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SELF-EVALUATION FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING DURING PANDEMIC COVID-19 IN MALAYSIA

AUTOEVALUACIÓN PARA EL APRENDIZAJE ABIERTO Y A DISTANCIA DURANTE LA PANDEMIA DE COVID-19 EN MALASIA

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ABSTRACT

The education system worldwide had closed since March 2020 to curb the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the traditional face-to-face lecture in the higher education field transitioned into the open and distance learning (ODL) method that substantially impacted the teaching and learning process. This study aimed to examine teaching self-evaluation (TESA) towards ODL and students' feedback online (SuFO) on various courses from October 2020 until February 2021 using faculty-level data. The data for the Teaching Self-Assessment for Open and Distance Learning (TESA-ODL) score was collected from lecturers in the Faculty of Business and Management (FBM), University Teknologi MARA (UiTM) campuses throughout Malaysia. All of the research objectives were met as a result of the outcome. Future research should examine the usability and effectiveness of mobile applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram in-depth by evaluating students' socio-demographic inequality in FBM and UiTM.

Keywords:

Self-evaluation, open distance learning, online learning, teaching evaluation, university

RESUMEN

El sistema educativo en todo el mundo había cerrado desde marzo de 2020 para frenar la propagación de la pandemia de Covid-19. Por lo tanto, la lección presencial tradicional en el campo de la educación superior hizo la transición al método de aprendizaje abierto y a distancia (ODL) que tuvo un impacto sustancial en el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje. Este estudio tuvo como objetivo examinar la autoevaluación de la enseñanza (TESA) hacia ODL y los comentarios de los estudiantes en línea (SuFO) en varios cursos desde octubre de 2020 hasta febrero de 2021 utilizando datos a nivel de facultad. Los datos para la puntuación de la autoevaluación de la enseñanza para el aprendizaje abierto y a distancia (TESA-ODL) se recopilaron de profesores de la Facultad de Negocios y Administración (FBM), campus de la Universidad Teknologi MARA (UiTM) en Malasia. Todos los objetivos de la investigación se cumplieron como resultado del resultado. La investigación futura debería examinar en profundidad la usabilidad y la eficacia de las aplicaciones móviles como WhatsApp y Telegram mediante la evaluación de la desigualdad sociodemográfica de los estudiantes en FBM y UiTM.

Palabras clave:

Autoevaluación, educación abierta a distancia, aprendizaje en línea, evaluación docente, universidad

INTRODUCTION

The UiTM is a well-known public university with the main campus located in Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia. UiTM is the largest university in Malaysia regarding size and student enrolment and is the only public university offering intakes twice annually. Teaching evaluation is a critical component to ensure that the teaching process at UiTM is implemented excellently to achieve learning outcomes and enrich students' learning experience. Thus, UiTM has adopted a holistic teaching evaluation framework and self-evaluation for teaching and facilitation activities starting Semester II 2019/2020. A lecturer's self-evaluation is one of the fifth pillar initiatives in Education 5.0@UiTM, which is Inspiring Educators.

A UiTM lecturer must be professional, knowledgeable about course content, and skilled in facilitating teaching delivery and assessing student learning outcomes. A 360-degree evaluation that involves assessment by students through SuFO, peer or colleagues via Online Lecturer Professionalism Monitoring (PRO-PENS) and self-evaluation is expected to provide a better overview of the lecturers' tasks by producing a holistic evaluation (Refer to Figure 1). Self-assessment is the third element built into UiTM's teaching assessment framework after PRO-PENS and SuFO. A self-assessment instrument known as TESA was developed in collaboration with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor's (Academic and International) office with a group of lecturers from the Faculty of Education to measure self-reflection towards teaching delivery and professionalism.

The educational system is exposed to external threats with the rapid increase in Covid-19 cases globally (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Technology and internet connections are integrated into online learning, whereas educators and students with poor internet access are left behind. Online learning's dependence on technological equipment poses a substantial challenge for institutions, academicians, and students. Academicians are struggling to comprehend teaching subjects online, while institutions transitioned to online mode during the pandemic and not only distance learning has brought many institutes into specific situations but also teachers and families have experienced new learning context (Slovaček, Matković, 2020).

High-quality online teaching is critical to replace the face-to-face teaching method as the Covid-19 virus infects people who fail to self-distance. Besides, a high-quality online delivery is difficult and time-consuming than the traditional teaching method. Advanced planning and preparation alongside personalised feedback and help (Dubey & Pandey, 2020) are essential for high-quality

online lessons. Furthermore, some students depend on electronic gadgets, such as computers and smartphones, and free internet on the campus due to socioeconomic differences (Demirbilek, 2014). The transition process of these disadvantaged students is expected to be slower as they cannot attend university because the university closed during the Covid-19 pandemic. The researcher evaluated ODL among lecturers and students from the FBM, UiTM during the Covid-19 pandemic. Three research questions (RQs) were addressed in this study:

RQ1: What is the level of teaching practices for ODL among lecturers from all FBM campuses?

RQ2: What is the level of lecturer's professionalism and teaching and learning activities for business and management courses rated by students?

RQ3: Do gender, years of teaching experiences, campuses, and position predict teaching practices and professionalism among lecturers?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

This study investigated the self-evaluation of teaching practices and self-reflection towards ODL among FBM lecturers and SuFO on lecturer's professionalism and teaching and learning activities on various business and management courses. The study was undertaken during the semester between October 2020 until February 2021 by utilising faculty-level data collected by the Academic and International Office, UiTM. The data on TESA-ODL scores were collected from lecturers in UiTM's FBM campuses throughout Malaysia. FBM is the largest faculty in UiTM with more than 300 academic staff. All FBM staff from fifteen (15) programs were invited for the study. In contrast, the SuFO data was collected from students in the FBM, UiTM campus in Selangor.

Measures

Two questionnaires were used to collect the data in the study. First, a self-rated instrument called TESA-ODL was used to measure the lecturer's teaching practices, effectiveness and professionalism for ODL. This instrument was developed by the Academic Affairs Division (HEA) of UiTM. Second, the TESA-ODL questionnaire was designed to evaluate several ODL relevant constructs: delivery and content provision, universal design for instruction, engagement, task assignment, motivation and empathy, support and feedback, and reflective practice. Academicians' rating on ODL delivery was collected

using a five-point Likert scale. The indicator for the score obtained is explained in Table 1.

Table 1. Indicator for TESA-ODL scores.

Marks	Indicator	Description
1-50	Novice	ODL is probably totally new to the lecturers
51-100	Developing	Lecturers know the basics of ODL but may need to improve further to get the best of ODL
101-150	Proficient	Lecturers are almost experts in teaching via ODL
151-200	Expert	Lecturers have mastered the various facets of ODL delivery

*Note: Abbreviation = ODL – Open and Distance Learning

A SuFO instrument was used to measure student’s evaluation and feedback on various business and management courses during ODL. The questionnaire comprised 24 items that measure: i) overall impression about the course (four items), ii) lecturer professionalism (seven items), iii) teaching and learning activities (11 items), and iv) infrastructure (two items). The overall perception of the course was determined by whether or not the course boosted the student’s knowledge, the student’s level of confidence, and whether or not the manner of assessments in the course enhanced the student’s capacity to learn. The professionalism of a lecturer was defined as the competence or skill expected of a professional in the provision of academic assistance to students and the ability to engage in conversation with those pupils. The activities of teaching and learning were determined by the behaviors and skills of the lecturers, which added to the variety of learning experiences that the students may have. The infrastructure was referred to the availability of spaces and equipment that were also in working order to facilitate educational activities. A four-point Likert scale was used to collect student’s feedback on various courses during ODL, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The score from 90 to 100 is excellent, 80 to 89 is very good, 70 to 79 is good, the score 60 to 69 is average, while the score below 60 is weak.

Data Analysis

The data was analysed using by using SPSS 25. Means, standard deviations, and frequency of the study variables were estimated using descriptive statistics. The differences in teaching practices score measured using TESA-ODL were examined using an independent t-test. A linear regression analysis was performed to determine predictors for TESA on ODL delivery. The value $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic profiles of the respondents (lecturers) are summarised in Table 2. Missed data was excluded from analysis. A total of 766 lecturers completed the questionnaire. There were 203 (26.5%) male lecturers, whereas 563 (73.5%) were female lecturers. A total of 319 (41.6%) lecturers had teaching experiences less than ten years, while 447 (58.4%) had teaching experiences greater than ten years. In terms of position, six lecturers were at DM41 grade, 116 (15.1%) were DM45/46 grade, 502 (65.5%) were DM51/52 grade, and 26 (3.4%) were DM53/54 grade. Three (0.4%) of them were VK7/6/5 graded. Subsequently, 70 (9.1%) were Part Time-Full Time (PTFT) lecturers, while 43 (5.6%) were Part Time lecturers. A total of 81 (10.6%) lecturers were from Selangor campuses, whereas 685 (89.4%) lecturers were from other campuses.

The mean and standard deviation of the TESA-ODL score was 171.28 and 16.68, respectively. The findings indicate that most FBM lecturers were experts in ODL delivery (Refer to Table 3). Overall, 22,979 students completed their SuFO survey on 177 business and management courses. The average and standard deviation score were 88.19 and 4.52, indicating that most students rated their lecturer’s professionalism and teaching and learning activities on courses as very good (Refer to Table 3). A total of 697 (91.0%) lecturers rated themselves as an expert in ODL delivery, while 69 (9.0%) lecturers regarded themselves to be proficient in ODL delivery.

Table 2. Demographic profile of the respondents (lecturers) (n = 766).

Characteristics	Category	n(Percentage)
Gender	Male	203(26.5%)
	Female	563(73.5%)
Years of experience	Less than ten years	319(41.6%)
	More than ten years	447(58.4%)
Position	DM41	6(0.8%)
	DM45/46	116(15.1%)
	DM51/52	502(65.5%)
	DM53/54	26(3.4%)
	VK7/6/5	3(0.4%)
	Part Time-Full Time (PTFT)	70(9.1%)
	Part Time	43(5.6%)
Campuses	Selangor Campuses	81(10.6%)
	Non-Selangor Campuses	685(89.4%)

Table 3. TESA-ODL and SuFO scores.

Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
TESA	171.28	16.68
SuFO		
Section A: Overall Impression about the Course	88.88	4.20
Section B: Lecturer Professionalism	88.27	5.14
Section C: Teaching and Learning Activities	88.75	5.08
Section D: Infrastructure	85.87	4.64
Mean Point (%)	88.19	4.52

Association Analysis

Association analysis showed that male lecturers from Selangor campuses and lecturers who have ten years and below teaching experience statistically scored higher in TESA-ODL than their counterparts ($p < 0.05$). Nevertheless, there was no significant difference in TESA-ODL score between permanent and part time-full time staff ($p > 0.05$).

Table 4. Association between variables.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	p-value
Gender			
Male	4.34	0.43	$p = 0.032^*$
Female	4.26	0.41	
Position			
Permanent	4.28	0.42	$p = 0.145$
Part time-full time	4.33	0.39	
Years of experience			
Ten years and below	4.33	0.40	$p = 0.013^*$
More than ten years	4.25	0.42	
Campus			
Selangor	4.37	0.39	$p = 0.016^*$
Non-Selangor	4.27	0.42	

Note: Independent t-test, significant $p < 0.05$

Regression Analysis

Table 5 shows the outcomes of the multiple linear regression. The observed overall model demonstrated four predictors, namely gender, campus, years of teaching experiences, and position, significantly predicted the TESA-ODL score, $R^2 = 0.015$, $p < 0.05$. This finding indicated that 1.5% of the variance could be explained through the model, which was considered a very low variance.

Table 5. The predictors of TESA-ODL scores in multiple linear regression model.

TESA-ODL Score (n = 766), Adjusted R2 = 0.015					
Variable	Beta	t	p-value	95.0% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Gender	-0.074	-2.056	0.040	-5.461	-0.126
Campus	-0.081	-2.177	0.030*	-8.310	-0.429
Years of Teaching	-0.087	-2.185	0.029*	-5.586	-0.298
Position	-0.003	-0.065	0.948	-3.904	3.653

*Note: $p < 0.05$

Higher education institutes adopted online teaching as an alternative approach due to the prolonged shutdown of educational facilities due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The ODL technique has been implemented in the FBM since March 2020. The study examined the lecturer's self-reflection and teaching practices on ODL and SuFO on the lecturer's professionalism and teaching and learning activities on various faculty courses during ODL. Teaching and learning evaluation is a critical component in ensuring that the teaching process at UiTM is implemented excellently to achieve learning outcomes and enrich students' learning experience.

The Academic Affairs Division (HEA) of UiTM is continuously working towards upgrading the professionalism of academicians, specifically in the teaching and learning environment. Currently, UiTM has already implemented three teaching evaluations. The first system, PRO-PENS (Lecturer's Professionalism Monitoring), functions to obtain peer evaluation, while SuFO is for student evaluation. Subsequently, a third component to obtain a holistic evaluation, which is a self-rated instrument known as TESA, was developed as a tool for lecturers to reflect on themselves in teaching effectiveness and professionalism. The benefits of TESA include enabling a lecturer to individually measure and reflect on one's strengths and weaknesses in the mastery level of particular knowledge or skills within learning implementation and facilitation delivery and learning assessment. In addition, TESA provides guidance and confidence to lecturers on their roles and responsibilities in continuously developing themselves to contribute to the university's academic excellence.

The findings showed that most lecturers regard themselves as experts in teaching practices and professionalism in ODL. The faculty has adopted several essential steps to ensure that the online learning process runs smoothly.

The FBM Learning and Teaching Unit organised training and workshops for ODL throughout 2020 to enhance digital competencies among academic staff when conducting online classes. Among the training organised were Telegram & Loom training, Quizzes and Games Training, Telegram 2.0: Apps for Education, e-assessment with Google, e-assessment Training for ODL, Discovery Padlet for New Future Virtual Classroom, and others. Thus, lecturers have been equipped with information on improving their instructional materials and recommended adopting multimedia-enhanced contents and educational tools.

The high TESA-ODL scored by lecturers was supported by excellent feedback from students on the lecturer's professionalism and teaching and learning activities on various academic courses during ODL. The high score suggests that online learning has a good impact on student's learning in FBM. Evidence reported that online learning could outperform traditional face-to-face learning (Elfaki et al., 2019). The use of various digital technologies at the undergraduate level was also emphasised to boost student behavioural and emotional involvement.

Conversely, graduate students' cognitive and emotional engagement was primarily addressed through experience-sharing and learning co-construction (Heilporn et al., 2020). Likewise, Gonzalez et al. (2020), reported that academic performance among students statistically improved during Covid-19 compared to face-to-face interaction. Similarly, many other positive aspects or changes in learning emerged during the pandemic. As a result of the stay-at-home order, time spent with family increased, personal enhancement improved, and new and meaningful activities were developed (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020).

Students and academicians heavily rely on internet connection and technology gadgets to accommodate online learning. Some students rely on the computer and free internet on campuses and colleges due to socioeconomic differences. The transition process of these underprivileged students is predicted to be lengthy due to the educational facilities shut down. As a community's poverty level rises, rate of internet accessibility decreases. Students with a poor socioeconomic background cannot afford to own a broadband connection causing them to lag and face additional problems in online learning (Fishbane & Tomer, 2020). Most FBM students hail from low-income households and cannot afford internet access to support online classes.

The FBM offered both asynchronous and synchronous classes by considering these challenges. Lecturers prepare assignments or record lectures where students can complete them at their own pace in asynchronous

classes. This method assists students with limited internet access and considers students' preferences and attitudes towards online learning. Alternatively, learning is conducted at a particular time via a specific platform such as Google Meet, Google Classroom, and an in-house platform known as UFUTURE in synchronous classes. According to Malik et al. (2017), male students favored synchronous and asynchronous activities or lectures more than female students. Additionally, students were more interested in synchronous activities when given credit in the form of grades (Lew & Nordquist, 2016), which explains the high SuFO scores.

Mobile applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram are standard communication tools globally today. These platforms are increasingly used in teaching and learning during the Covid-19 pandemic by considering student's needs. The use of mobile phone applications for teaching and learning, such as WhatsApp, adds to favourable attitudes for increasing learner's autonomy, boosting cooperation, and enhancing motivation toward specific academic goals (Arifani & Suryant, 2019).

Asynchronous classes in FBM are commonly conducted via WhatsApp and Telegram. The primary use of these two applications is based on considering students with poor internet connection at home during the lockdown. The disadvantage of using mobile applications is that these applications can cause students to become inactive and lose focus because the applications attract and social interaction between the learning communities. However, there were no significant issues of the applications' use in learning among FBM students, as demonstrated by the higher rating on SuFO.

Furthermore, the communication between students and lecturers is facilitated by mobile apps and technology, and the design and structure of learning settings (e.g., the medium where learning occurs) in the online learning process can significantly impact learning results (Gonzalez et al., 2020). Evidence showed that students' attitudes towards ODL significantly influence their learning process (Ali, 2020). Respondents in this study were younger learners who are also known as digital natives.

Digital native is a term coined to refer to someone who grows up using technology and feels comfortable and confident with it. Technology is ingrained in the lives of younger learners as a natural and integrated aspect of their lives. The heavy presence of technology in lives today justifies the positive feedbacks for ODL. Additionally, students can acquire a high-quality education without sacrificing work time, family time, or travel costs. Students in ODL can speak to lecturers, address classmates, access

study materials, and complete assignments from any internet-connected place instead of being restricted to a specific location at a given time.

Environmental and emotional issues are related to online learning, especially during pandemic Covid-19 (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020). Nevertheless, most students in this study did not face significant difficulties in learning online, as evident by positive feedbacks given on various courses. This finding denotes that students are already accustomed to online learning when this evaluation was undertaken from October 2020 to February 2021, the third semester of online learning at UiTM. This result is further supported by previous evidence, demonstrating that students without prior experience or good online delivery experience might perceive it as unsuitable (Hodges et al., 2020).

Gender, years of experiences, and campuses were identified as predictors of teaching practices and professionalism among academicians in FBM. Men rated themselves highly in professionalism and ODL delivery because men demonstrated a more positive insight into technology gadgets (Terzis & Economides, 2011). In addition, some female academicians opine that they feel insecure with private online tools. Studies highlighting gender and age differences as predictors of technology acceptance and engagement in online learning environment often yielded mixed results and required further study (Yoo & Huang 2013).

Current studies are dominated by research on evaluating student's perceptions (Rafique et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2021; Yu, 2021) than academicians or teachers. Staff with less than ten years of teaching experience in UiTM were considered younger and scored better than staff with ten years of teaching experience. The differences in age influence technology acceptance and adoption. For example, Liu et al. (2012), found that young people were the earliest adopters of new technology and comprise most smartphone users. Hence, the current study's finding parallels Liu et al.'s discovery.

In addition, the findings also indicate that the campus was a predictor for TESA-ODL score with academic staff in FBM Selangor campuses scored higher than non-Selangor campuses. The Teaching and Learning Centre actively organized workshops and training for academic staff in Selangor campuses throughout 2020 instead of branch campuses. Training enhances the skills and confidence of lecturers in conducting classes online.

There were few issues related to ODL delivery among lectures despite the positive rating of TESA-ODL score among academicians. Some lecturers reported being uncomfortable with the working conditions with the ODL

method because many misunderstandings arise between students and lecturers due to a lack of face-to-face communication during teaching and learning sessions. The faculty can adopt various initiatives to ease the implementation of ODL among lecturers. For example, training can be provided using mobile applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram for ODL. Most young lecturers are already familiar with these two tools or platforms. Nevertheless, the training reduces stress among lecturers in conducting ODL, especially older lecturers. Training on the design and structure of the question and assessment development to all lecturers is necessary to ensure student assessment quality in ODL. The training programmes can be done collaboratively with the Assessment and Evaluation Development Unit, UiTM.

CONCLUSIONS

Online education is a new fascinating option to limitless learning and has positively impacted learners and academicians. Students and academicians have optimistic opinions about online classes. The findings showed that the lecturers in FBM understood the ODL concept as many felt comfortable and were willing to learn about the usability of mobile apps and technology for ODL classes. The lecturer's professionalism and teaching and learning activities are two factors that contribute to an overall high rating on academic courses during ODL from the student's perspective. Gender, years of teaching experiences, and campuses are predictors of the TESA-ODL score. The faculty will continue to monitor, review, evaluate and improve the teaching and learning process through ODL in the FBM to maintain the quality of UiTM graduates.

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