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An Assessment of Lecturers' Confidence Level in Conducting Online Teaching and Learning Activities in UiTM Melaka during the Restricted Movement Order

Siti Hajar Abd Aziz¹, Mohd Sufiean Hassan², Ahmad Nur Azam Ahmad Ridzuan³, Norida Abu Bakar⁴

^{1, 2}Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, University Technology MARA Melaka,

³Faculty of Computer & Mathematical Science, University Technology MARA Perak, ⁴Faculty of Business Management, University Technology MARA Melaka

Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic worldwide has forced education activities to go fully online, which has led to challenging teaching and learning experiences for both students and lecturers. Although in many developed countries, online learning and online communication were nothing new, to others, this sudden revolution of online education can be both an overwhelming and difficult experience. The lack of training, inadequate facilities such as learning tools, and reliable internet access, the lack of knowledge in handling online educational communication could make online learning difficult, particularly for the lecturers. This would reduce lecturers' confidence in conducting and managing online learning. Hence, this study is aimed to assess the confidence level of lecturers from Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka branch campuses in conducting teaching and learning activities during the Movement Restriction Order period. The data obtained in this study was collected randomly from 52 participants from the seven established faculties in UiTM Melaka. The questionnaire was divided into three sections, the Demographic, the Teaching and Learning Online Exposure, and the Lecturers' confidence in Conducting Teaching and Learning through Online Basis. The results showed that the level of confidence among academicians in UiTM Melaka indicated a moderate level where the mean was in the range of 3 to 4. This is because this was the first time the academicians went through full teaching experiences of teaching and learning via online platforms. Even though there were a few of them who were quite familiar with several instruments used in the online platforms, generally most of the academicians were still new with online teaching tools. The study also found that the overall level of the lecturers' confidence in terms of conducting and managing online learning is moderate with many academicians opting to use a basic online communication platform to execute their teaching and learning activities.

Keywords: Academicians, Online Platforms, Self-Confidence, Pandemic, Teaching and Learning

Introduction

One of the areas which was forced to evolve instantaneously during the covid19- pandemic is the education sector. When social distancing order came into force, plus the quarantine order and the implementations of 'the new norm' due to Covid-19, the education environment suddenly came into what is known as the "shock effect", which has forced millions of people around the world to move into digital platforms in search of knowledge. According to a report by UNESCO, as of April 9, 2020, there were over 1,500,000,000 students worldwide ranging from the primary to the tertiary levels who were not able to attend schools (UNESCO, 2020).

Thus, conventional teaching and learning classrooms were suddenly abandoned in many parts of the world, forcing both learners and instructors, including those in the universities to adapt to online learning immediately in order to stay safe from the threats of Covid-19 (Hodges et al., 2020).

Online learning, as pointed out by Stern (2004) refers to an interactive learning powered by the Internet on a digital platform, which requires both instructor and students to take active roles. Stern noted that other than facilitating and organising activities online, the instructor must also get students to engage directly with the lessons as compared to depending too heavily on lectures and memorization. Hodges et al (2020) also pointed out that the challenges of online learning can be stressful to instructors, apart from having "a stigma of being lower quality than face-to-face learning", although this statement has yet to be not proven through research.

Apart from students' readiness to embark on online education, questions also arise on the instructors' readiness to conduct online learning. This means to look at their willingness to effectively design the educational materials and manage the courses within an online environment. This is also closely related to the question of the instructors' confidence in executing and managing online learning.

- This study, therefore aimed to assess the confidence level of lecturers from Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka branch campuses in conducting teaching and learning activities during the initial period of the Movement Restriction Order when all teaching and learning activities suddenly go fully online.

The outcome of this study is hoped to serve as a foundation to more in-depth studies on teaching and learning activities at higher learning institutions, particularly related to online platforms.

Confidence to Conduct Online Teaching

Learning online can be challenging, but the skill to teach online does not come naturally, and so does the confidence to carry out an online course from start to finish. According to Sadler (2013) the instructors' self-confidence is linked to their effectiveness in using teaching strategies, which could be achieved in relation to the level of content knowledge and teaching skills they have.

Meanwhile, the instructors' experience are the key factors in terms of their perceptions towards their knowledge and skills. The same notion was also suggested by Zheng et al (2015) who suggested that self-efficacy and teaching experiences as the factors predicting teaching practices in online language courses.

Next, a study conducted by Hassan et al (2016) indicated a positive relationship between self-confidence and using ICT in teaching. A positive attitude towards ICT, is powered

by self-confidence, which enhances the instructors' motivation to use the technology in the classroom.

Significantly, the confidence in teaching online can be described as the use of online competency mastered by the instructors. In one of an earlier study on online teaching, with the reference of pedagogical aspects in language teaching, Hampel and Stickler (2005), identified seven key competencies which are presented in figure 1.

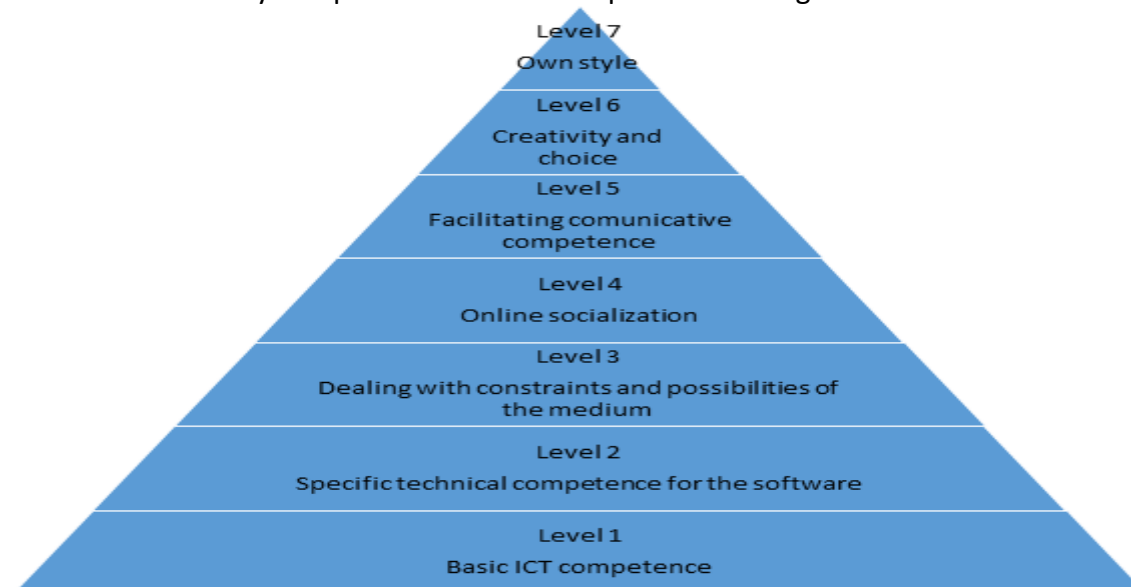


Figure 1: Hampel and Stickler (2005): 7 Skill Competencies Pyramid

In this framework, Level 3 which was “dealing with constraints and possibilities of the medium” was noted as one of the most basic competencies, in which, if an instructor lacks this element, it may lower the lecturer’s confidence level to teach online. This, including the other two lower levels of the pyramid (Figure 1) indicated that the factors related to ICT hardware and software (Compton 2009) were also related to the teaching pedagogy related competencies which were at Level four and five.

This notion was also backed up by a study made by He (2014) which claimed that instructors were reported to have very low confidence in teaching online, using the Web 2.0 tools and facilitating students to learn in the online environment. Most participants reported the highest confidence in using basic computer programs such as Words and Powerpoint. In addition, another study indicated that instructors preferred social networking sites such as Facebook and Youtube as they were considered to help facilitate actual communication interaction with both synchronous and asynchronous alternatives (Marek & Wu, 2012).

In fact, confidence level increases as an lecturers’ experience increases. In a study made on 424 candidates in an educational technology course (Willis et al., 2016) suggested that candidates needed repeated exposure to gain awareness and understanding towards the use of technology in teaching. This was achieved using “experience-based environmental education” which helped to increase the sense of preparedness and confidence of study participants. This was also agreed by Greener & Craig (2015) who suggested that engaging staff with technologies was the main challenge in institutional digital transformation, mainly due to a lack of training provision and support.

Methodology

The questionnaire was constructed based on Online Academic Success Indicators Scale (OASIS) adapted from Bradley et al. (2017). The participants were from the seven faculties available in UiTM Melaka. The total number of participants for this questionnaire was 52. The questionnaire was divided into three sections, which are Demographic, Teaching and Learning Online Exposure and Lecturers confidence on Conducting Teaching and Learning through Online Basis. The purpose of the questionnaire was to evaluate the confidence level among the academicians in UiTM Melaka in terms of how they conducted teaching and learning activities. In fact this new norm of teaching has transformed the conventional, face to face learning into online learning when Malaysia first experienced the Movement Restriction Order due to Covid-19 in 2020.

Result and Discussion

Table 1

Faculty in UiTM Cawangan Melaka

Faculty	Frequency
Fakulti Perladangan dan Agroteknologi	1
Fakulti Perakaunan	4
Fakulti Sains Komputer dan Matematik	6
Fakulti Seni Lukis dan Seni Reka	7
Fakulti Pengurusan Hotel dan Pelancongan	7
Fakulti Komunikasi dan Pengajian Media	11
Fakulti Pengurusan dan Perniagaan	15
TOTAL	52

Table 1 showed the established faculties in UiTM Melaka. Altogether, there were seven faculties namely Fakulti Perladangan dan Agroteknologi (FPA), Fakulti Perakaunan (FP), Fakulti Sains Komputer dan Matematik (FSKM), Fakulti Seni Lukis dan Seni Reka (FSSR), Fakulti Pengurusan Hotel dan Pelancongan (FPHP), Fakulti Komunikasi dan Pengajian Media (FKPM), and also Fakulti Pengurusan dan Perniagaan (FPP). Based on the survey conducted, FPP had the highest number of participants and FPA had the lowest participation. The total participants were 52.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics on Conducting Online Teaching and Learning

Teaching and Learning Online Exposure and Lecturers confidence	Mean	SD
I am confident in my ability to implement curriculum in an online environment.	3.56	0.916
I am confident in my ability to create an online environment that allows students to build new knowledge and skills.	3.69	1.001
I am confident in my ability to implement different methods of teaching online.	3.87	0.817
I am confident in my ability to use online student assessment to modify instruction.	3.52	0.896
I am confident in my ability to encourage online interactivity among students.	3.67	0.857
I am confident in my ability to use technology to create effective representations of content that departs from textbook knowledge.	3.75	0.905
I am confident in my ability to use technology to predict students' skills/understanding of a particular topic.	3.42	0.957
I am confident in my ability to complete online activities on time.	3.35	0.988
I am confident in my ability to set up computer equipment.	3.67	0.901
I am confident in my ability to grading online assignments.	3.60	0.869
I am confident in my ability to respond to student messages.	3.98	0.852
I am confident in my ability to provide corrective feedback.	3.81	0.930
I am confident in my ability to avoid copyright infringement.	3.25	0.926
I am confident in my ability to create online quizzes.	3.92	0.926
I am confident in my ability to organize/conduct online meetings.	3.92	1.007

Next, Table 2 showed the mean and standard deviation in measuring the ability of the academicians in conducting teaching and learning activities using online platforms. The results indicated that the academicians have had high confidence in responding to student messages during the Movement Control Order period (Mean = 3.98; SD = 0.852). The results also proved that the academicians have excellent and sufficient ability to organize online meetings (mean = 3.92; SD = 0.926) and at creating online quizzes using any instruments which were available on the online platforms (mean = 3.92; SD = 1.007).

In addition, in terms of the ability to implement curriculum in the online environment, the results showed an average level with mean (3.56) and a standard deviation of (0.916). A similar pattern of the result was shown for the ability to create an online environment which

allowed students to build new knowledge and skills (mean = 3.69; SD = 1.001), ability to use online student assessment to modify instruction (mean=3.52; SD = 0.896), ability to encourage online interactivity among students (mean = 3.67; SD = 0.857), ability to set up computer equipments (mean = 3.67; SD = 0.901) and ability to grade online assignments (mean = 3.60; SD = 0.869). In terms of the ability to avoid copyright infringement, the results indicated the lowest average with mean = 3.25 and a standard deviation of 0.926.

Overall, the results indicated that the confidence level of the academicians in UiTM Melaka was moderate. This was due to the academicians' experiences in teaching and learning via online platforms. Even though there were a few of them who were quite familiar with several of the instruments used for teaching on the online platforms, generally the rest of the teaching staff on campus were still new with the use of teaching tools online. The other reason why the results have shown a moderate level is that some academicians were just jumping into the online basis with their lack of knowledge in terms of using the online mechanisms and system. For these few, they have no other choices but to deliver knowledge to their students during the Restricted Movement Control Order period enforced throughout Malaysia. Hence, it took them quite a long time to understand and be able to manage the online platforms in their teaching and learning activities.

Conclusion

In brief, teaching and learning using the online platform are considered as current methods for delivering knowledge and information to students. As Malaysia went through the Covid-19 pandemic, the online teaching and communication instruments are the best possible solutions for teachers, academicians and students to conduct and continue with the teaching and learning processes. Nevertheless, some of them seemed to be still unfamiliar with the teaching and communication instruments available for online platform purposes. In fact, the observation of this study indicated that during the implementation of the MCO in Malaysia in the beginning of the year 2020, the level of confidence among academicians was considered to be of moderate level. For the future recommendations of this study, it would be interesting to study the in-depth reasons why those confidence levels among the academicians are at a moderate level so as to provide further insights into understanding the impacts of online learning towards academicians in the nation.

This study correlate with the previous theoritical framework, suggesting that repeated exposure are needed for lecturers to gain awareness and understanding towards the use of technology in teaching. As online learning in Malaysia is generally new prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, lecturers need to be exposed to the diversity of online learning tools and given continual hands-on practice from time to time as to make sure their confidence level are high whenever a fully online learning is needed. It is anticipated that online learning will remain as the only teaching and learning method available in emergency situation.

Corresponding Author

Dr. Mohd Sufiean Hassan Senior lecturer at the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Melaka Branch.

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