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ONLINE LEARNING DURING PANDEMIC COVID-19: AN INSIGHT FROM A RURAL AREA

Normaizatul Akma Saidi[1], Naziatul Aziah Mohd Radzi[2*], Noraida Saidi[3], Siti Fatimah Ab Ghaffar[4], Hasif Rafidee Hasbollah[5] & Mazne Ibrahim[6]

[1]   Pensyarah Kanan, Fakulti Hospitaliti, Pelancongan dan Kesejahteraan, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia. Email: akma.s@umk.edu.my

[2]   Pensyarah Kanan, Fakulti Hospitaliti, Pelancongan dan Kesejahteraan, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia. Email: aziah.mr@umk.edu.my

[3]   Pensyarah Kanan, Fakulti Perakaunan, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Kelantan, Malaysia. Email: noraida069@uitm.edu.my

[4]   Pensyarah Kanan, Fakulti Hospitaliti, Pelancongan dan Kesejahteraan, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia. Email: fatimah.g@umk.edu.my

[5]   Pensyarah Kanan, Fakulti Hospitaliti, Pelancongan dan Kesejahteraan, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia. Email: rafidee@umk.edu.my

[6]   Pensyarah, Fakulti Hospitaliti, Pelancongan dan Kesejahteraan, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia. Email: mazne@umk.edu.my

*   Corresponding Author

Article Info:

Abstract:

The pandemic COVID-19 has transformed traditional face-to-face learning into online learning. Implementation of online education is vital to stop the spread of the virus. Nevertheless, despite the advantages offered by online learning, it also presents challenges to students living in rural areas. The present study aims to explore the insight of online learning among rural students. Therefore, this study explores qualitative insight to obtain in-depth knowledge of online learning in rural areas. This study conducted an online survey with 21 students in rural areas. The qualitative content analysis produced four relevant themes of online learning: easy-to-find information, internet disruption, lack of focus, and difficult understanding. This study contributes to online learning literature in a rural area context.

Keywords:

Online Learning; Rural Area; Insight; Internet Disruption; Lack Of Focus; Difficult To Understand

Introduction

Globally and in Malaysia, the novel coronavirus illness 2019 (COVID-19) has caused widespread disease and concern. The lockdown imposed during COVID has had a negative impact on educational chances, in addition to healthcare and economic losses. This pandemic has already consumed every part of human lives, including education, which is one of humanity's most basic needs. During the previous pandemic, online schooling was primarily viewed as an optional method of education. Still, the pandemic time caused it to take the position of being the primary mode of learning. As a result, educational institutions are now using online platforms to assist students in their learning avenues (Mulyanti, Purnama & Pawinanto, 2020).

With the development of COVID-19, numerous governments have ordered the closure of all educational institutions. Since they had to protect their students from viral exposures, which are likely in a highly socialising student society, educational institutions have come to a halt. Due to the spreading contamination, schools in Malaysia and a few other impacted nations were shuttered in early February 2020. Nearly 75 countries, however, had executed or announced the shutdown of educational institutions by mid-March (Muthuprasad et al., 2021).

According to UNESCO, 186 countries would have imposed nationwide closures by the end of April 2020, affecting 73.8 percent of all enrolled students (UNESCO, 2020). Even if the only means to limit the development of the COVID-19 by interrupting the transmission chain are lockdown and social separation, the closure of educational facilities has impacted a huge number of students. Students in rural locations have significant hurdles when it comes to online learning.

Traditional educational activities rely on a facilitator's direct interaction with the students. This can be done in a large or small group setting to teach any of the three domains: cognitive, psychomotor, and affective. During the COVID-19 crisis, however, online learning has emerged as the only viable modality of instruction for school and college students (Nolan & Owen, 2021).

Although online learning opens up a new world of fascinating possibilities for many developing nations, it is not without drawbacks. Remember that many students from rural locations have limited or no access to the internet. While students with easy access to the internet and the right tools can continue their studies without issue, it concerns those who lack these resources. Additionally, limited internet bandwidth and technological issues prevent teachers and students from using online courses, reducing involvement and disruption during online lectures (Surkhali, & Garbuja, 2020).

As a result, certain courses, such as medical education, are more difficult and demanding since they require hands-on training and soft skills that cannot be fully represented by online learning. Therefore, this study aims to analyse students' opinion on online learning as a

modality of education during the pandemic COVID-19 when it was widely adopted, particularly among students in rural area.

Literature Review

There are several studies based on the significance and efficacy of the implementation of online learning that considered it a good teaching method and it is widely being appreciated by the learners (Abbasi et al., 2020; Eltayeb et al., 2020; Mamdouh & El-boudy, 2022). There are numerous reasons for its general acceptance; ease of use, flexibility and better control over the environment are some of the few reasons that can be used especially for learners. However, in spite of its multiple advantages, there are quite a few limitations of online learning such as social isolation, lack of student-teacher interaction, connectivity issues, etc.

In other study, students regarded the online learning method to be beneficial and it had increased their understanding of the subject. They also indicated that their technological and computer skills have improved after completing the online learning programme. In addition, the students in the study group were generally satisfied with the online learning application as a teaching tool (Narayan, 2018).

In addition, other findings also offer support to beneficial of online learning among students. The online learning has grown in popularity over the last decade because it offers greater flexibility in terms of time and place, study pace, accessibility, active access to a greater variety and quantity of knowledge, and reduced monetary expenditures (Khurana, 2016).

The negative side of online learning is difficulties in understanding the subject. Most students find it difficult to follow the learning process effectively due to a lack of supporting facilities and infrastructure. This shortcoming led to lack of development in student's knowledge because they are bored with the learning process. Moreover, technology-based distant learning necessitates a unique approach to planning, implementation, and evaluation. Therefore, students require special attention in the execution of distant learning, particularly good and sufficient infrastructure, an acceptable internet network, and self-motivation to be able to participate in an independent learning process. Nevertheless, uneven access to the internet network, high quota costs, and unequal command of science and technology are all issues with distant learning (Syam & Achmad, 2022).

Then, it is thought that online education discriminates against low-income students since they cannot afford the equipment and technology needed. Because they cannot afford a dependable internet connection or the gear needed for online connectivity, many students in underdeveloped and emerging nations are at a disadvantage. Due to the COVID-19 lockout, the use of online modules has significantly impeded teaching and learning (Qazi, et al., 2020).

Lastly, while the flexibility, independence, and convenience of online learning may have helped students, the student-centeredness of the learning process necessitates students' greater responsibility for learning in that they are expected to be self-regulated, self-motivated, and self-disciplined (Kemp & Grieve, 2014; Fajar & Larasati, 2022). There are variety of self-regulated learning tactics that can be employed by the students, such as imagery, note-taking, knowledge searching, and attention concentrating (Adam et al., 2017).

Methodology

Design
Using traditional content analysis, this study sought to learn about students' perceptions of their online learning experience. In traditional content analysis, a significant volume of material is systematically transformed into a well ordered and short summary of essential findings. At each analysis phase, data is abstracted from its manifest and literal substance to latent meanings by analysing raw data from an MS Excel sheet and establishing categories or key themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Participants
Twenty-one students residing in rural areas, were selected using purposive sampling. The participants included were all women. The participants were provided with a questionnaire through an online Google form to assess their perceptions of online learning during COVID-19.

Ethics-Related Matters
Each participant willingly agreed to take part in the survey. No official ethical approval was required because participants' identities were kept private.

Data Collection
The data for this study were collected through online questionnaire with open ended question on the online learning experience.

Data Analysis
Data were recorded on a MS excel sheet. The researcher has employed content analysis in this context to extend students' perceptions of online learning. Conventional content analysis was used to examine the open-ended questions. The term "content analysis" refers to a wide range of textual investigations that often entail comparing, contrasting, and categorising a set of data (Schwandt, 1997; Creswell & Miller, 2000). By using content analysis, it is better able to uncover trends in learners' attitudes toward online learning. After reviewing all of the responses to the open-ended questions, the researcher developed the study's themes and sub-themes.

Results and Discussion

Easy to Find Information
The internet has a very large wealth of information and is easily accessible to do revision, reference for exercises and answer exam questions. Additionally, during the Covid-19 lockdown, students may explore several web sites to gather knowledge on a certain subject to aid their understanding. E-books and YouTube videos were the most often mentioned sources by students. Other resources included educational websites, telegram channels (a platform that allows administrators to broadcast public messages to an unlimited number of people), Facebook pages, educational apps, research papers, and WhatsApp groups (Mahdy & Sayed, 2022). The responses from the students for this theme as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Theme One (1)

No.	Theme: Easy to Find Information	Respondent
1.	It makes it very easy for students to find information	13
2.	Easy to get information	14

Difficult to Understand

The most common problem faced by the students during online learning is difficulty in understanding the material provided. Some students find it difficult because the explanations given online are unsatisfactory compared to face-to-face, on the other hand, not all students have a good network when studying online, so the material presented is not clear (Puspita, 2022).

To aid students in their self-learning, it is critical to improve the learning materials available to them. The learning materials should be creative, easy to grasp, and engaging, as well as meet the learning objectives of the curriculum. Instead of providing pdf or PowerPoint files, theoretical parts should be delivered as live streaming through video conferencing software. The utilisation of interactive video-streaming in real-time mirrors traditional face-to-face teaching to some extent. It enables teachers to share their screen and transition between different teaching methods, as well as allowing students to participate and react to their questions. PDF and PowerPoint files, on the other hand, offer little or no interactivity and do not respond to students' questions (Mahdy & Sayed, 2022). The responses from the students for this theme as depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Theme Two (2)

No.	Theme: Difficult to Understand	Respondent
1.	It is difficult to understand some subjects because they need to be taught face to face	8
2.	Very inconvenient because it is difficult to understand a subtopic being studied	9
3.	Lack of understanding in some topics	10

4.	Difficult to understand	18
5.	Difficult to understand for some subjects	12
6.	It is difficult to understand a subject	11

Internet Disruption

In this difficult time, ensuring digital equity is critical. All digital devices, the internet, and Wi-Fi are not available and accessible to all teachers and students. Lack of suitable digital tools, no internet connections, or shaky Wi-Fi connections can all cause a lot of problems, and many students may miss out on learning opportunities (Dhawan, 2020).

Students face numerous problems when learning online. Inconsistent internet connections, according to students, have a significant impact on their attentiveness. During class, they had trouble with an inconsistent internet connection. This is one of the causes for students' inconsistency in online classes (Al-Amin et al., 2021).

Tariq and Fami (2020) agreed, adding that a stable internet connection is required to participate in the online lesson. According to another study, over half of students are unable to engage in online classes due to internet and device issues (Islam, Khan & Quadir, 2021).

The poor connectivity was also cited as a major impediment to online learning in other studies. The situation is considerably more difficult for individuals who live in rural areas. The findings emphasise India's digital gap and lack of fairness in access to uninterrupted internet, which is causing problems for many students. The second and third restraints were data limit and data speed, both of which were imposed by internet infrastructure limitations. These findings suggest that if a country wishes to go toward online education, it must first improve its internet infrastructure (Muthuprasad et al., 2021). The responses from the students for this theme as depicted in Table 3.

Table 3: Theme Three (3)

No.	Theme: Internet Disruption	Respondent
1.	Okay, I just often get internet disruption to make it difficult for students to understand more easily	7
2.	I am more comfortable using teaching and learning online. However, there are some obstacles such as high internet data usage and need strong internet to access Google Meet / Microsoft team and university's website	5

3.	Basically, online learning is one of the effective learning processes but sometimes it happens ineffective and inefficient due to the weakness of the internet.	6
4.	Struggle with the internet. Stress	4
5.	It's a bit complicated in the early stages due to internet connection. But now I'm used to it. And I hope to be able to come back to campus so that I can communicate with my friends face to face	20
6.	There are many challenges and risks that students have to face, especially internet	21
7.	Saves time and sometimes makes trouble due to unhelpful internet network problems	17
8.	A little difficult when line conditions are poor	16
9.	Sometimes difficult because of internet network problems	15

Lack of Focus

Students cannot pay proper attention to their lesson and they claimed that they did not understand the lesson properly through online platform (Al-Amin et al., 2021). In addition, research by Panday (2020) mentioned that students suffered from a lack of attention during the online class. Therefore, they did not understand the lesson properly through this new learning method.

Online classes should be engaging, interactive, and dynamic. Teachers should give students time limits and reminders to keep them alert and focused. To the greatest extent possible, efforts should be made to humanise the learning process. Students should be given individual attention so that they can easily adapt to this new learning environment. There are variety of tools to communicate with students, such as social media and numerous group forums. In addition, texts, various messaging apps, video chats, and other means are also available as communication tools between teachers and students. Furthermore, content should be designed to allow students to practise and refine their skills. Therefore, online programmes should be designed to be creative, interactive, relevant, student-centered, and group-based (Dhawan, 2020). The responses from the students for this theme as depicted in Table 4.

Table 4: Theme Four (4)

No.	Theme: Lack of Focus	Respondent

1.	I cannot concentrate 100% in learning	3
2.	Lack of understanding and focus on what is being taught due to surrounding factors	1
3.	Need high commitment and disruption of environmental factors in the home	2
4.	Lack of focus. Need high commitment but distraction from home surroundings	19

Conclusion

The implementation of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic still has many shortcomings that must be re-evaluated for better future education. The results of this study indicate that the online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic provide wealth of information. Nevertheless, online learning also gives drawbacks in term of difficulties in understanding the subject, internet disruption and lack of focus.

Therefore, the findings of this study are essential for future research in reducing the problems of online learning in order to better promote an interactive and engaging online learning experience for students. In addition, it is able to eliminate the hurdles that isolated students face in online learning. As a result, students' intrinsic motivation to participate in the subject and make meaningful contributions can be boosted.

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