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Factors Influencing Online Learning Experiences towards Psychological Well-being: Which Drivers Matters?

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on our daily lives. Officials from the Department of Public Health are urging people to limit their social gatherings, limiting the amount of time and people they can interact with in person. Due to the closure of educational institutions, students have to changed their learning method from face-to-face to online learning. Stress, anxiety, and depression have been identified as the most common mental health issues among university students. Many people, notably students, have suffered psychological consequences as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. University students experience stress, worry, and despair even when there is no epidemic because of the constant demands of study. Research objectives of this study is to determine factor mostly influenced psychological well-being during online learning and to identify the significant relationship between technical and financial issues, burden of assignments, non-conducive learning environment and psychological well-being.

Keywords: Psychological Well-Being, University, Students, Technical and Financial Issues, Burden of Assignments, Non-Conducive Learning Environment

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on our daily lives. Officials from the Department of Public Health are urging people to limit their social gatherings, limiting the amount of time and people they can interact with in person. Due to the closure of educational institutions, students have to changed their learning method from face-to-face to online learning. Online education is also known as e-learning, distance education, and even virtual education (Kader et al., 2022). It is a technical platform that enables students to learn at their own pace and on their own terms through the use of the Internet (Kader et al., 2022; Solangi et al., 2018). Due

to pandemic COVID-19, there is a need to use online learning. Most universities, even in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), have implemented online learning and teaching to ensure the whole semester runs smoothly. Therefore, lecturers use a variety of online teaching methods such as Google Meet, Webex, Microsoft Teams, and many other platforms to teach students. Online learning has many advantages, including the ability to customize and outsource courses, as well as the ability to learn at a time and place that is most convenient for the students (Kader et al., 2022).

There are, however, a number of drawbacks that students encounter when they choose to take their education online. This covers mental health, but the most essential factor is whether or not students are satisfied with their online studies. If not, this may lead to the feelings of detachment from their educational institutions and they may feel demotivated continue learning through online setting (Marler et. al., 2021). Many university students struggle to manage their time effectively so that they can study and finish their assignments by the due date, and they are concerned that online learning will have an adverse effect on their academic performance, resulting in depression, a lack of motivation, and a loss of interest in learning. Additionally, some students experience stress because of technological issues including interrupted Internet access, a lack of knowledge with the platform and systems being utilized, unfriendly teaching methods, and a lack of support from family members and lecturers (Kader et al., 2022).

The successful implementation of e-Learning systems depends on how the program is performed by students and instructors (Thongsri et al., 2019). Though online teaching is one of the promising alternatives to the physical classroom, students show a negative perception of online learning behavior, which might be a significant consequence that is responsible for psychological distress. There are various causes of e-Learning crack-up such as course quality, the usability of content, technological ease, availability of technical assistance, and the likelihood of interaction with peer students (Penna & Stara, 2007; Ssekakubo et al., 2011). If this situation is not handled well, it will cause stress, depression, and worry for many of the students, which could have a negative impact on their mental health.

To cover the academic gap caused by the pandemic's reality and the resultant statewide closures, online learning has been used internationally as an alternate teaching or learning technique during the COVID-19 quarantine. Due to the extensive spread of the virus across nations and even continents as well as institutional closure, more than 80% of students worldwide no longer attend their universities and colleges including Malaysia. Higher education institutions in Malaysia have been forced to use alternate teaching strategies in light of this circumstance in an effort to close the gap during these challenging times. In order to replicate a virtual classroom where the instructor and the student can converse and complete the curriculum's learning objectives remotely, online learning or e-learning systems have been implemented. Teachers have been challenged to become familiar with new teaching techniques by using platforms like Zoom, Webex, Google Meeting, and Skype to present the curriculum to the students. Although unfamiliar with such experiences, students enrolling in full instruction programmes experienced a system shock and feel anxiety and depressed (Ngampornchai & Adams, 2016).

National Health and Morbidity Survey 2017 (NHMS 2017) revealed that out of 284,516 respondents surveyed, 50 percent of the students claimed that they experienced some forms

of psychological distress, such as examination-related stress, problem with tutor, a family and peer-related issues. In 2018, the number of university students in Malaysia increased and committed suicide due to academic stress in university (The Star, 2018); a local university student succumbed to depression and committed suicide by jumping off the hostel due to the high level of academic stress. Stress, anxiety, and depression have been identified as the most common mental health issues among university students. Depression and anxiety were shown to be prevalent in 15.6 percent of undergraduates and 13 percent of graduate students, according to earlier research (Eisenberg et al., 2013; Yusof et al., 2019). Another study by Md Nordin & Abu Talib (2009) discovered that 503 Malaysian university students (34%), on average, showed signs of poor psychological health (Yusof et. al., 2019). Many people, notably students, have suffered psychological consequences as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Liu et al., 2020; Wang & Zhao, 2020). University students experience stress, worry, and despair even when there is no epidemic because of the constant demands of study. In spite of the COVID-19 epidemic, there are still many studies that need to be done to examine online learning in certain circumstances (Kara, 2021).

Literature Review

This section discussed related variables that will be proposed by researchers including psychological wellbeing, technical and financial issues, burden of assignments and non-conducive learning environment.

Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being is defined as a combination of positive circumstances in all aspects of life, such as contentment, both physically and spiritually, as well as optimal function. In another study, mental well-being is defined as a positive and sustainable mental state that allows individuals, groups, and nations to thrive and flourish (Agrawal & Krishna, 2021; Clarke et al., 2011). Meanwhile, individuals' happiness, subjective well-being, and eudaimonic well-being are frequently used to define it (Agrawal & Krishna, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2001). On top of that, psychological well-being is more than just feeling good all of the time; it also includes negative emotions such as frustration, failure, and sadness, all of which are natural aspects of life (Shahira et al., 2018; Stamp et al., 2015). Negative emotions can have a negative impact on health and happiness over time. If not handled properly, this can have negative effects on an individual's mental health. Positive emotional and social support, on the other hand, is critical in developing psychological well-being (Siddiqui et. al., 2016). A person with a high psychological well-being will live a happy life, be satisfied with their professional and personal lives, and be capable and well-supported (Panahi et al., 2016).

The current study builds on theoretical and empirical research on the impact of COVID-19 on the global community's psychological well-being, particularly in the areas of education (Alsalman et al., 2021). While university students, among others, were directly affected by the pandemic, the current study looks into how several factors have influenced the psychological well-being of UiTM university students. There are several factors can affect psychological well-being among university students such as stress, anxiety and depression. Previous research found that depression, anxiety, and stress were found to be 42.2%, 73.7%, and 34.8% among 443 students in Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), respectively (Shahira et. al., 2018). According to this study, academic pressures such as assignments, exams, final year projects, and facilities are the major sources of stress for students. The results of stress

include depression and anxiety, and the inability to cope with stress has been identified as a sign of psychological distress.

On the other hand, prolonged use of digital tools, a lack of face-to-face interaction, and a heavy load of assignments have resulted in anxiety, a change in sleeping habits, distraction, and a stress-building environment, potentially leading to depression (Al-salman et al., 2021). There are also several reasons students getting stress for instance financial difficulties (Andrews et. al., 2004; Chai et. al., 2004), academic pressure (Chai et. al., 2004, Abdul Hamid et. al., 2005, Mahfar et. al., 2005 & Bullare et al., 2009), unconducive study environment (Mahfar et. al., 2005 & Bullare et al., 2009) and poor relationship with classmates (Abdul Hamid et. al., 2005; Bullare et al., 2009). Because online learning is already linked to feelings of alienation, loneliness, and a negative attitude toward the learning process (Rovai & Wighting, 2005), online learning in the context of the pandemic Covid 19 is certainly cause for concern for students' mental health (Marler et. al., 2021). Hence, the current study to assess the level of psychological symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and stress in order to gain a better understanding of psychological distress among university students in Malaysia.

Technical and Financial Issues

Online or remote education indicates that students are geographically separated from instructors and require a method of delivery (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020; Wang et al., 2013; Wilde & Hsu, 2019). Technology mediates students, lecturers and the design of learning environments (e.g., space where learning occurs) can have a significant impact on learning outcomes (Bower, 2019; Gonzalez et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2013). For decades, researchers have studied online education, and good online teaching is the result of rigorous instructional design and planning (Hodges et al., 2020). Unfortunately, because of the COVID-19 epidemic at the beginning year 2020, many students worldwide were forced to switch from face-to-face instruction to an online learning environment in the middle of the semester. Despite the fact that online learning provides students and lecturers with schedule flexibility and the ability to study at home, not all students enjoy studying online. Some of them must deal with problems such as technological and financial issues. A prior qualitative study discovered that a shortage of internet connections was an issue among students because so many individuals were using the internet at the same time (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020).

Furthermore, some participants expressed stress because they were unfamiliar with some online tools in the similar study. Despite the fact that few students cited unfamiliarity, the following comment illustrates the challenge for a student who has never had an online educational experience. Some of the students had never taken an online course before, so this was extremely stressful for them. They understand that their generation is supposed to be very tech-savvy, but in their personal experience, they are not, and this process was a struggle that they hope to never have to go through again. In addition, students may also have to share the internet connection with other school-age siblings who are also teaching and learning at home. Due to financial issues, some students must share technical gadgets such as laptops, computers, tablets, and others with their siblings.

Burden of Assignments

Homework or assignments are seen by many educators as a necessary reinforcement tool in the learning process. Whether it is used for advanced training, strengthening a topic that has

been taught or as an introduction to a new topic, it is traditionally believed that homework is an important method in the process student learning (Hong, Wan, & Peng, 2011). However, too many assignments led to stress among students. It parallel with the findings of the study by Omigbodun et al (2006) who has discovered that stressors such as excessive school works and other physical facilities problem led to psychological distress among Nigerian university students. These factors disturbing the students live emotionally and mentally and affected their study performance. In addition, most of education institutions implementing online learning during pandemic recently determined as contribute factors to worst condition when students cannot cope with the online learning norm.

In past study stated that students complained too many assignments to do, while they lack social support from their friends because of limited physical interaction among them and cause them to suffer emotional disturbance (Irawan, et al., 2020). Some students try interacting with lecturers to consider about assignments that they think so heavy to reduce emotional disturbances among them. It is supported by a study by Abdul Rahman & Rosli (2021) who found that respondents agree that the assignments are increasing become a challenge for students throughout their online learning. This situation is also caused by the difficulty of discussing with friends and lecturers online.

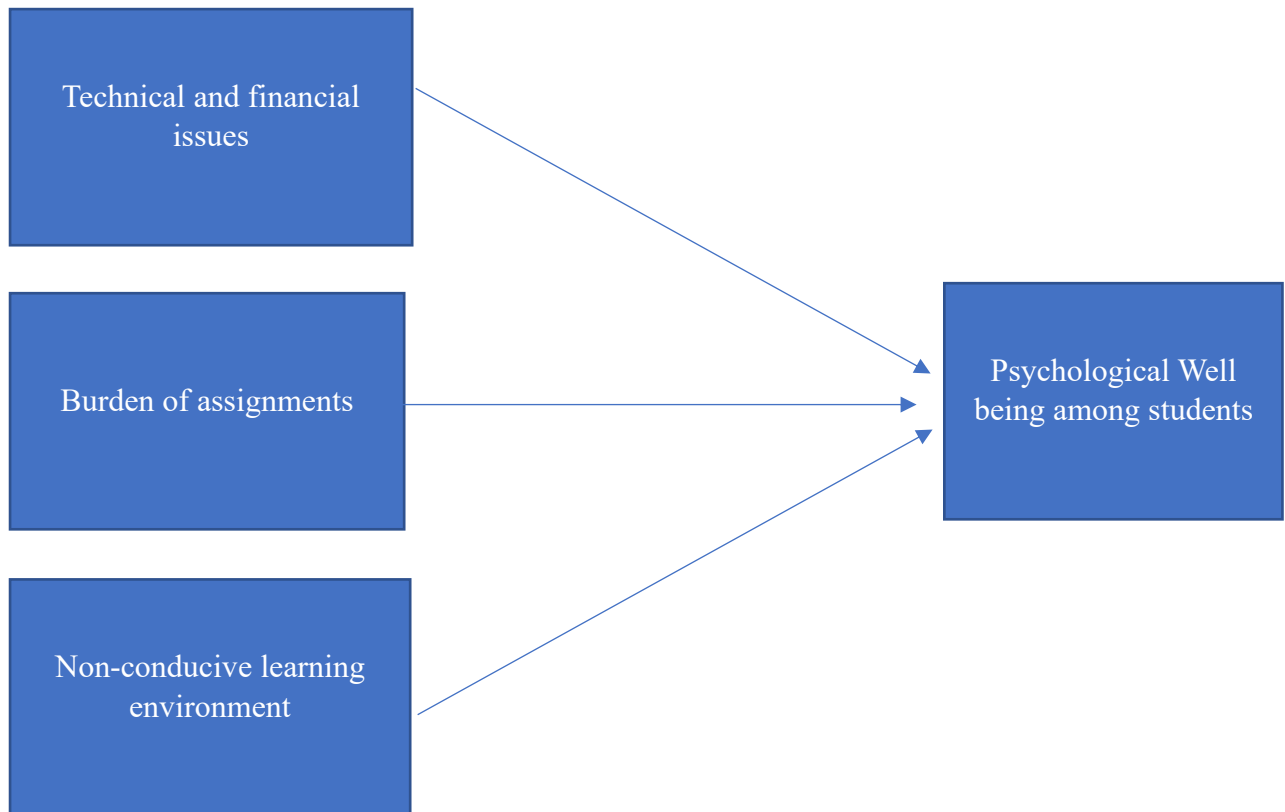
Non- Conducive Learning Environment

To enable students to be equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills, the learning that takes place needs to be effective. One of the crucial factors is the learning environment (Walberg 1981; Moos 1979). The learning environment refers to the space allocated for learning (Tessmer & Harris 1992) whether it is a classroom, a science laboratory, an open area or an office. It is a place where learning takes place either in a social, psychological, and pedagogical context that affects student achievement and attitude (Doppelt & Schunn, 2008). Thus, the learning environment includes all the variables involved in the learning context whether physical, social, or psychological. It can stimulate students to be involved in the learning process and is also able to influence student behavior in addition to the formation of their cognitive skills or perceptions. However, the learning environment during the pandemic is focused on the home which is where online learning takes place. Limited space and social interaction influence the learning effectiveness and affected the students' performance (Yan et al., 2021). Some students have yet to fully experience the learning process because the classroom only appears in digital form. They need time to adapt to the online learning environment and experience a more conducive learning environment (Wang & Zhao, 2020).

Some students felt that on-campus learning was conducive because the regular on-campus routine help them stay motivated and develop a discipline. Others say that online classes, which offer the flexibility to study from home, are a more efficient way to stay on track and balance a busy schedule (Keane, et al., 2022). On the other hand, not every student has the same perspective. There are some of those whose homes do not provide an adequate setting for study. This could be because they reside in a small house with limited space and are unable to concentrate on the lesson when taking an online class since they are constantly interrupted by their younger siblings at home. This supported by previous research, it has been determined that some students have expressed their frustration and distress about a non-conducive learning environment at home that has negatively impacted their academic performance during online learning. They have to deal with issues like an inadequate home

environment and many distractions, which raises the stress level of the students (Ali et al., 2022).

Proposed Research Framework



Discussions and Conclusions

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented health crisis that disrupted education institutions globally by pushing online activities to the online mode. Campus closures and social distancing measures introduced to stop the spread of the virus deprived students of the socializing aspect, negatively impacting their mental health. The pandemic experience was particularly challenging for international students who were devoid of adequate social support (family, friends) their domestic peers had. Despite the current pandemic that is hindering education worldwide, online learning based on internet services has become available and universal, facilitating the learning system. Colleges and universities use online resources to continue their educational journey through software applications such as Goole Meeting, Cisco Webex, Zoom and Microsoft Teams. An improved communication technologies enable easy learning systems since access to social media is a beneficial source of information and communication. Online technology is seen as an active element of both students' and lecturers' learning systems. During the pandemic era, several nations used television broadcasts and online sources to promote distance education.

E-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic made it possible for university students to complete their studies as per the academic calendar in Malaysia and all over the world, nonetheless, factors such as 'poor time management' and 'fatigue' increased their vulnerability to experience poor emotional well-being. Further studies and research should

be carried out in order to confirm which drivers influencing psychological well-being of students. Many findings from past studies imply that academic advising and counseling services should be more readily available during digital studies to support students. Additionally, academic advisors and university counseling services should expand supportive counseling services for female students and students with average academic performance to improve their online learning experiences and mental well-being. For students' online learning to be successful, the university must hold training sessions to improve students' initiative, encourage students to actively interact with lecturers and classmates, and improve students' self-study ability. Besides, through training sessions, schools need to help students realize the usefulness of online learning, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The online learning system should be built with a friendly and easy-to-use interface and diverse learning programs through the E-learning system, should improve system accessibility, should allow students to actively register, and should be flexible about the time to use.

In future, this research would like to suggest conducting this study among students in university or any colleges to test the relationship between technical and financial issues, burden of assignments, non-conducive learning environment towards psychological well-being.

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