

# Lecturers' Readiness and Emotional Presence on Online Teaching Data in a Malaysian University During COVID-19

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## ABSTRACT

This article presented a survey data on the lecturers' perception on online teaching during the COVID-19 outbreak. The study adopted a quantitative approach with an open-ended survey questionnaire to establish lecturers' readiness and their emotional presence in adopting 100% online teaching from home. The questionnaire consists of two sections, quantitative and qualitative. As for the quantitative section, the data comprised of demographic characteristics of research respondents and the qualitative section consisted of staff feedback. The data inclusive of 180 academic staff of Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Malaysia and was analysed using SPSS 22.0. Therefore, these results offer invaluable evidence for university's management as well as policy makers to make further improvements of online teaching and learning as well as lecturers' readiness in online teaching.

**Keywords:** Online teaching, Higher Education, Lecturers' Readiness, Feeling, COVID-19

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, the world was shaken by the declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) as the infectious disease rapidly spread outside China, infecting and claiming millions of lives [1]. In Malaysia, there are currently 20 public universities and 41 private universities with enrolment of more than 1.2 million students [2]. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has affected the higher education sector in Malaysia significantly [3], since the government had taken up decisive actions to mitigate the spread of the virus to a full-blown pandemic resulting in schools and universities shutting all across the world by forcing people to stay home [1]. This caused both lecturers and students in HEIs to face with multiple challenges in teaching and learning since the pandemic transformed the landscape of learning and teaching around the world,

particularly in universities. Currently online learning, which has its origin in what was traditionally known as distance education has become a new norm in learning in the higher education sector. All teaching and learning are performed synchronous or/and asynchronously [4], and learning materials are made available to students online. During the COVID-19 semesters, students access their learning materials, participate in any online learning activities and forum, download and upload assignments as well as sit for online assessments through the universities' Learning Management Systems (LMS) such as Moodle [5]. In order to ensure successful online learning to take place training, facilities and infrastructure are some of the critical issues to be taken care of by the universities. This will ensure the lecturers to be ready to face the new norm of teaching online; to deliver effectively in ensuring the

course learning objectives, whether they are cognitive, affective or psychomotor domain based to be achieved successfully. Adequate facilities are an essential factor for online learning to be effectively meaningful [6]. The fast-paced, constantly changing, dynamic and innovative online learning environment forces lecturers to think outside of the box in enabling students to have a meaningful learning experience [7]. Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) is one of the public universities in Malaysia, also faces some challenges related to online learning since this is the first time ever that the learning session will go fully online. The university is located in the east coast of Malaysia, comprising 6 faculties with 628 lecturers. Thus, understanding their demographic profile, exposure on techniques of online learning, facilities at home and infrastructure are important tools to find out issues so as to ensure remote learning can be executed effectively and efficiently.

This study is carried out to gather information on lecturers' readiness towards online learning practices in Malaysia higher learning institutions specifically at UMT amidst the COVID-19 pandemic; looking into some points of concerns specifically on the lecturers' readiness and their emotional presence. The next section describes the methodology involved in the study which includes design of the study, participants and data collection. An online survey is conducted among UMT lecturers to provide some insights into the study. Section 3 discusses the results obtained from the survey and Section 4 concludes.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to UNESCO [8], due to Covid-19 pandemic, students who attended online learning are in very difficult and stressful circumstances and often without any real teaching or support from their teachers. Therefore, the teachers must overcome all the problems that occur in online learning responsively so that the learning continues to achieve the targets set although it is also worrying that teachers and students have been unaware of digital inequality, especially as it has increased due to the pandemic.

However, teachers and educators also face various challenges in the online classes on how to handle the access to quality of education and how to utilise technology for effective teaching. Niemi and Kousa [9] in their study at one local upper secondary school in Finland found that the teachers faced several challenges in conducting online classes during Covid-19 pandemic such as non-authentic interaction and a lack of the spontaneity that in-person teaching provides, also, they were worried

about students' progress although teachers quickly learned to use alternative platforms, but interaction through it was not of as high quality as face-to-face interaction.

In the Philippines, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a sudden shift from face-to-face classes to distance learning education in early 2020. Alea et al. [10], in their study mentioned the main problem with distance learning because there are still more basic education schools that are not equipped with the facility and training to adapt to the distance learning education particularly during difficult times. Also, more experienced, and IT-specialized teachers coped best in the new condition and teachers' need to equip themselves with knowledge on technology because technical challenges in distance learning have had a negative influence on student motivation and learning.

In relation to challenges with online teaching, teachers also must overcome many challenges concerning technology itself, pedagogical changes, governmental guidelines, and students' individual needs. In the interviews with in-service teachers in Massachusetts [11], this group of teachers had never taught online before. Therefore, they felt themselves unprepared and needed a lot of support as compared to teachers who frequently used technology who were better with this transition from face-to-face to online interaction. Majority of the academician who had no training in online education claimed that they need effective teaching support in order to improve the pedagogy and quality content of knowledge in online teaching and learning environments. Also, motivation is also needed for the different purposes, preferences and behaviours in this new trend of teaching and learning [12].

Education system in Indonesia has also shifted to online learning since early 2020. However, the teachers were not ready as this transition was carried out too sudden with lack of coordination. They felt that the learning process through this online system has not been implemented optimally. They also encountered several challenges for example, missing students, tasks given to the students were not completed and some of the students just copy and paste answers from friends or the Internet [13].

Lecturers at higher education institutions also have to adapt to the new normal of teaching and learning due to Covid-19 pandemic. The readiness of lecturers in online teaching explores their vulnerability in their profession because of the adjustment they need to make from face-to-face interaction to online lecture setting [14]. Therefore, further analysis of the readiness and problems encountered by the university lecturers in conducting online learning and its solution is very urgent to do. This study aims to parse this problem for future research,

professional development, and policymaking considerations to cope with this new normal.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed methods approach, which primarily used online surveys and open-ended questions gathered from 180 lecturers from one public university in Malaysia. The participants are randomly selected for this study to discover the participants' readiness and perceptions in conducting online classes during Malaysia movement control order (MCO), in response to the COVID-19 pandemic starting from 18 March 2020. The researchers decided to use a mixed methods approach as this approach can provide more solid evidence compared to using only quantitative or qualitative methods alone [15]. The quantitative data was analysed using SPSS 22.0 and qualitative data was analysed using ATLAS.ti 8.0. The questionnaire used consisted of 17 questions and the Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.94 which was highly significant at the 0.01 level.

In order to interpret the mean score of lecturers' emotional presence in designing online lessons offers the most relevant interpretation of data [16].

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Results

Table 1 shows the demographic profiles of the respondents involved in the survey. A total of 180 lecturers participated in this study. The respondents profile comprises gender, age, size of household during movement control order (MCO), employment status and exposure to online teaching. The respondents comprised 65 (36.1%) male and 115 (63.9%) female lecturers ages ranging between 21 to 60 years old.

Table 2 displays the respondents' readiness to teach online classes. Eighty-one (45.5%) respondents claimed that they do not have a proper workplace at home and 88 (49.7%) claimed that they were not comfortable with conducting video conferencing at home although 122 (67.8%) of the respondents have internet connection at home. For smartphone users, 92 (52.1%) have data plans below 40 GB and only 3 (1.7%) respondents have no internet plan at all.

Table 1. Demographic details of the respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (N = 180)	Percentage
Gender	Male	65	36.1
	Female	115	63.9
Age	21 – 30 years	2	1.1
	31- 40 years	85	47.2
	41 – 50 years	75	41.7
	51 – 60 years	17	9.4
	More than 60 years	1	0.6
Size of household during movement control order (MCO)	1-5 people	136	76.4
	6-10 people	40	22.5
	11-15 people	1	0.6
	More than 15 people	1	0.6
Employment status	Permanent	160	88.8
	Contract	20	11.2
Exposure to online teaching	A lot	29	16.1
	Not much	133	73.9
	Never	18	10.0

Table 2. Analysis of lecturers' readiness to teach online classes

Variable	Category	Frequency (N = 180)	Percentage
Proper workplace at home	Yes	47	26.4
	No	81	45.5
	Maybe	50	28.1
Comfortable with video conferencing at home	Yes	50	28.2
	No	88	49.7
	Maybe	39	22.0
Have Internet connection at home	Yes	122	67.8
	No	58	32.2
Internet data plan	Unlimited data plan	61	33.9
	Above 40 GB	24	13.3
	Below 40 GB	92	51.1
	No internet plan	3	1.7

Table 3. Analysis of lecturers' perceptions on teaching online during Malaysia movement control order (MCO)

Variable	Category	Frequency (N = 180)	Percentage
Do your courses involve practical work?	Yes	107	59.4
	No	73	40.6
Can the practical work be conducted online?	Yes	17	14.5
	No	69	59.0
	Not sure	31	26.5
Do you think that the practical work MUST be conducted using a conventional approach (hands-on, face to face etc.)	Yes	104	88.9
	No	13	11.1

Table 3 shows the analysis of lecturers' perceptions on teaching online during Malaysia movement control order (MCO) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. From the survey, 107 (59.4) respondents said that their courses involve practical work and 69 (59.0%) of them do not think that these practical works can be conducted online. One hundred and four (88.9%) of the respondents also believe that the practical work must be conducted using a conventional approach such as hands-on, and via face-to-face interaction.

This research wanted to discover the emotional presence of the lecturers in designing online learning during the Malaysia movement control order and the level of feelings are illustrated in Table 5 below. Table 4 marks the interpretation for levels of feelings in designing online lessons, in which it was divided into three categories; low, average and high.

The obtained data showed that the levels of negative feelings, for instance, unhappy (1.99), hopeless (1.95) and angry (2.32) were low (mean score less than 2.33). However, the lecturers do feel highly self-conscious (mean score of 3.68) in handling online classes. Feeling optimistic in designing online classes was the highest mean recorded (3.96). It is important to note that several other feelings were reported by the lecturers which fell under the average range, namely discouraged, anxious and overwhelmed.

Table 4. Interpretation of Mean Score

Mean Score	Interpretation
1.00 to 2.33	Low
2.34 to 3.66	Average
3.67 to 5.00	High

Table 5. Levels of lecturers' emotional presence in designing online lesson during Malaysia movement control order (MCO)

Feelings	Mean	Standart Deviation	Level
Unhappy	1.99	1.04	Low
Hopeless	1.95	1.00	Low
Discouraged	3.16	1.05	Average
Angry	2.32	1.05	Low
Self-conscious	3.68	0.88	High
Anxious	3.30	1.00	Average
Optimistic	3.96	1.10	High
Overwhelmed	3.06	1.01	Average

In finding the reasons on the basis of those feelings, an open-ended question was asked. Most of the lecturers felt overwhelmed and discouraged since they felt that practical classes must be carried out in order to achieve the psychomotor domain of the courses' learning outcomes. The lecturers believed that laboratory and practical sessions 'needs to be done during face to face sessions', by giving some reasons like 'students need to use machines in this course'; 'there's a lot of calculations and the best way to learn is by hands-on and face to face interaction'; 'ship simulation must be done in the lab' and 'designing online psychomotor assessments will be super challenging, since all of the apparatus are in the lab'.

Figure 1 showed the needs of lecturers from three different fields in having conventional classes. The

majority of the lecturers who insisted to have face-to-face class came from the applied science field (46%) while lecturers from the fundamental science field came second (40%). The other 14% belonged to the lecturers of social sciences backgrounds and the only two programmes that chose to have the conventional lessons were from Counselling and Accounting Programmes. These two programmes must strongly adhere to their professional boards.

Meanwhile, there were four reported difficulties encountered by the lecturers while working online during MCO. The issues were internet connectivity, unsuitable working environment, lack of/outdated computer hardware and knowledge on online teaching. Figure 2 provided the information on these difficulties and the data showed the differences between gender.

The issue of internet connectivity was reported to be the biggest stumbling block with 70 comments being made regarding this problem in the open-ended question. Within the issue of an unsuitable working environment, 75% (N = 24) of the respondents were female lecturers and only 25% (N = 9) were male lecturers that encountered this problem during the MCO. There are 21 lecturers (19, female; 2, male) also claimed that hardware is one of the problems in conducting online classes. Finally, knowledge on online teaching is also one of the major obstacles in online teaching stated by 23 female lecturers and 17 male lecturers.

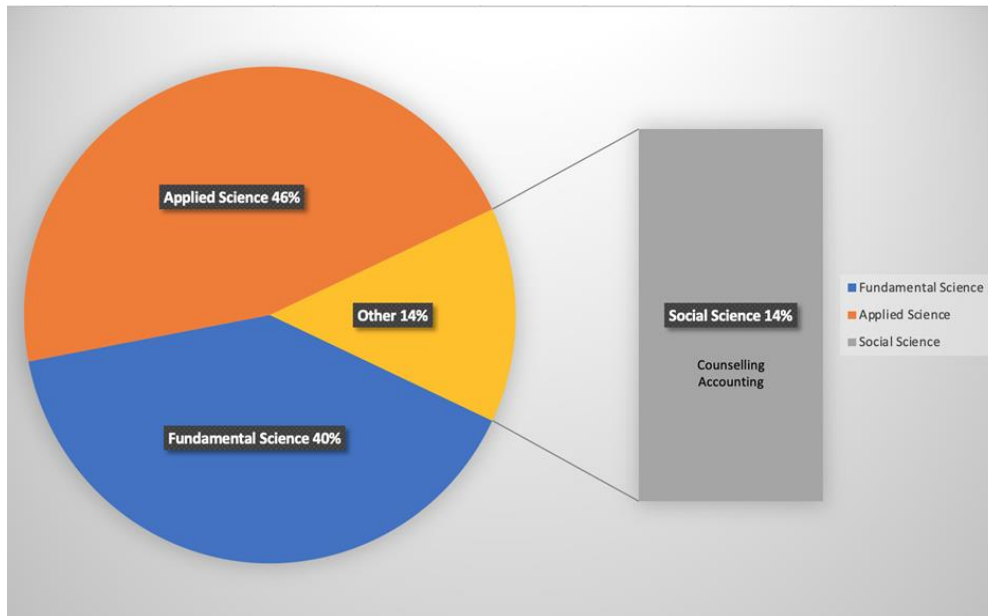


Figure 1. Needs of Conventional Classes according to Fields

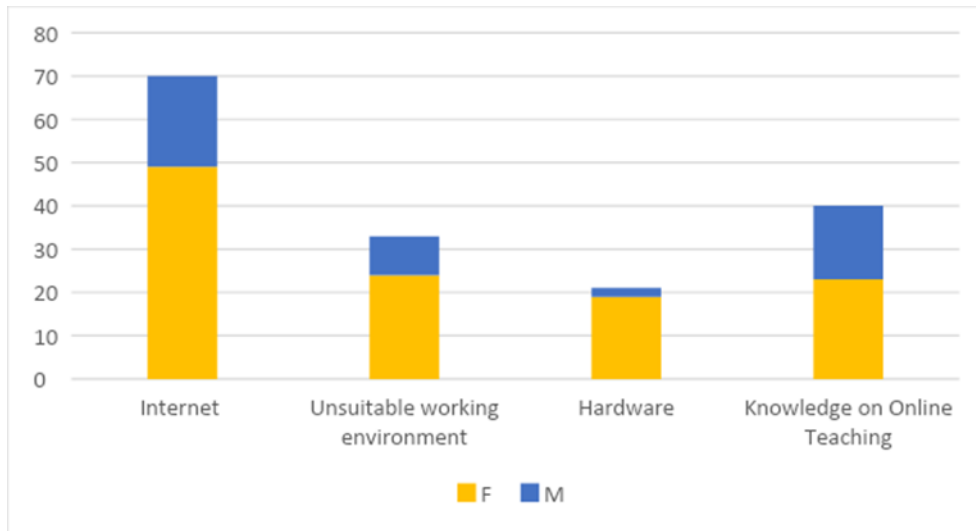


Figure 2. Difficulties encountered while working online during Malaysia movement control order (MCO)

In another open-ended question asked, the lecturers listed a few issues encountered in delivering lectures to all students using online approach. The major issue which was mentioned the most was internet connectivity. Some comments were as follows.

*“Some of my students do not have internet connection and coverage at their rural hometown”*

*“Not all students are online as they may have weak Internet coverage”*

*“Because I stay at Kampung [village], so the internet is slow”*

*“Even with unlimited internet access at home, I find that the internet traffic is unfortunately slow due to everyone is using it at home”*

*“I plan to conduct online synchronous class, but after wasting 30 minutes trying to establish connection with all my students, I ditch my plan.”*

*“Web conferencing needs big data usage. And not all students have good Internet coverage in their hometown.”*

Lecturers also reported that having a non-conducive working environment hampered their synchronous online classes. Some of the issues were listed below.

*“I don’t have a proper working space that I could convey my online lecture and I have a 4-month-old baby, two boys that are very loud.”*

*“Not comfortable to teach in front of my noisy kids”*

*“Since MCO is during school holidays, my (parents’) house has more than 23 people inside. Finding a quiet place is impossible.”*

*“Can somebody sponsor me a good working chair, please?”*

Not only that, another big issue that was reported by the lecturers was the lack of suitable computer hardware to conduct online classes. Hardware includes personal computers, laptops, microphone, camera, speaker and other related equipment.

*“Not everyone has the complete hardware (e.g. laptop, speaker, mic, home Wi-Fi router) cater for online learning, not at home.”*

*“I only have a laptop at home with an old version of operating software. It cannot be used to download applications/software for teaching and learning purposes.”*

*“I don’t have good pc or laptop for online class as well as my phone’s storage is full”*

*“I use a lot of whiteboard, but I do not have the tools like tab or graphic tablets to sketch. It’s hard.”*

*“We have to share our laptops and smartphones with the rest of the family who have online classes.”*

There are clear indications of lecturers’ concern on the needs for them to be fully prepared for online classes. The preparation includes being technology savvy, understanding many online teaching applications and how to use them as well as managing undergraduates’ learning experiences. The feedback was reported below.

*“Need to have proper planning and need to develop course content to suit online teaching. Courses held by PBIA [UMT Training Unit] helped, but still, I need to study which is the best.”*

*“Tools in e-learning that were introduced during courses given can be sometime unpractical and require more preparation time, student not familiar with the application”*

*“I feel like I am a novice online lecturer. Though I have more than 20 years of teaching experience, I need to do a lot of preparation.”*

*“Yes, I attended courses to help me widen my knowledge on online apps, but I need to suit them with my own courses. Adrenaline pumping! Need to prepare!”*

#### **4.2. Discussion**

The transition of classroom interaction to online classroom during the COVID-19 Pandemic has significantly impacted all countries in the world. From all levels of education, educators must adapt using the new method of teaching using all kinds of alternative platforms such as Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp and Telegram within only a few months. This transition not only affected teaching and learning activities for educators and students, but included transformations in instructional strategies, technology readiness among educators in implementing online learning, support given by institutions, and the motivation of educators and students.

This sudden shift in teaching and learning is very challenging particularly to the educators as they were not prepared with the sudden transition from face-to-face classroom to online learning and this transition led to several obstacles in teaching and learning activities such as problems related to availability of a good internet connection, the condition at home and minimal interaction with the students [11].

Lecturers at higher education institutions also have to handle their emotions well as motivation is also needed to make sure effective teaching and learning can occur in this new normal education setting [12]. Although some lecturers claimed they are feeling hopeless and angry with the current situation, the teaching and learning activities still need to be conducted as the students are their main clients. Hence, the lecturers can use various pedagogies using online tools and alternative materials and resources to improve the online process of teaching and learning and to make sure the students receive optimal learning experience even though the teaching is conducted online.

Education institutions are also responsible to facilitate the teaching and learning activities to make sure everything will be conducted effectively and efficiently in this new normal setting. Continuous support to educators for example by providing professional development courses, access to good internet connection and an efficient learning management system can be fully utilised by the

educators and students. The education institutions also must be willing to invest in the facilities and equipment needed for online learning to accommodate the needs of educators as designing online learning with varied learning strategies is critical to successful online learning. The findings from this study can be useful for providing information to policy makers in Higher Education especially Malaysia on the lecturers’ readiness of using online for teaching and learning during Covid-19 pandemic. These findings also could be useful to improve the knowledge and performance of university’s staff. Also, researchers and policy makers in the field of higher education can identify what are lecturers’ perceptions in carrying out 100% online classes and find ways to overcome the problems regarding learning especially for students in rural areas because of the lack of good internet connections in their areas. Future research also needs to be carried out with more respondents from public and private universities to investigate the implementation and readiness of online learning among the lecturers.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study is to investigate and understand the factors related to lecturers’ readiness and their feelings on teaching online from home. COVID-19 outbreak has changed the education landscape in Malaysia and has given a significant impact on both the educators and the students. The findings reveal that the pandemic has affected the higher education sector in Malaysia significantly. Both lecturers and students in HEIs are faced with multiple challenges in teaching and learning. The effect was more severe in East Malaysia due to poor Internet connectivity for online learning. Nevertheless, COVID-19 also provides an opportunity to HEIs to reconstruct the education system and establish updated programmes and assessments. Online learning is very dependent on internet access and it is very challenging. This paper has discussed several factors that must be taken into consideration by lecturers in higher education institutions in order to perform more effective online classes namely, training, facilities and infrastructure, which may lead to the lecturers’ readiness and emotional presence. It is reasonable to conclude that internet connectivity and non-conducive working environment at home are some of the major challenges that were faced by the lecturers. Lecturers were worried on the issue of fulfilling the learning outcomes, particularly the ones which involved psychomotor domain. A number of tentative conclusions can also be drawn. Contrary to expectations, lecturers felt self-conscious in teaching

online which means that the lecturers were not only concerned about the technical condition of online learning technology, but they were also highly concerned on the social condition which coincided with those of Collins and Berge [17]. “Novice online lecturers” needed time to prepare themselves on the best tools in teaching different learning outcome domains and thus, future research might explore methods of effective content delivery for different learning outcomes. Not only this data could be useful to improve the knowledge and performance of university’s staff on online teaching, it can also be used by policy makers in the field of higher education on lecturers’ perceptions in carrying out 100% online classes and find ways to overcome the problems regarding learning especially for students in rural areas because the lack of good internet connections. This study can be a good indicator to evaluate lecturers’ emotional presence during the critical times. The conclusions presented here may be of practical importance to explore ways in which lecturers can balance their concerns for content delivery more effectively against learners’ needs for a sense of socially-constructed community in which they can successfully make sense of their learning, since meaningful learning is key to undergraduates’ success.

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