

Challenges of Online Teaching for Full-Time Lecturers in UiTM while Studying Part-Time

Nurul Aishah Abd Rahman, Noor Safwan Muhamad, Hamizah Mokhtar, Muhammad Isha Ismail, Ahmad Amzari Yaccob

Civil Engineering Studies, College of Engineering, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Pahang Branch, Jengka Campus, Malaysia

Corresponding Author Email: naishah.ar@uitm.edu.my

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Abstract

The inclination of individuals with careers to concurrently work and study, including lecturers, is driven by the organizational necessity to advance professionally. In higher education, online teaching is a norm approach used in engaging the learning process between lecturers and students with extensive education. The new norm allows lecturers to have more flexible working hours than the conventional approach. However, the workload as a lecturer indirectly increases, and it has an adverse impact on the work-life balance due to the lecturers pursuing doctorate studies. This study aims to identify full-time lecturers' challenges with online teaching while studying part-time. A semi-structured interview was used to get feedback from experienced full-time lecturers who have completed their studies or are still studying. The findings of this study can assist researchers and lecturers in developing strategies to overcome the challenges of completing their studies.

Keywords: Challenges, Feedback, Part-Time, Postgraduate, Work-Life Balance

Introduction

Postgraduate studies in Malaysia have gone through significant changes recently. The Ministry of Higher Education, under its Minister, Datuk Seri Noraini Ahmad, aims to make Malaysia the global hub for higher education by 2025 (Khir, 2022). The number of postgraduate students at public and private universities has also increased tremendously. Some of the reasons include easy access to scholarships and study loans, hoping for better career opportunities, and universities' success in promoting lifelong learning by introducing well-sought academic programs. According to the statement made by the Higher Education Minister, enrollment for master's and PhD degrees in public universities has increased by 16.9% and 44%, respectively, in 2021 as compared to the previous year. The increment resulted in a total enrollment of 72173 local and 27309 international postgraduate students (Muhamad, 2022).

As of August 30, 2022, the statistics shown on their official website confirmed that Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) had produced 34565 graduates with master's and PhD degrees. The active enrollment includes 7544 local and 1489 international postgraduate students (UiTM, 2022). Lecturers play an important role in educating and training students in

universities. The importance of lecturers holding higher postgraduate qualifications is deemed necessary as part of lifelong learning and preparing to share advanced knowledge with the students and progress well in their careers (Sidek et al., 2012).

Increasing trends of lecturers can be seen enrolled in PhD programs year by year to ensure that they are still relevant and can contribute to the body of knowledge. A PhD is also one of the minimum requirements for lecturers to progress in the academic field. At UiTM, PhD qualification is a must before lecturers can be promoted to Associate Professor and above. Although lecturers are eligible to apply for scholarships offered by the university and enroll in full-time study mode for a PhD, some lecturers prefer to choose part-time study due to discrete reasons such as location, unwillingness to bond with a service contract, and family matters.

Besides teaching and learning, lecturers are also accountable for engaging in consultations, research, publishing papers, and administration (Yaacob et al., 2017). Achieving a work-life balance is crucial for lecturers to ensure that they may complete their studies without compromising their professional performance, or conversely, that their academic pursuits do not interfere with their work. This study aims to identify the challenges faced by full-time lecturers in completing their PhD journey by studying part-time. The feedback from respondents through semi-structured interviews will discuss the challenges faced throughout their study period and how they overcame them. The outcomes of this study can be a reference for new lecturers who plan to further their studies part-time.

Literature Review /Background

Online Teaching / ODL

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, many universities worldwide, including Malaysia's public and private universities, have switched their delivery methods from face-to-face to online, sometimes known as Online Distance Learning (ODL). These unanticipated transitions are crucial to ensure that the teaching and learning process is not interrupted even though the lecturers and students are separated physically (Abdelsattar et al., 2022). Positively ODL allows greater flexibility for the lecturers to rearrange classes to suit any unforeseen circumstances due to the pandemic and ease the students in obtaining the online resources for their study and through recorded teaching videos. Some institutions and organizations also offer cheaper fees for the students to join any courses and conferences due to the shift from face-to-face to online platforms (Sarmah, 2022).

Although there are many benefits of ODL, distance is a critical limitation that can hinder the learning process. Through e-platform such as Zoom, Google Meet, Webex, etc., it is hard for the lecturer to monitor and learn more about their students, learning styles, and capacities which are essential to ensure effective knowledge transfer. The limitation of participation from students is one of the reasons that students are easily distracted by external elements at home (Svatos et al., 2022). Besides, the laboratory and teamwork activities are challenging to conduct online, so the lecturer is more productive during class sessions. The pros and cons of handling online teaching or ODL are also proven from the demonstration of a complex mix of good and adverse emotional reactions due to the implementation of ODL by 1340 science, technology, engineering, and mathematic (STEM) students (Minichiello et al., 2022).

As part-time PhD students, those lecturers will face challenges in both situations. As a lecturer, they must ensure active participations of their students while as a research student, they will face problems to access laboratories for experimental works and to engage with

public or authorities for data collection due to restrictions meant for Covid-19 mitigation measures (Sinha and Bag, 2022).

Balancing Studying and Working

Other than tuition fees and the cost of buying study materials, costs for accommodation, food, and travel will become the obstacles that hinder someone from furthering their studies at the postgraduate level. Some companies might offer to fund for their staff to further studies if it is related to their business, while others use their funding. In Malaysia, options are available for lecturers to further studies under scholarship or study loans. However, funding for further postgraduate studies is limited, requiring some to continue studying part-time. Other than being unable to secure funding, personal matters make them go for part-time studies, such as not wanting to lose seniority for career progression. Working while studying part-time will cause lots of physical, mental, and economic stress, especially for those who are already married and have kids (Barron et al., 2007; Bugaj et al., 2019)

A study from the United Kingdom found that the stress level of Postgraduate students is significantly high compared to the general population. Generally, Postgraduate students always have issues with self-confidence, lack of social support, and poor work-life balance that can develop into anxiety and depression if not controlled appropriately. The study suggests that universities and supervisors develop peer support networks and discuss with them to improve their self-confidence, thus promoting a balanced lifestyle (Casey et al., 2022). As an intervention, future research should attempt to detail the difficulties faced by Postgraduate students of a different gender at various time points of study.

Clinical academia, which is those in the medical field but involved with research-intensive institutions, are usually facing difficult career paths with more significant stress brought on by high levels of competition, performance expectations, uncertain funding, and a lackluster sense of job security as compared to clinical-only pathways. In addition, the women in clinical academia must deal with a lack of accurate role models, inappropriate mentoring, intolerant of caring responsibility, and covert discrimination like losing ground during maternity leave (Salem et al., 2022). Thus, the institutions should assist in ending these gender prejudices by encouraging more working women to be involved with research activities in balancing studying and the working environment.

A study made by the School of Applied Psychology in Australia discovered substantial correlations between work-based benefits and demands, facilitation and conflict, and engagement and well-being. Their findings imply that working while studying could have both favorable and unfavorable consequences on university life for students. Engagement and well-being were explored as outcome factors; however, other outcome variables, such as performance, development, and achievements, as well as the effects of work combined with study, need to be evaluated (Creed et al., 2015)

Locally, a case study from International Islamic University of Malaysia found that many postgraduate students at the university have had experience working while attending classes. They appeared to comprehend the significance of working while learning and its effects. The primary drivers for this behavior are financial support, personal growth, and the desire to gain practical work experience for the future. Working while attending university has both positive and negative effects. Therefore, advice and suggestions for students who must work while they are in school include being dedicated, disciplined, responsible, and having effective time management (Faizuddin, 2018).

Most of the research conducted locally and globally found that lecturers who are doing part-time Postgraduate study will significantly affect their performance. The participants in the Focus Group Discussion stated that fatigue, not getting enough sleep, and exhaustion are the main causes of physical health problems. Most working students struggle to balance employment and education, especially when their schedules overlap. Students who believe their jobs are time-intensive also believe that this interferes with their academic performance by making them feel more exhausted, giving them less time to study, and forcing them to skip classes. Additionally disrupted are the mental and emotional components, particularly after receiving a reprimand. That would cause people to overthink potential bad outcomes in study and working situations. As a result of their hectic schedules, they will be less likely to socialize with their classmates. Financial issues constitute the main hurdle from enrolling in Postgraduate studies, according to the quantitative data, which is qualitatively consistent with the comments of the participants who identified these issues as a prevalent source of difficulty in their everyday lives. The respondents are also having trouble setting aside enough money each month to cover their basic needs as well as their costs associated with their education. The absence of financial and moral support from working students' immediate families is another factor that affect the balance between studying and working (Balacuit and Lpio, 2022; Creed et al., 2015; Hill et al., 2022; Solmiano et al., 2022; Yaacob et al., 2017).

Methodology

Design of the study

The study on the challenges faced by full-time lecturers in completing their PhD journey with studying part-time was carried out using interview techniques. This research method is appropriate for issues requiring complex questioning and considerable probing. It is also widely used as a method for qualitative research. A semi-standardized interview was chosen for this study with the design of less structured and flexible questions that permit the spontaneous issues raised by the interviewee to be explored (Ryan et al., 2009). It encourages the interviewee to voluntarily contribute detailed information rather than answer structured questions (Rahman et al., 2020). Therefore, problems are explored from individual perspectives.

In designing the interview protocol, the various target populations were identified in the earlier stage of this study. The target population of this study is individuals who are directly involved with applying for part-time study while working full-time as a lecturer in UiTM.

The individual interviews start with an introduction to the topic and open-ended questions. The questions introduced to the interviewee are: (1) What are the challenges you face while teaching online during the semester and studying simultaneously? And (2) What steps do you take to overcome the challenges? If the interviewee could not elaborate on the questions, the interviewer would ask a follow-up question. The interviews' discussions are summarized and given to the interviewee for validation.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained from the interview session was analyzed using the thematic analysis technique, as shown in Figure 1. There are six phase processes involve during conducting the analysis (Clarke and Brown, 2014) It starts with familiarizing the data obtained from respondents during the interview session for further exploration in phase one. This process requires initial recording observation by write down the data. Next, the initial

code was generated to organize systematically and potentially relevant to the research question in the second phase. For the third phase, coded data are examined to identify similarities and overlaps. The similarity data were clustered together to form potential themes or complex codes as a pattern of meaning in qualitative data. After completing the third phase, the potential themes required review by referring to other relevant documentation or guidelines in the fourth phase. In the fifth phase, the themes were commencing with defining and naming to independently coded answers accordingly. The final phase is to produce the reports of the analysis.

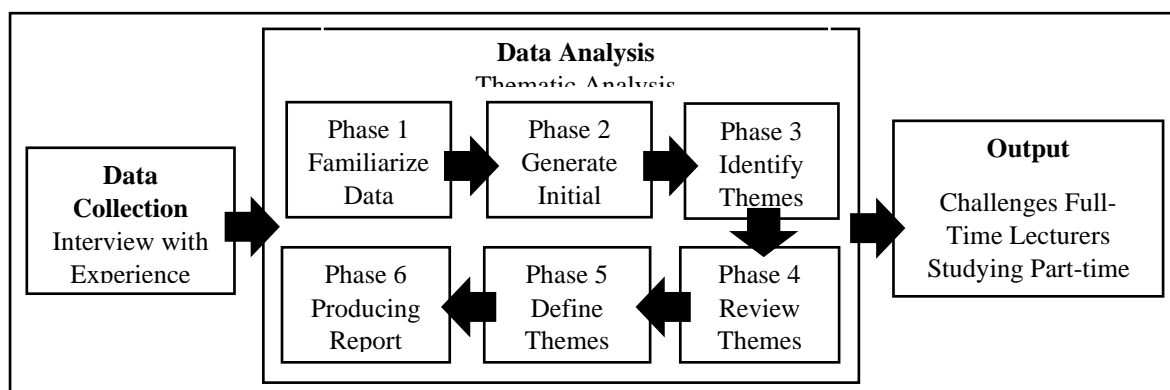


Figure 1. The framework of research methodology

Result and Discussion

Table 1 presents a comprehensive overview of the respondents' detailed information. The interview material collected from participants has been condensed and organized through analysis to establish the underlying themes and subthemes of the difficulties, as depicted in Figure 2. The obstacles can be classified into two main categories: 'internal issues' and 'external issues'. The inherent limitations of the study serve as a contributing aspect to the subject of internal issues. The feedback provided by the respondents indicates that the challenges depend on ineffective time management, writing problems, insufficient funds, and feeling demotivated. The external issues encompass several challenges that impede timely completion and hinder concentration on academic pursuits, including family commitment, teaching commitment, consuming time preparing online modules, and excessive holding of side positions. The succeeding subsections provide a discussion of the details pertaining to each parameter. Table 2 aligns the responses provided by the participants with the corresponding topics and sub-themes.

Table 1

List of respondents' profiles

No	Respondent ID	Years Studying Part Time	No. of position hold while working
1	Respondent 1	4	5
2	Respondent 2	4	3
3	Respondent 3	2	3
4	Respondent 4	4	4
5	Respondent 5	8	4
6	Respondent 6	5	6
7	Respondent 7	3	2
8	Respondent 8	5	6
9	Respondent 9	5	6
10	Respondent 10	3	3
11	Respondent 11	3	2
12	Respondent 12	5	6
13	Respondent 13	3	1
14	Respondent 14	6	4
15	Respondent 15	4	1

Table 2

The challenges per respondents

Theme	Subtheme	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5	Respondent 6	Respondent 7	Respondent 8	Respondent 9	Respondent 10	Respondent 11	Respondent 12	Respondent 13	Respondent 14	Respondent 15	Total no of ticks
Internal	Ineffective Time Management	√	√	√			√		√		√		√	√	√		9
	Writing problems	√	√									√					3
	Insufficient funds											√					1
	Feeling demotivated											√		√			2

External	Family commitment	√											√				2	
	Teaching commitment	√			√		√					√						4
	Consuming time preparing online modules												√			√	√	3
	Hold many positions in institution																√	1

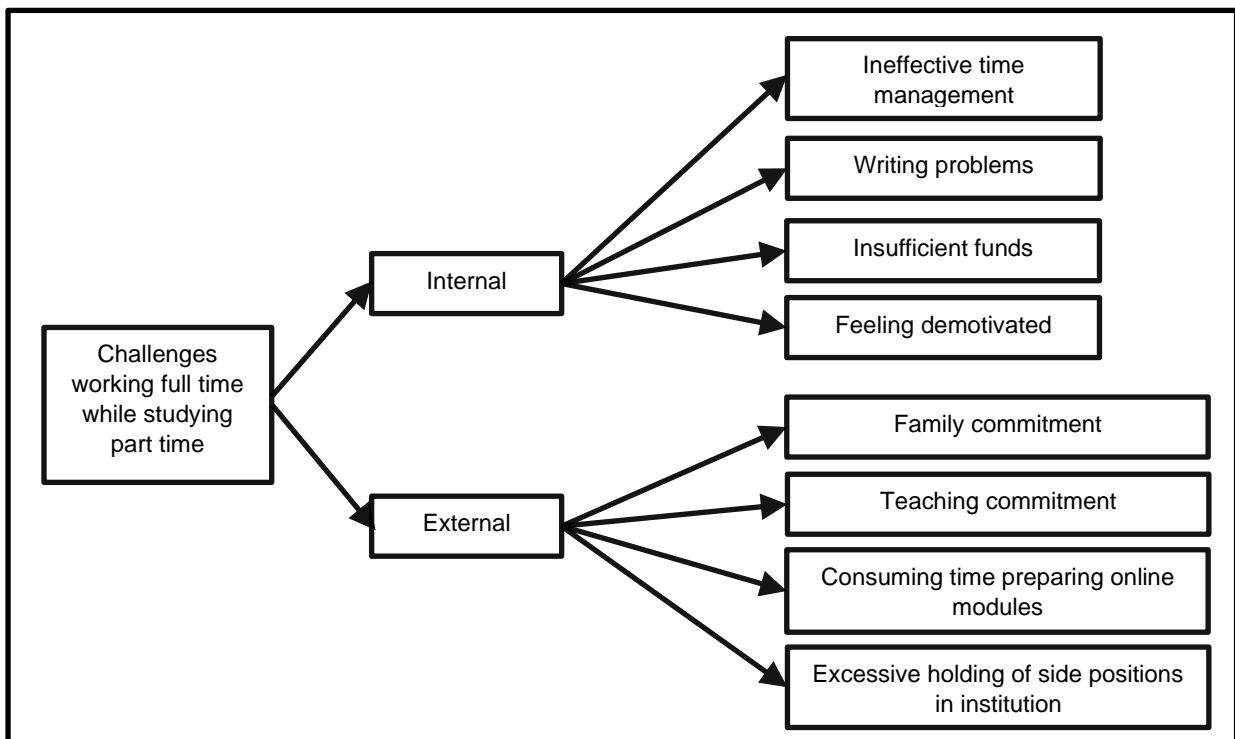


Figure 2. Overview of the challenges faced by full time lecturer while studying part time.

Ineffective Time Management

Effective time management is crucial for achieving a harmonious balance between academic pursuits, professional obligations, and personal life commitments. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that not all endeavors unfold according to expectations. Nonetheless, adhering to a predetermined schedule remains essential to fostering adherence to the proposed strategy. The lecturer's dedication to prioritizing part-time studies is significantly constrained due to their teaching responsibilities. Typically, individuals in this context engage in around eight hours of daily work, encompassing various responsibilities

such as delivering lectures, performing administrative tasks, participating in faculty events, and managing or attending obligatory programs. If the lesson is canceled daily, it is necessary to schedule another session out of working hours which may entail working outside of regular working hours. Every semester, students face the recurring difficulty of allocating a regular amount of time each day to engage in studying activities. In certain circumstances, educators decide to allocate their weekends or extend their daytime hours for the purpose of engaging in study activities, a practice that may have implications for their overall well-being. The PhD level is a comprehensive phase of education focused on conducting original research, encompassing the critical examination and assessment of established and emerging theories in a specific discipline in contrast to the undergraduate level. Despite the time constraints faced by part-time students, a previous study conducted by (Balacuit and Lopio, 2022) found that students who worked a substantial number of hours per week attained comparable academic performance to those who worked fewer hours. Examples of the respondents from the summary of the interview are as follows:

"My class ends after working days until 6 pm, and sometimes I need to replace the class at night. It is tiring. I have toddlers that need to handle after working hours. My post requires a research grant as a university KPI." (Respondent 1)

"Priority should be given to teaching because it is my main duty. The workload became crucial during MCO as I held posts as a resource person (RP) and lecturer in charge (LIC). My duty requires me to revise the syllabus, propose the suitable module and handle student intern during MCO." (Respondent 10)

Writing Problems

Publication in a journal with high-impact factors is crucial for research and studies, as it establishes the worth of the author or researcher and enables them to achieve greater recognition and publication quality in comparison to articles with low-impact factors. Furthermore, it is imperative that students adhere to the university's criteria by disseminating their research through publication in a high-impact journal. The literature review is a crucial part of scholarly journals because it accurately classifies each piece of literature, establishes the progress made toward a particular research inquiry, creates a connection between the intended research and other studies, and identifies research gaps (Mohammed and Ahmed, 2019). Nevertheless, prior to producing their manuscripts or articles, part-time students require additional time to read the other journal. As a result of this circumstance, the individuals in concern have difficulty producing or completing the articles within the designated period, hence necessitating an extension of the academic semester. The writing difficulties are also associated with the challenge of deconstructing the research subject into interconnected ideas that need to be embraced. In essence, the writing process necessitates that students or researchers develop coherent concepts with consistent material pertaining to the primary objectives to generate outcomes of superior quality and accomplish the target of locating relevant articles. Examples of the respondents from the summary of the interview are as follows:

"Difficult to focus. The writing process becomes pending during the semester. The writing process needs consistent reading and writing for at least one hour daily to ensure I am always on track. But I can't make it." (Respondent 2)

Insufficient Funds

Engaging in full-time lecturing while simultaneously pursuing part-time studies offers certain financial advantages for individuals, as it provides them with a means to cover their academic expenses. Unfortunately, the situation is distinct for students who possess a strong dedication, as they may encounter the need to allocate their earnings towards various financial obligations such as bank loans (e.g., personal loans, vehicle loans, credit cards, etc.) and family expenses to cover the costs of their educational pursuits, including tuition fees, on a semesterly basis. The overall costs vary based on the classification of the institution, with private universities exhibiting notably higher expenses compared to their public counterparts. The variation in tuition fees across public colleges indirectly impacts the financial situation of students. Examples of the respondents from the summary of the interview are as follows:

"I used my own money to pay study fees, obtained samples at a laboratory to collect the data, and paid for conference fees to publish my articles. Much money needed to spend along my study journey." (Respondent 11)

Feeling Demotivated

The lack of substantial development, despite diligent study efforts over a specific period, serves as a prominent factor contributing to students' demotivation and fatigue. Experiencing a decline in motivation or a waning of interest is a prevalent phenomenon, sometimes attributed to challenges in making progress or stress. Nevertheless, it is imperative for students to promptly address this emotional state to regain focus. This can be achieved through engaging in practices such as meditation, yoga, or even taking a leisurely walk to alleviate the impact on their academic pursuits. Furthermore, it is recommended that students cultivate a positive mindset or attitude to enhance cognitive abilities and promote more effective and efficient thinking processes. Examples of the respondents from the summary of the interview are as follows:

"I felt demotivated every time I had a meeting with my supervisor. The issue is I do not have any progress to report. It took quite a while to collect the data and lost for no reason. I'm burning out and exhausted. I got my anxiety in sometimes, which affects my mental health." (Respondent 13)

Family Commitment

One of the primary difficulties encountered by married students who are enrolled part-time is the responsibility to fulfill family commitments while simultaneously striving to maintain a balance between their many tasks, including fulfilling household responsibilities, attending to the needs of their children, managing academic obligations, and meeting work-related responsibilities (Abolanle & Feyisola, 2014). Typically, individuals allocate their time to engage in family activities as a means of fostering relationships following their professional obligations. These activities often involve the preparation of meals and the meticulous care of children, particularly those in the infancy or toddler stage. Limited time constraints might result in heightened restlessness, hence impeding one's ability to concentrate and allocate sufficient time for studying. The responsibility of independently managing children in a long-distance relationship becomes of utmost importance. The increased demand for domestic necessities is a challenge for certain students, as it hinders their ability to allocate time for academic pursuits. Examples of the respondents from the summary of the interview are as follows:

"I have three toddlers with an age range of 1 to 7 years. So, I must prepare their dinner and shower after returning from the nursery. Normally, I also sleep with them because 1 of my kids is still breastfeeding." (Respondent 1)

Teaching Commitment

In their capacity as full-time lecturers, they are assigned a teaching schedule for each semester and are expected to cover all the topics outlined in the lesson plan established at the beginning of the semester. Throughout the course of the semester, it is necessary for the university or faculty to arrange student development programs or mandatory activities, which may result in full-time professors having to cancel their classes. In addition, the occurrence of a public holiday serves as a justification for the cancellation of lessons. Besides, alternative class sessions are scheduled outside of regular working hours to ensure that students are able to attend makeup classes. Examples of the respondents from the summary of the interview are as follows:

"I temporarily serve on another campus. However, I have to report and do administrative work on my campus. For example, I teach on campus at Shah Alam and must prepare the final question. At the same time, I also need to report, prepare documentation, and monitor students under my supervision on my campus at Pahang." (Respondent 6)

"If there is a public holiday in the midweek during class, I need to replace the class. The problem is, I can't replace it at night because I have kids and I am long-distance marriage. So, I need to settle replace either during weekday or weekend to complete the syllabus." (Respondent 9)

Consuming Time Preparing Online Modules

Currently, the utilization of online systems has been prevalent in lecture classrooms, particularly in response to the implementation of movement control orders (MCO) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The transition from traditional classroom instruction to online teaching necessitated significant efforts on the part of educators to acclimate themselves to various online platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Webex, and others. Students who perceive a sense of disconnect or barrier between themselves and the speaker may encounter challenges or difficulties. Certain students perceive the comprehension of syllabus material for the novel course to be arduous in comparison to traditional in-person instruction. Examples of the respondents from the summary of the interview are as follows:

"Online assessments are tough for me as I'm teaching laboratory class. More time is required to find reliable sources to make sure the new assessment done is equivalent to assessment before MCO." (Respondent 14)

"Extra time needs to spend in preparing the online module for class and rearrange an assessment approach during MCO." (Respondent 15)

Excessive holding of side positions in institutions

The tasks of a lecturer encompass both instructional duties and administrative coordination within the institution or faculty. Additionally, it is necessary for them to assume the role of committee members for brief or impromptu occasions. In certain programs, it is also necessary to undertake the preparation of documentation to meet accreditation requirements, fulfill university documentation standards, and engage in collaborative efforts with local or international institutions to meet key performance indicators (KPIs) or university

requirements. Examples of the respondents from the summary of the interview are as follows:

“In this cycle, around two years, I need to hold a high management post. Some of my friends also post more than one as a committee member. In the meantime, we are struggling to prepare a document for accreditation and receive external panels visit.” (Respondent 4)

Conclusion

The present study aimed to identify the problems associated with part-time learning while working as a full-time instructor. To achieve this objective, interviews were conducted with a sample of fifteen teachers who were directly involved in part-time studying during the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) phase. The studies have classified the issues into two contributing components, namely internal and external. Among the several internal issues, bad time management emerges as the most formidable challenge when juxtaposed with other concerns, including writing difficulties, inadequate financial resources, and diminished motivation. Time restrictions significantly influence the timely completion of a Ph.D. program, as well as the maintenance of continuous progress during the duration of the program. The primary factor contributing to the difficulty experienced by respondents was their dedication to teaching, which surpassed their commitment to their families. This was seen in the significant amount of time they spent preparing online modules and their tendency to have multiple side positions. Therefore, this research enhances the current understanding of the obstacles encountered by full-time teachers who opt to pursue part-time studies. It offers a comprehensive compilation of elements that impede their progress, serving as a valuable resource for aspiring lecturers who intend to pursue further education on a part-time basis.

Corresponding Author

Nurul Aishah binti Abd Rahman

Civil Engineering Studies, College of Engineering, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Pahang Branch, Jengka Campus, Malaysia

Email: naishah.ar@uitm.edu.my

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