases and can be applied anytime, especially in online distance teaching and learning. However, to successfully learn, all stages must be completed in order. Kolb's theory also involves learners' internal cognitive processes.

The first step in Kolb's learning process is to get a specific experience. It can be a completely new experience, or it can be a modified version of an experience that has happened before. As each learner participates in an activity in a given experience, Kolb believes that participation is the cornerstone of learning (Heinrich & Green, 2020). The learner takes a step back to reflect on the homework after participating in the specific experience. At this stage of the entire learning cycle, learners can ask questions and share their experiences with others. Communication is crucial because it allows learners to notice any difference between their understanding and experience (Su & Cheng, 2019). Understanding events is the next step of the learning process. Learners try to draw empirical conclusions by reflecting on prior knowledge, applying familiar concepts. When learners begin to classify concepts and judge what happened, they will shift from reflective observation to abstract conceptualisation. It requires analysing personal experience and comparing it with their current conceptual understanding. Learners can evaluate new information and adjust their findings based on previous ideas, so concepts need not be "new" (Gadola & Chindamo, 2019). It is the testing phase of the cycle. The learner returns to a task to apply what they have learned to a new situation. One can enter Kolb's learning theory at any point of the cycle because it is cyclic. In order to ensure successful learning, this cycle should be executed in its entirety. Each stage depends on the previous stage, and each stage must be completed to gain new knowledge (Ferrero et al., 2018).

Related Past Studies
Role of Technology in RTL
Technologies are called technologies for projects, equipment, or product systems that can be used to maintain, increase, or improve the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities (Trust & Whalen, 2020). Technology also enables teachers to better adapt to the needs of students with disabilities (Ferri et al., 2020). Therefore, technology can be seen as a tool and catalyst for change. Teachers must be willing to use technology in the classroom to improve and innovate their teaching techniques, and students must accept technology as a tool for their benefit.

Challenges of RTL Implementation for Teaching and Learning
During the COVID-19 pandemic, RTL has changed face-to-face classroom teaching. The rapid expansion of internet connections has significantly impacted business and education (Taylor & Sharp, 2020). According to United Nations Sustainable Development Group (2020), although online learning is traditionally conducted through recorded lectures and RTL platforms in the higher education sub-industry, due to the lack of information technology (IT) infrastructure for students and professors, some universities have postponed learning and teaching until further notice (Utku, 2021: Der & Unfractionated, 2020). By using various applications as learning media such as YouTube, Zoom, Google Meet, and various other applications (Pieri, 2019; Li et al., 2020). Gossling et al. (2020) suggested that due to RTL development, online courses, network-centric courses, and network-enhanced courses are three options for developing an Internet-based learning system. The government and countless independent charities and foundations have been doing their best to provide IT equipment to students who cannot access the Internet (Almazova et al., 2020; Ferri et al., 2020). Different experiences can help learners improve their skills in a particular field and cultivate them to be more adaptable and comprehensive no matter which learning method

they prefer (Gelles et al., 2020). Kolb's experiential learning theory considers the entire process of learning. The complete experience can include all stages (Hash, 2021).

Positive and Negative Impacts of RTL

RTL provides teachers with much-needed classroom efficiency, enabling them to maximise the students' learning curve and style (Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2019). The actual advantage for teachers can be quantified as time-based effort and reduced workload (Kolb et al., 2018). For teachers, online learning has many advantages. By 2019, it is expected that at least half of the courses will be available online, providing educators with greater scheduling flexibility and cost-effectiveness, as well as access to new learning platforms, including the possibility of remote learning from educators in other parts of the world (Kaiser & Stillman, 2018).

On the other hand, RTL is the perfect solution to the challenges posed by COVID-19 in education (Reich et al., 2020). A recent study found that 93% of educators surveyed believed that students are more likely to cheat in online courses (Ferri et al., 2020). Another big problem with distance learning is that students spend less time online than in physical buildings (Reich et al., 2020). However, in the remote learning model, the coach spends a few minutes in the physical education class to discuss what should be done with the students, and then they are allowed to quit and exercise (Ferri et al., 2020). Any student can lie, and if they do, the coach will not know whether the student performs the exercise (Dey & Bandyopadhyay, 2019).

Methodology

This study used a qualitative phenomenological method to investigate the effectiveness of the remote teaching and learning (RTL) phenomenon involving IIUM TESL postgraduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The method of the semi-structured online interview was applied together with an analysis of relevant documents to identify selected participants' perceptions regarding the matter and examine the interviewees' insights and views. The general population is the largest group of potential qualitative research participants (Johnson et al., 2020). However, the qualitative researcher should identify and determine the focus group of the study from the population centralizing on the goals and objectives of this research. Therefore, the general population of this research referred to the TESL postgraduate students under the Kulliyyah of Education at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Therefore, the total population of this study was 86 TESL postgraduate students from the Education Department.

In a qualitative descriptive study, the sample size appears to be small in terms of the scope of the qualitative-oriented analysis central to this style of investigation (Larsen et al., 2021). However, in the present analysis, the convenience informants were selected as the target group of this research for data collection. Accordingly, based on the total number of respondents, the focus group or sample size consisted of six IIUM TESL postgraduate students from the Kulliyyah of Education. Therefore, a total of 86 possible respondents, the interview was conducted with six participants who met the criteria of this research. This study used convenience sampling techniques. However, in qualitative research, this type of sampling strategy is often used to find and select information-rich cases and make the most effective use of limited resources (Capek, 2020). Thus, for convenience selection, the present researcher selected the participants according to the needs of the study. Therefore, a convenience sampling technique was used for this analysis.

In this study, the researcher used the thematic method of data analysis. Best et al. (2021) stated that six guiding steps work as a valuable framework for conducting thematic analysis. For example, Step 1) transcribing the data, Step 2) Categorising, Stage 3) Generating initial codes, Step 4) Scanning for creating themes, Step 5) Re-examining the themes, and Step 6) Describing or defining the themes. Thus, following this idea, the data were interpreted using this thematic analytical framework, findings were interpreted, and conclusions and recommendations were derived. The data for this research were analysed firstly by listening to audio-taped interviews; then, presenting verbatim transcripts of the data; next, identifying patterns and explanations; then identifying recurring themes; finally, moving themes to the coding framework with written notes. The data were also categorised and re-arranged in terms of themes. In addition, field notes were prepared as a crucial tool to identify factors that promoted the effective adoption of remote teaching and learning (RTL) among IIUM TESL postgraduate learners during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Findings
Students' Perception
When the participants were asked about their perceptions regarding remote teaching and learning in the pandemic situation, they tried to address the question differently. According to a few respondents (P1 & P3), they stated that

> "We face some difficulties focusing on my studies, especially having class by online or remote teaching and learning system."

Another few participants (P6 & P5) stated that

> "RTL really boring and student don't feel comfort and this teaching system is not reliable to achieve learning outcomes."

Another participant (P2 & P3) mentioned that

> "Most of the students cannot give focus in online classes because of easily distracted." "I don't fell enjoy this class and I am not satisfied totally with the technology and software using for RTL".

(P4 & P5) claimed that

"Based on my experience, face-to-face class is incomparable. Students are able to learn more, generate new ideas with group study, and solve difficult problems more in face-to-face class than RTL." "RTL is better for COVID situation, but it cannot fulfil the total requirements of the teaching and learning."

Existing Challenges Associated with RTL
The participants were asked about the challenges associated with RTL during the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, several participants (P1& P6) mentioned that

> "I face difficulties of RTL class such as feeling isolated and depressed". "I think the biggest challenge would be the presence of the infrastructure needed for the RTL to happen."

Another participant (P2) said that

> "Keeping focus or consultation is very big challenge for RTL system."

Another participant (P3) claimed that

"The main problem is the internet speed. We generally use Wi-Fi contention provided in Mahallah but unfortunately its speed always ups and down, even sometimes it goes as low as students can't browse a web page."

The same participant (P5) mentioned that

"Most of the time it very difficult to connect as the internet connections in Mahallah is quite low speed. For your information, in Mahallah if you leave nearby the router that time, you may get a good speed but if you are not near by the router you may face a lot of problems."

Another respondent (P3 & P4) stated that

"Internet speed is the biggest challenge. The lack of internet connectivity, most of the international students face a lot of challenges such as student's capacity to take pressure of classes, assignments, quizzes, and other activities. There are many challenges in RTL class, such as interruption from giving full attention in lesson, technical problem, and scheduling problem."

The Problems Associated with RTL

In this part of this study, the respondents were asked how the problems associated with RTL during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis could be solved. One of the participants (P1) mentioned that

"I read somewhere that it is important that the communication between the student and teacher is facilitated well in order for the former to stay engaged and from my own experience, I believe that is true." "I don't think teachers' efforts are the only factors for students to stay motivated."

(P4 & P2) also stated that

"Establish clear communication lines between the student and teacher and give the students some level of freedom to choose how they can do their activities while at the same time providing them the rubrics so that the teacher and students meet eye to eye when it comes to what learning outcomes we want to achieve." "Giving break in the class and have some fun and length of the class should be decreased. Class should be engaging, not one-way lectures."

Another respondent (P3) said that

"The lecturers should give students long break after one lecture to another so that they can retrieve easily their attention and feel comfort in front of theirs devises."

The same participant (P6) also mentioned that

"Lecturers should provide some entertainment during RTL, like doing fun in class or give a short break during the class. I hope sharing session can be also a very fruitful way. Short and attractive presentation of topics can be better ways among others."

Similarly, the same respondent (P5) also suggested that
> *"Ensuring best internet connection first and foremost. Then students' cooperation and sincerity and on time starting class and ending."*

(P6 & P4) stated again that
> *"Lecturers must give space to students to talk, share, and express their arguments. Students should be more careful and sensitive to communicate with lecturer. Making class enjoyable and easy for the students and help them to solve their problems and emotional support them to be attractive in RTL class."*

(P3) advised that
> *"Teachers need to take care specially the weak students to enhance their learning abilities through RTL. And they must research more and more on RTL, how to make it more effective and they should communicate students one by one to find out their problems related to RTL and come up with a proper solution."*

To sum up, the key facts and significant challenges associated with remote teaching and learning faced by teachers and students during the COVID-19 pandemic can be outlined briefly, considering the above findings from the viewpoint of different participants in this study. However, many participants stated that RTL is complicated, tedious, and ineffective than face-to-face classes. Students cannot focus on online classes and are not satisfied and genuinely enjoy the technology-based remote teaching and learning. Moreover, even though RTL is a better implementation for the COVID-19 situation, it still cannot fulfil the total requirement of teaching and learning.

Discussion
Students' Perceptions
The first interview question of this study was about the perceptions of the IIUM TESL postgraduate students regarding remote teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. One of the participants (P1) stated that the students face difficulties. As mentioned by (P1), "most of the students face many difficulties having class by RTL system and RTL is not more effective for them than the face-to-face class". Another participant (P8) stated that RTL is uninteresting as students feel uncomfortable with it. It is perceived as unreliable in achieving educational goals. Several other participants (P4, P3, & P2) stated that many students could not focus in class, did not enjoy it, and were dissatisfied with the technology and software used for RTL. They stated, "most of the students cannot give focus in online classes because they are easily inattentive, do not enjoy this class, and they are dissatisfied with the technology and software used for RTL." according to (P4 & 3) who claimed that "face-to-face class is incomparable. Physical classes allow students to learn more, produce new ideas through group study, and tackle complex issues more effectively than RTL classes, and they cannot focus more in their class activities on RTL because the teacher is not in direct touch." Finally, a few participants (P3, P6 & P5) claimed that RTL is unable to meet the demands of teaching and learning and that it has numerous limitations in achieving academic goals, as they mentioned that "RTL is better for COVID-19 situations, but it cannot meet the fundamental requirements of teaching and learning. Although RTL provides enormous opportunities for students, teachers, and institutions to continue the educational process, it also offers several drawbacks".

Existing Challenges Associated with RTL

In this section, the data were analysed and discussed according to the participants' responses about existing challenges associated with RTL during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, different participants gave different opinions regarding the challenges of RTL in the pandemic situation. According to a few participants (P1& P6), the most significant issue among students is maintaining attention in RTL sessions, as they claimed, "the biggest obstacle would be the provision of the infrastructure required for the RTL to occur." For example, if the student cannot establish a reliable internet connection, it would be a barrier, and maintaining concentration would be a significant difficulty for the RTL system."

A few other respondents (P3, P5, & P4) mentioned that one of the primary problems for RTL is the slow internet speed, which is also a severe challenge to students. As they claimed, "the biggest issue is the speed of the internet. Students frequently utilise the Wi-Fi provided at *Mahallah*. However, the speed fluctuates, and at times it is so slow that students cannot view the internet. The ups and downs of internet speed are distracting and cause people to lose focus. Sometimes, students must buy internet packages from mobile service providers, which is costly. Meaning to say, it adds some extra money with the semester's cost". In addition, according to (P2, P7, & P8), students face different types of challenges in RTL classes, as they mentioned that "there are many challenges in RTL classes, such as interruptions from giving full attention to the lesson, technical issues, and scheduling issues. One of the biggest challenges in RTL is that teachers cannot collaborate with students enough during class time through RTL, which is easier in face-to-face classes." Therefore, to the participants, problems such as slow internet, speed fluctuation, technical issues, and teachers' inability to collaborate with students should be reduced. Hence, this study highlights the importance of keeping the students' concentration in the remote teaching and learning system, which is their most significant barrier.

The Problems Associated with RTL

The participants were then asked about the appropriate solutions to the RTL-related issues that IIUM TESL postgraduate students faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants, however, carried forth various suggestions and strategies for the solutions of RTL- related problems faced by students in the time of the pandemic. According to several participants (P4, P5, & P1), one of the most crucial issues is strong communication between teachers and students. They stated that it is vital to establish clear communication lines between students and teachers. The teachers are also expected to give the students some level of freedom to choose how the students can carry out their activities while at the same time providing them with the rubrics so that the teacher and students meet eye-to-eye when it comes to what learning outcomes we want to achieve." Thus, communication between students and teachers is essential for RTL classes.

However, some other participants (P2, P6, & P3) stated that teachers should give students a long (time) break and create fun activities to enjoy and be attentive in the RTL classes. As they suggested, "giving a break in the class and have some fun so that they can easily retrieve their attention and feel comfortable in front of theirs devises and length of the class should be decreased. The class should be engaging, not one-way lectures. As well as teachers should give students more time, consultation hours should be increased even in the weekends." Therefore, the teachers should give a long break time and create some fun lessons to enjoy and pay full attention in the RTL classes. These will help achieve teaching and learning aims and objectives.

Moreover, a few other respondents (P5, P3, & P1) stated that lectures should be delivered in an attractive way and shorter. Teachers should also make sure of the internet connection. As they suggested, "short and attractive presentation of topics can be better ways among others, similarly, ensuring best internet connection, then students' cooperation and sincerity and on-time starting class and ending. After that follow steps as usual as face-to-face, like the quality of sound and videos, well focus on topics, patients, well dressed and mannered, greetings and break, sincere about student capacity and workloads." Thus, the teachers should deliver the lectures very attractively and make them brief. They should encourage students to cooperate appropriately and take care of the video sound and quality. The teachers should not provide more tasks to enjoy the classes and do not feel bored. Hence RTL classes will be more accessible for them.

Furthermore, some of the participants (P8, P7, & P4) stated the general responsibilities, honesty, and other duties of the teachers in RTL classes. As they advised, "students should be more careful and sensitive to communicate with lecturers. They should be patient, well-mannered, ethical, and concerned about their responsibilities. Teachers help the students solve their problems and emotionally support them to be attractive in RTL class. Teachers should also share their study plan and goal, give feedback after submitting assignments, and ask questions about their problems. At the same time, they must do research more and more on RTL, how to make it more effective, and they should communicate with students one-by-one to find out their problems related to RTL and come up with a proper solution." Therefore, the teachers should be very honest, sincere, and more responsible for their duties, more patient, and conduct research regarding RTL to be immensely more manageable for the students to achieve the teaching and learning outcomes, especially in the RTL mode.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aimed to understand the success of RTL among IIUM TESL postgraduate students in the COVID-19 pandemic environment. However, the main objective of this study was to determine the RTL barriers for the postgraduate students studying TESL at IIUM in a pandemic situation. During the COVID-19 crisis, this research also sought acceptable answers to RTL-related challenges experienced by the IIUM TESL postgraduate students. Data were collected through online qualitative interviews. The study also used qualitative research methods with six students from Kulliyyah of Education at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) as research participants. The data were examined thematically using the answers to this study's three key research questions. The overall findings of this study showed that the remote teaching and learning (RTL) system is more difficult for students, and they mentioned numerous problems and challenges during the RTL sessions, creating significant barriers to achieving teaching and learning objectives.

According to the findings, performing new research and producing fresh concepts are required for RTL's adaptability by the students. The significant contribution of this study is the adaptability of Kolb's Cycle of experiential learning theory. It emphasised internet teaching and learning, especially RTL, that includes four significant steps or components, such as concrete experience or learning, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation that are more relevant to solving RTL problems during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Furthermore, ensuring robust internet connectivity and providing strong communication between students and teachers, such as teachers should engagingly deliver lectures and make them shorter; teachers should take long breaks during class time and make

some fun, and teachers should be cooperative and supportive of RTL classes. As a result, students will enjoy RTL classes and devote 100% of their attention to them, which can be helpful to achieve the teaching and learning goals, as well as objectives, particularly of the RTL system.

This study cannot cover all aspects related to the RTL in the pandemic situation. However, future research can be expanded to other higher institutions, including private and government institutions. Apart from the school principals, future research should be conducted by other institutional leaders too. The method used in the research can be varied by using other methods like quantitative surveys, focus group discussions, and qualitative case studies. Similar research may be conducted to cover the areas that this study did not cover. In addition, conducting new research and developing new ideas are needed for the adaptability of RTL by the students. Finally, research on student motivation is needed to determine whether a mismatch between teachers and students contributes to the RTL system.

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