

Prolonged Online Learning: A Study on Students' Perspective for Teaching Improvement

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ABSTRACT

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, online teaching and learning have refashioned education into a different norm. Teaching, which was previously relied on instructors' sole role, is now shared with technology integration. The part includes assisting students in learning in a more versatile and open environment known as an online environment. However, this knowledge-gaining process method can occur in a prolonged or never-ending process if not conducted correctly. An instructor and students being away from each other have been posited to acquire less meaningful interaction, more work, and poor infrastructure, which can impede a smooth teaching and learning process. Hence, this study aims to discover students' perspectives on their ESL instructor's online teaching of English courses. The responses are sought to enhance the instructors' delivery skills and effectiveness. The reactions were retrieved through questions interpreted using coding and put into several themes. These findings will be helpful for the instructors to improvise their teaching skills aside from upgrading any possible ground matters to optimise the students' motivation in gaining knowledge online. This discussion is also for instructors to determine how best to deliver online teaching at home during this challenging period.

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1. Introduction

Covid-19 began at the end of 2019 and has not shown any stopping signs. The pandemic has refashioned the education field tremendously. Instructors and students communicate differently, carrying out tasks in an online mode or if it is to be performed physically, the interaction is done in a shorter time than before. Unavoidably but surely, teaching and learning are getting accustomed to the new norms, using an online method where classrooms can be in a hall, bedroom, porch or even while on the move. Since this online teaching and learning is relatively new in Malaysia, both instructors and students have familiarised themselves. For corporate organisations that deal with specific infrastructure, for example, telco providers, this is the time that they step forward in helping the students and the instructors to be able to continue with the learning process during Movement Control Order (MCO). One of the entities is YES, which offers a free SIM card for students under YTL Foundations (TheEdgeMarkets.com, 2020). The move is commendable in lessening students'

burden, particularly those who rely on mobile data to complete their online studies and keep connected with their instructors.

On the other hand, instructors put their best effort into ensuring that the teaching and learning processes can still be conducted. On the one hand, the instructors feel that they have done their best, and it satisfies them, but on the other, the students may experience it differently. Some suggestions are needed so that the gap between conventional teaching and learning processes and online learning is not too evident and detrimental. The obstacles include inconducive surroundings, weak internet connection, lengthy class sessions, mismatches of materials, and unsuitable delivery or assessment methods. To add, instructors and students need to consider the advantages and disadvantages of online classes to enhance the learning experience (Nicole, 2019). Since teaching and learning have been shifted to an online method, it is necessary to measure its effectiveness.

Literature has begun looking into the students' feedback and responses from the instructors about teaching processes and how they can improvise the delivery method. The students' attitude was investigated in terms of their affective and cognitive components of emotions, feelings, values, and thoughts. In contrast, the behavioural part is represented by the outcome of previous actions or experiences toward a person, entity, or event (Njiku, 2019). Studies are probing into the efficiency of available platforms used for pedagogical purposes (Abuhassna et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020). Nevertheless, students' perspectives are used to being left behind because they may lack the awareness or the metalanguage to comment in meaningful ways, making it not reliable (Fei & Ming 2008; Khamis, 2017). Also, Karuppannan and Mohammed (2020) remarked that the plus point of education being moved towards the technology completely is not cherished by many learners because they were still in need of the instructor's sensible touch, which only can be provided by traditional teaching and learning method.

In underdeveloped countries like Pakistan, Adnan and Anwar (2020) assert that online learning cannot produce targeted results because most students cannot access the internet due to technical and monetary issues. Today, our students are highly digital natives and use technology as an integral part of their everyday lives. The use of technology is a must for internet searching, socialising, and communication (Popovici & Mironov, 2015). Insofar, the literature indicates that undergraduates with more university experience tend to provide more substantive responses when solicited. Watson et al. (2017) argued on the limited representation of online students' preferences on what kind of approach work for them. The literature's scarcity could then be appropriated by investigating how students' perspectives could impact their instructors' online teaching delivery skills and effectiveness.

While the COVID-19 pandemic is an unusual impetus for encouraging online learning, it is still uncertain if students believe they are ready and willing to use online education to access high-quality learning (Muflih et al., 2021). Movement Control Order (MCO) which was introduced on March 18 2020 (First Phase) (New Straits Times, 2020), had indirectly forced education institutions to be obligated with the change of conventional classroom to an online version to avoid the spread of the disease. Through infection control and physical isolation due to the pandemic, students' motivation to learn online is crucial so that they are still engaged in the knowledge gaining progression. To add, increased enrolment in online programmes and courses has urged extensive studies on online teaching and learning that impact online students' learning. The matter validates the importance for this study to be conducted in terms of collecting reactions from the students themselves on how the instructors can further enhance their online teaching skills. Therefore, it is vital to find out students' perceptions regarding online teaching and learning method.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

As the COVID-19 pandemic pushes for online teaching and learning, ICT continues to develop, and new learning methods have evolved. With the shift towards online learning, technology will be in hand a lot. It requires instructors and students to be flexible in using them efficiently. Hence, technology acceptance and adoption are a necessity. Adapting the theory of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Davis et al. (1992), two influencing factors of the model become the

focus of the study (Figure 1). TAM deems that ones' intention to use a system is defined by their perceived usefulness and ease of use.

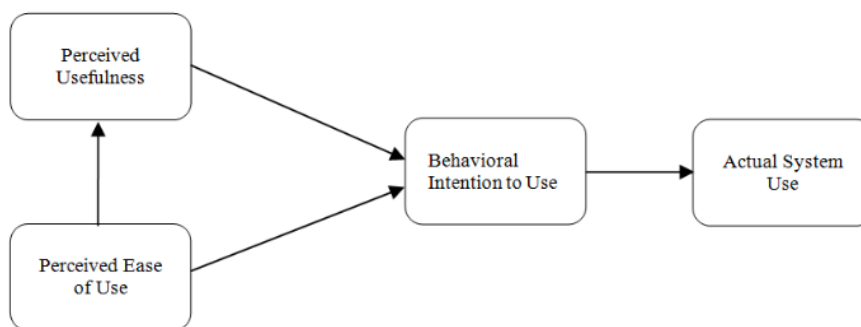


Fig. 1. Technology Acceptance Model (Davis et al., 1992)

Following the need to seek student individuals' ability to accept and adopt new technologies, the model focal factors, i.e., Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use by Sharples et al. (2005), are considered perspectives. In this study, the two elements are considered from the students' perspective. Perceived usefulness is how a student believes ICT will increase efficiency on tasks. The latter is the perceived effort to use a particular communication tool.

The first factor is the usefulness or practicality of the technology. The element touches on the benefits the students gain from using the method, especially in contrast to the traditional one. The second factor is the issue of comfort. It is about the students' adaptability to technology as they may face difficulties like weak internet connection, unsuitable devices or unfamiliarity with the platform used by the instructors. Once they experience problems, they are more likely to demotivate themselves to learn. Additionally, if it causes disruptions to the instructors' delivery process, the students tend to get bored and uninterested in learning.

2.2 Motivation and Related Studies in an Online Context

In this study, the primary question that asserts the idea of staying motivated among students will be the instructors' competence in engaging them in the online learning environment. Learning motivation is an important aspect to be considered since it leads to many successful and more apparent paths for the students. It is part of an individual student's effort to develop or retain their self-confidence (Seifert, 2004), so technology's quality, use, benefits, and drawbacks in online learning impact students' attitudes. Guay et al. (2010) defined motivation as "the reasons underlying behaviour" (p.712). Motivation can be classified into intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation refers to doing something naturally exciting or enjoyable, while extrinsic motivation is about doing something because it leads to an individual result.

A review of motivational literature in online contexts indicates the usefulness of Moodle in motivation enhancement. A study by Piteira and Costa (2006) on the usability of the LMS Moodle implemented in an online course concerning motivation in the School of Technology of Setúbal Polytechnic, Portugal, revealed that the online system using Moodle platform as well as Moodle-facilitated provided activities such as quizzes, lessons, forums, and chats were well accepted by students. Shroff, Vogel and Coombes (2008), in their study on students using the Blackboard™ platform in a Hong Kong university, revealed that five factors; perceived competence, perceived challenge, feedback, perceived interest and perceived curiosity, are those that strongly support students' intrinsic motivation. Likewise, Chan Lin (2009), in her study of a 12-week web-based course at Fu-Jen Catholic University, Taiwan, discovered that the design and implementation of web-based activities helped motivate the students to learn online.

While there has not been much motivational literature in the online context internationally, the absence in the local setting is even more apparent. Krish and Wong (2009) investigated learners' perception towards online delivery of English courses in light of motivation and autonomy on an online English course at Universiti Tun Abdul Razak (UNITAR), Malaysia. Thang and Bidmeshki (2010), who investigated an online Reading English for Science and Technology (REST) course for undergraduates at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, discovered positive feedback from the motivated students when undertaking an online course. A recent investigation by Kamal et al. (2020) showed

an increased positivity among the 354 students who underwent STEM online teaching and learning during the pandemic. Data collected by Chung et al. (2020) from 399 students in two different online learning courses in Malaysia showed that respondents are generally ready for online learning but given a choice, do not want to continue with online education in the future. Specifically, the students preferred online learning via pre-recorded lectures uploaded to Google Classroom and YouTube. While the biggest challenge for degree students is internet connectivity, diploma students found difficulties understanding course contents taught online.

2.3 Students' Feedback to Improve Online Teaching

Baber (2021) asserts that the success of any online learning depends on students' acceptance and on instructors' competence in integrating technology into their lessons. In this study's context, to improve teaching quality, one needs to be given feedback or constructive comments from the students. Instructors who advocate the positivity in using online learning to deliver the knowledge during this pandemic must adapt to changes and scaffolding methods of delivery so that they can fully utilise their expertise and, at the same time, fulfil the need of their students.

The question arises on how the instructors can be informed on the improvisation they need to improve the students' learning. Consequently, this study attempts to address the issue by concentrating on the element of feedback. Feedback is frequently laden with irritation and uncertainty at a certain point, especially when involved parties fail to comprehend or apply feedback effectively. On the other, giving feedback can be a learning experience for those who give it, such as students (Yu, 2021). This paper aims at the positive side of having feedback in teaching and learning processes, mainly to help the instructors suit the online learning approach that can cater to students' diverse backgrounds and not only for a specific group.

Giving feedback on the online learning approach could theoretically contribute to knowledge delivery, orientation, and skills changes. From the standpoint of reflective learning, these changes in instructors can be further interpreted. Therefore, the students' feedback on motivation, i.e., their feeling about learning via online mode during a pandemic, were collected and discussed to fulfil the study's purpose.

3. Methodology

This study is exploratory, and it was conducted among 102 undergraduate students taking English courses at a university. They were asked to answer only one question: "Do you feel motivated learning through online mode during this pandemic?" Then, the respondents were required to provide reasons for their answer of 'yes' or 'no' to the question. The qualitative responses were then analysed using thematic analysis, where the solutions were put in several criteria. It was grouped according to several themes such as flexibility in learning, learning new things, online learning materials, learning surroundings, network, etc.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Demographic factors and platforms used for online learning

One hundred two engineering students participated in the study: 52 (50.98%) male students and 50 (49.02%) female students. The students comprised diverse races, which were Malay (71.57%), Chinese (14.71%), Indian (11.76%) and others (1.96%). The students admitted using more than one platform for their online classes. The frequent ones are Google Classroom (101), Google Meet (101), WhatsApp (97), and KALAM (99) which is the university's official platform for online learning. There were others such as YouTube (62), email (57), Telegram (50), Zoom (36), Microsoft Teams (34) and more, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic Factors, Choices of Device, and Internet Mode for Online Learning

N = 102	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	52	50.98
Female	50	49.02

N = 102	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Race		
Malay	73	71.57
Chinese	15	14.71
Indian	12	11.76
Others	2	1.96
Platform Used for Online Class		
KALAM	99	97.06
Google Classroom	101	99.02
Google Meet	101	99.02
Zoom	36	35.29
YouTube	62	60.78
Microsoft Teams	34	33.33
Edmodo	11	10.78
Padlet	1	0.98
Kahoot	1	0.98
Voov	1	0.98
Whatsapp	97	95.10
Telegram	50	49.02
email	57	55.88

4.2 Feeling Motivated or Not Motivated Learning Online during the pandemic

Figure 2 presents a summary of the feedback given by the students according to the question given (Do you feel motivated learning through online mode during this pandemic?), and it was analysed using a descriptive analysis method. The question was under the theme of 'Yes' or 'No' responses to the changes from conventional approaches to online learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Most of the responses stated 'No' to the question, with 73% (n=102) saying they did not feel motivated to learn online during the pandemic. In comparison, only 27% (n=102) stated 'Yes' to the question, meaning they are motivated to use the method in the learning process.

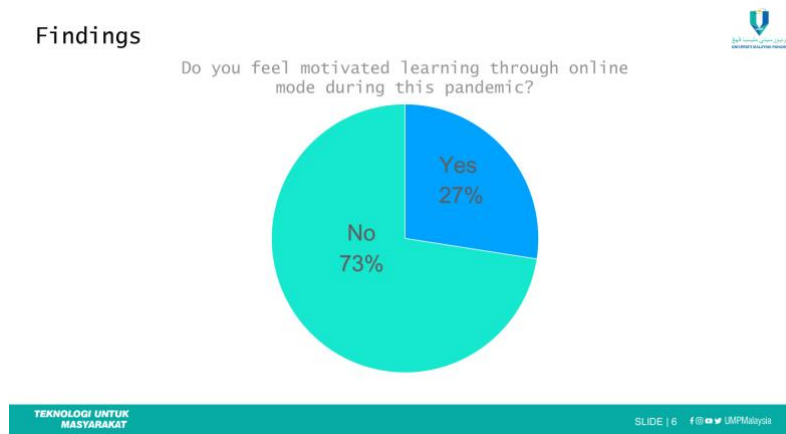


Fig. 2 Descriptive Analysis on Feeling Motivated Learning Online during the Pandemic.

For the answer 'Yes' towards the feeling of motivated in learning through online mode during the pandemic, the responses were recorded under the themes of 'Online Learning Materials' with 14.3%, 'Flexibility in Learning' (42.9%), 'Ability to Learn New Things' (21.4%) and 'Others' (21.4%). These are depicted in Figure 2. The majority give their responses on the theme of 'Flexibility in Learning' since online learning also promotes the ideas of self-paced learning and self-directed learning. It means the students have the privilege to decide the contents of their learning at a particular time besides allowing them to complete the course at their ability with assistance from the instructors. In addition, the availability of the online learning materials also encouraged the students to learn in an online mode. With easy access to the internet, the resources they need are vastly accessible and retrievable at any time.

Findings



Feedback Criteria/Theme	%
"Yes" Towards feeling motivated learning through online mode during pandemic (n=102 responses)	
Online Learning Materials (4)	14.3
Flexibility in Learning (12)	42.9
Ability to Learn New Things (6)	21.4
Others (6)	21.4

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Fig. 3 Reasons for 'Feeling Motivated' Learning Online during the Pandemic

Figure 3, on the other hand, presents the findings based on the answer 'No' to the question of whether the students feel motivated to learn in an online mode during the pandemic, where the responses were recorded according to the themes of 'inconducive learning surrounding', 'network problem', 'unmotivated/diverted attention' and others. It was revealed that 'unmotivated/diverted attention' reason dominated the students' responses with 48.7 per cent. One-way communication, lack of engagement, and unprepared instructors have been identified as the contributing factors for the students to feel unmotivated to learn online. Learning online requires undivided attention from the instructors and the students. Sometimes, a good lesson plan with relevant course materials is not enough as the delivery skills of the instructors could not encourage the students to be motivated to learn throughout the process.

When we are talking about online learning, one of the essential elements to be considered is an internet connection or network status. Based on Figure 4, 13.5% of the total number of respondents stated that network problem constitutes feeling unmotivated for online learning mode. A stable internet connection is needed to ensure uninterrupted learning processes. This facility should be the strong point for switching from conventional teaching and learning styles to online learning modes. The instructors and students need a reliable network to deliver the instructional materials. The students can simultaneously learn by asking questions, listening to explanations, and doing the exercises to measure their understanding of the subject matter.

Findings



Feedback Criteria/Theme	%
"No" Towards feeling motivated learning through online mode during pandemic (n=102 responses)	
Inconducive Learning Surrounding (14)	18.9
Network Problem (10)	13.5
Unmotivated/Diverted Attention (36)	48.7
Others (14)	18.9

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Fig. 4 Reasons for disagreeing 'feeling motivated learning online' during the pandemic.

Brown (2020) indicated that direct feedback offers a better understanding of the ongoing matters in the classroom so that an opportunity for exchanging ideas can be opened to everyone involved.

Finally, the findings work as an indicator of what to do next in the future study. Systematic planning should be given thorough attention so that it will work effectively to help students and instructors transition from the conventional teaching and learning method to the recent approach due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Overall, this study and its findings suggest that students' feedback is also vital in an online learning approach due to several reasons stated above, precisely for their unmotivated feelings toward the process. The principal responses obtained from this study showed that the online learning approach could be further improvised, and it involves excellent participation from all parties. The instructors and students and whoever suggested and implemented the policy, family members and the public, in general, are welcome to contribute to better the approach.

With the sudden change in the environment with the new coronavirus, online learning has become a promising solution for the education sector all over the globe. Despite gaining popularity of online learning with the emergence of the internet, and new technology, students are more inclined toward traditional face to face learning than online learning before COVID-19.

For future research, a clear rubric or guideline should be prepared for the prospective respondents to clearly understand what to expect in the lesson delivered through the online learning mode. Conversely, comments, critiques, or feedback, which are constructive, can still be given as perfection is far from reality at this moment.

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Declarations

- Author contribution** : MSZ: initiated the research ideas, instrument construction, data collection, analysis, and draft writing; AA revised the research ideas, ZA updated the literature review, NY devised the data presentation and analysis, and the final draft.
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