

Pennywise Rips Your Arms Off, You Still Won't Be Able to Wipe, So Keep Walking: Teaching During COVID-19 Lockdown

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ABSTRACT

The current situation of global pandemic caused by COVID-19 has created an unprecedented situation which is sending shockwaves through the world of work including teaching. The Higher Education Ministry in Malaysia was fast in responding to lockdown by immediately shifting to online teaching platforms. The aim of this study is to determine the challenges faced by teachers in one tertiary institution in Sarawak, East Malaysia, which at present, is completely excluding face-to-face communication. The qualitative data was obtained from eight university language teachers who were teaching online from home. Findings using thematic analysis revealed that teachers could overcome the challenges of online teaching with positive attitude, accessibility to telecommunication services and knowledge of online teaching, thus transforming education in Malaysia.

Keywords: COVID-19 lockdown; online teaching, challenges, positive outcomes.

Introduction

"We are entering uncharted territory and working with countries to find hi-tech, low-tech and no-tech solutions to assure the continuity of learning.

UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay (2020)

The emergence of the Corona virus Disease (COVID-19) in 2019 previously identified as 2019 corona virus (2019-nCoV) infections in China went on to become a global pandemic and brought the world to its knees (Garger, K, 2020). Fox News (20 April 2020) also reported that there is increasing confidence that the outbreak originated in a Wuhan laboratory, in China. Since it was first detected in early December, 2019 until now, scientists have found no vaccine, thus leading to many deaths with more than 3 million people getting infected with the number increasing daily. This pandemic has caused lockdowns in at least 184 nations solely to control movement of people so as to curb the spreading of the virus.

The Malaysian Higher Education Ministry has been quick to respond to the lockdown by immediately shifting to online teaching platforms. Before COVID-19, many higher institutions in Malaysia had already implemented e-learning because of its effectiveness as a learning approach to students who were not able to physically attend college (example: Open University Malaysia, Universiti Tun Abdul Razak, and Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris). With the current lockdown and Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia, the Higher Education Ministry has issued a directive for teachers and students to go for digital education online as an alternative learning platform. However, many teachers and students are not prepared for the mode of learning, which completely excludes face-to-face communication. The lockdown period in Malaysia began 1st April 2020 and is expected to end on 9th June, 2020. The aim of this study is to examine the challenges facing language teachers in one tertiary institution in Sarawak, East Malaysia. This will be the first such study in East Malaysia to investigate challenges of

online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic to fill the gap in literature.

Literature Review

Definition of online education

In the research literature, online education is variously termed as “distance education” “e-learning,” “online learning,” “blended learning,” “computer-based learning,” “web-based learning,” “virtual learning,” “tele-education,” “cyber learning,” “Internet-based learning,” “distributed learning,” “remote learning” etc. In this study we consider all of these terms to be sufficiently synonymous and use them to refer to online teaching as it focuses on teachers teaching online.

When online education began in the late 20th century, most online programs and classes were synchronous and used chat rooms, instant messaging, and texting. Both chat rooms and instant messaging, being synchronous, allow users to decide who participates in the conversation. Technological innovations like the invention of @ symbol in 1972 for use in email (Maloney-Krichmar & Abras, 2003), and the use of the World Wide Web (WWW) for commercial purposes in 1991 for the Internet connectivity have been adapted for online education. The universal use of web sites has provided opportunities for the development of online communities and groups. Emailing, conferencing, chatting, working together via Google drive, Google doc, Google hangout, dropbox, facebook, Twitter, etc. have been widely used in online classrooms in US. (Harasim, 2000).

One perspective of this phenomenon simply sees it as the conversion from face-to-face classrooms to online, Mclsaac & Gunawardena (1996) defined online education as “no more than a hodgepodge of ideas and practices taken from traditional classroom settings and imposed on learners who just happen to be separated physically from an instructor” (p.5). Fundamental to this change is the use of technology and a reorganization of the pedagogy. Moore and Kearsley (2012) stated that “distance education is teaching and planned learning in which teaching normally occurs in a different place from learning, requiring communication through technologies as well as special institutional organization” (p.2). For the aspects of being distant, Finch and Jacobs (2012) defined it as “all forms of teaching and learning where the student and instructor are separated geographically and temporally” (p.546).

Online Teaching in the World

Education in the 21st century has changed dramatically with the use of technology in the classroom. According to Bell & Fedeman, (2013), the fast development of the Internet and the World Wide Web (WWW) has produced numerous benefits to education. For instance, the nature of the anonymity in the online environment may allow more students, who otherwise do not want to attend face-to-face classes because of their shy personality, to participate in online education where they do not physically see each other. The upgraded technology and software may also allow instructors, students, and university administrators to collect data, feedback, and evaluation regarding their online experiences.

Teachers are challenged to keep up with the latest technology in teaching. Tamhane, K.D. et al (2015) stated that attitudes change when both teachers and students at the Pravara Department of Rural Engineering, Loni, Uttar Pradesh, use mobile learning application. Student can learn at his or her own pace, anywhere and anytime and this affects the working attitude of teachers who are not used to technology. Youngblood, Trede, & Di Corpo (2001) conducted a study in US to clarify the challenging role of the facilitator in the online learning environment and to identify other factors including facilitators’ attitude that support or inhibit online learning. Within their study, Youngblood, Trede, & Di Corpo surveyed undergraduates in a US university, asking them to rate twelve facilitator tasks for their importance relative to the online learning experience. Findings showed that the important attribute facilitators should have brought into teaching is a positive attitude to ensure a successful online learning experience. According to Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2013) study of a US high school found that teachers’ negative attitude to accept technology can be a challenge. Positive attitudes toward online teaching may reinforce both teachers’ confidence to bolster and make them have satisfaction. Ko, S. & Rossen, S. (2001) who examined the attitude of academicians towards teaching online courses in USA also found that most of the attitude held by academicians were negative primarily because they were uncertain of the quality of the education that students received through online courses.

One of the fears for teachers with online teaching is due to their low level of technology knowledge. Davis et. al., (1989) Technology Acceptance Model states that the task given can be accomplished with less effort if the system is user-friendly. Making the e-learning system easy for all teachers to use will encourage them to teach the content using technology. They would then cease complaining

about their low knowledge of technology. Another challenge of online teachers is to have good technical support. Teachers of online courses will be much more successful if they have ready access to highly knowledgeable faculty and staff who can guide them through the process of course design and implementation, as well as provide ongoing technical suggestions and support (Boaz et al, 2000).

When conducting online assessment, a teacher has to be aware of criteria which are different from face-to face-assessment. One challenge is to curb or control cheating. How do teachers ensure that there is no cheating when assessing their students online? Erin Gillett et al (2017), states that online assessment requires a different type of criteria as compared to traditional face-to face assessment. In the traditional classroom, teachers can use their physical presence to facilitate communication through voice, body language, intonation, expressions, and gestures in online education there is no face-to face communication and thus, their messaging can be misinterpreted by students. However, the teachers can still rely on tests submitted via email/ video via WhatsApp and to communicate via Skype, Google Meet, Zoom, Google classroom. On the other hand Tiene, D. (2000) found that in online examinations, there are advantages using multiple choice, true-false, fill-in –the-blank besides open ended questions.

Thus, teachers teaching online are challenged when making online assessments. According to a study by Purcell-Robertson & Purcell, (2000) examining the impact of online learning towards in the US education system, showed that the teachers are now the 'guide on the side' as learning and assessment have become more student centred. The way teachers assess students' work—differ from what would occur in a traditional classroom setting. Norries et al., (2011) in a study demonstrated that students' achievement in a US college increases significantly when teachers allow students to use mobile learning devices, including smartphones, during learning time. This is because their time-on-task completion will increase as they have the device at hand. They also found that students were constantly using the smartphone camera to take pictures of abstract concepts taught in class so that later they could relate them with concrete ideas.

The integrity of students is of critical importance to teachers when conducting online assessment. Mardanian, & Mozelius (2011) reported that the main problem faced by teachers when conducting online assessment is to ensure there is no cheating and total honesty of test

taking measures are observed by the students. Khan, S., Khan, R.A. (2019) conducted online assessments among 41 university students in United Arab Emirates found that the students do not take the assessment seriously and regarded online assessment as easy and unnecessary. In another study conducted by Spivey, M. F., & Mcmillan, J. J. (2014) in a university in south eastern United States, data was collected through tracking technology usage and grades of 174 students. Some students were taught and assessed primarily through online learning platforms while others were assessed through traditional pen and paper tests. No significant difference was seen in terms of performance or effort in students taking online exams. The study indicates that advantages offered through online assessments are of convenience rather than academic superiority. The study lends support to the use of online assessments on the premise that they do not adversely influence student's grades.

Online resources are available and accessible to teachers to supplement their own teaching resources. Borgman, C. et.al (2008) stated that the past decade has seen enormous growth in the Internet of free, online resources available for teaching and learning. These resources, variously called learning objects, open educational resources, or online teaching resources, include innovative and interactive curricula, teacher-created lesson plans, as well as tools such as visualizations and simulations that support teaching. Erin Gillett, et al, (2017) stated that tough as it may be , teachers need to understand the challenges of converting and that very rarely is it successful to simply convert an existing course "as-is" to an online format. When teachers are at the point where they are ready to design their online course environment, the first and most important need to be met is time. Teachers need time to read; time to meet with instructional technology staff; time to become familiar with the technology options available at their institutions; time to experiment with the technology itself; and time to actually set up the environment of their virtual classrooms.They added that it is in the phase of course design—how a teacher plans for interactions, lectures, conversations, and assessment to occur—that the path diverges in a different direction. This is the area where teachers new to online teaching need the most guidance.

Teaching online can make time management difficult for teachers. Lin Shi, et al. (2016) found out that managing time in teaching online courses can be an enormous challenge for online instructors. They offered 6 strategies that have proven effective in the courses taught by a group of experienced online instructors at Indiana University. These are: 1) Write concisely and clearly, 2) Organize in

an easy to follow order, 3) Be explicit and emphatic about the time requirement in the syllabus, 4) Manage asynchronous discussions, 5) Take advantage of the technical tools available, and 6) Utilize other resources. By utilizing these strategies, both instructors and students can enjoy the convenience of online teaching and learning without getting lost, feeling overwhelmed, or sacrificing the instructional quality and overall learning outcome.

In overcoming the challenges so as not to cause further disruption to education in China during the COVID-19 pandemic, Huang, R.H. et al. (March 2020) stated that a reliable network infrastructure is crucial to support cyber-teaching. Therefore during the current pandemic, all major telecom service providers in China should boost internet connectivity service for online education, especially for the under-served regions in China. The Chinese authorities concerned should also increase the server bandwidth of Chinese universities and schools to provide flexible learning and teaching experience for students simultaneously without interruption. Specifically, four channels of China Education Television started open broadcasting of primary and middle school classes across the nation covering 75 lessons on air to provide learning experiences for those in remote areas in China without Internet or without cable TV.

Online Teaching in Malaysia

Online teaching is not new in Malaysia as there are an increasing number of higher institutions offering online learning programs. According to Hussin, Bunyarit & Hussein, (2009) higher education institutions in Malaysia began implementing online teaching in the late 1990s. At that time, there were execution issues such as the lack of trained lecturers, facilities and infrastructures, students' unpreparedness, and student' resistance to adopt e-learning. The main reason for online learning to occur in Malaysia is because of its effectiveness as an alternative learning approach (Masrom (2008). Online education in Malaysia continues to increase presently as according to (Azhari & Ming, 2015) the demand for online education in Malaysia continues to rise due to its capability to reach global audiences, and its unique functionality, accessibility and flexibility in the long run. According to Daniel Rahman (2020), in the 2000s, there was 1Bestari.net for schools while in 2014; the Malaysia MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) initiative was launched through collaboration between The Malaysian Council for e-Learning Heads (Meipta) and Open-Learning (a public-listed Australia based edtech company).

Higher institutions in Malaysia have created their own platforms for teaching online. According to Teoh Pei Ying (2020), some universities in Malaysia already have their own teaching platforms. For example, staff in UiTM use UFUTURE, while University Malaya, Kuala Lumpur (UM) academic staff are strongly encouraged to activate e-learning for teaching and learning (T&L), using SPeCTRUM (UM's in-house e-learning platform) as well as other online T&L applications. The Malaysian Education Ministry has provided other platform links for online education such as digital textbooks, PdP videos (EduwebTV/CikgooTube) and links to applications to help PdP, such as Edpuzzle (an interactive teaching application via video), Quizizz (quiz game) and Kahoot (game-based learning platform). According to T.N. Alagesh (2020), in University Malaysia Pahang just as in all private and public institutions in Malaysia, all academic staff are supported by the university technical teams to activate the e-Learning mode through online lessons. All academic staff can get assistance whenever necessary so as to implement successfully online e-Learning methods through KALAM, UMP's Knowledge & Learning Management System, during lecture sessions using appropriate online applications.

However, there are also continuous challenges with online teaching in Malaysia. According to Karim Alias in Daniel Rahman (2020) the top three challenges of online teaching in Malaysia are (i) experience and skill of educators in using online system and online applications; (ii) the state of readiness of the infrastructure, for example, Internet connectivity, bandwidth and devices; and (iii) the evolving mindset (both of educators and students). Online teaching training is necessary to make teachers more confident and effective. Lau, C. Y., & Shaikh, J. M. (2012) reported that more training on new online learning resources should be provided to the academic staff at Curtin University Miri Campus to increase their skills in using the online learning resources for their teaching. Better internet connectivity is also necessary to boost the use of these resources.

It is crucial for teachers to have a positive attitude towards technology to ensure the success of online teaching and to improve students' performance. Haron Haryani, et al. (2011) investigated factors that influence the adoption of e-learning stated that only 13% of the respondents in a public university in Malaysia, display a positive attitude towards the adoption of e-technology in teaching and learning. Some studies conducted in Malaysia related to mobile applications and online teaching also indicated that teaching using technology had an adverse effect on students' performance. Siew F. N.

et al (2017) investigated the relationship between smartphone use and academic performance of students in a Malaysian tertiary institution as supported by the teachers. For seven consecutive days, 176 students from three academic programs recorded their daily smartphone use for learning. Significant differences were found in uses of smartphones depending on the academic program being followed. Further, it was found that the more students utilized their smartphone for university learning activities, the lower their CGPA. The outcome of this study suggests to the teachers a need to evaluate and better understand the instructional uses of smartphones for tertiary students in order to improve their performance.

In response to the current COVID-19 situation in Malaysia, Parmjit, S. (cited in Daniel Rahman, 2020) states that teachers in Malaysia must learn of the pedagogical strategies demands peculiar to online learning. These would be quite different from the strategies required in conventional delivery. Teachers have difficulties adjusting to a teaching paradigm where they cannot see students raise their hands, ask a question in class and get immediate feedback. Instead teachers have to prepare more background reading for students before each class and engage them in online discussions. Online teaching strategy does not require a different timetable as classes are generally conducted in line with published timetables to ensure that a sense of "normalcy" continues to exist.

The Malaysian Ministry of Education Ministry has provided platforms accessible through www.moe-dl.edu.my. Thus, teachers can utilize the best platform to teach online. During the current COVID-19 pandemic, Parmjit, S. (cited in Daniel Rahman 2020) said a recent survey found that Malaysian higher institutions have been well prepared for this shift to e-learning, where both teachers and students have been overwhelmingly receptive. Among the industry-leading tools and technologies used by educators, he said, were Microsoft Teams, Moodle, WhatsApp, Blackboard, Open Learning Platform, WizIQ, Zoom, Facebook Livestream, Google Classrooms, Google Suites and Google Meet.

An important aspect which also concerns teachers particularly during the lockdown of COVID-19 pandemic is how to conduct assessments during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Tharanya Arumugam (2020), during the current COVID-19 pandemic, the Higher Education Ministry and Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), have approved alternative assessments which are comparable to, if not more stringent, than traditional examination methods. Each alternative assessment approach must

be designed to ensure that students achieve the learning outcomes for the subject and course. This has to go through a review and quality assurance procedures and ultimately be approved by the university's Senate. Thus, proper alignment with programme learning outcomes is extremely important. Besides, any alternative method has to be in full compliance with the directives and guidelines issued by MQA. Final exam could be substituted by final assignments, projects, and papers.

Telecommunication services in Sarawak

The challenge facing teachers during COVID-19 period in rural Sarawak is telecommunication services. The past five years have seen an increasing awareness in Sarawak on the usage of Internet as an alternate means of communication. Through the two major Internet Service Providers (ISP's) in the country, TMNet and Jaring, most Sarawakians in and around the major towns and cities are going on-line. The recent introduction of broadband Internet access has seen an even sharper increase in the number of Internet users in the state. Sarawak hopes to connect some of the remotest areas through various projects (both government and non-government bodies). Its e-Bario project was introduced by University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) in July 2000 (Sarawak Government Official Portal, 2020).

Methodology

Location of study

Located immediately north of the Equator between latitude 0° 50' and 5°N and longitude 109° 36' and 115° 40' E, Sarawak stretches some 800km along the north-west coast of the island of Borneo. Sarawak is separated from Peninsular Malaysia by a distance of 600 km by the South China Sea. On the island of Borneo, it directly adjoins the State of Sabah to the north-east where the Sultanate of Brunei forms a double enclave.

Today, there are 2 public universities, 3 private universities, 3 teacher training institutes, 3 polytechnics, 4 healthcare colleges in Sarawak with an increasing number of private colleges with staff and students from all over the world and they utilise internet in their teaching and learning. This study was conducted at a public university in Sarawak which has also moved to online learning mode whereby all academic activities conducted are a blend of asynchronous (without real-time interaction) and synchronous (real-time interaction) online learning.



Figure 1: Map of Malaysia

Synchronous sessions are held in moderation considering students' limitations, especially those with poor Internet speeds. They are conducted according to students' timetables to avoid overlapping online classes. Students with good Internet connections can join the scheduled sessions. Students can also participate in self-paced asynchronous learning activities on the university's online learning platform (UFUTURE).

Data Collection Procedures

The interview questions for the study were designed based on common issues discussed among language teachers at a public university in Sarawak due to traditional classroom teaching being replaced with online classroom teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through video call discussion with the language teachers, questions were formulated based on a) Attitude towards teaching online, b) Accessibility of telecommunication service, c) Knowledge of technology, d) Online teaching strategies, e) Online teaching time management, f) Online teaching platforms, g) Online teaching resources, and h) Online assessment. The questions were also designed to capture any new experience not addressed in the literature with regard to online teaching during a pandemic.

One of the researchers who was an insider, obtained prior permission from the head of the language department of the university concerned before contacting 8 language teachers to share their experience. The interview questions were posted to them in the middle of April 2020 via e-mail and all responded immediately. In the analysis below, all the respondents are referred to as Respondents 1-8.

Interview Questions

- 1) How do you feel about teaching online?
- 2) How good is the telecommunications service for you to teach online?
- 3) What are the technical skills which a teacher needs when teaching online?
- 4) What strategies do you use when teaching online?
- 5) How do you manage your time when teaching online?
- 6) Which online teaching platforms do you use?
- 7) How do you conduct online assessment?
- 8) What online teaching resources are available for you?

Data Analysis Procedures

This study utilised thematic analysis to find out the teachers' experience from their written responses. Thematic

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Respondent	Gender	Teaching experience	Knowledge of Technology
1	Female	15 years	Basic
2	Male	16	Basic
3	Female	5	High
4	Female	18	Basic
5	Male	8	High
6	Male	20	Basic
7	Male	27	Low
8	Female	33	Low

coding is a form of qualitative analysis which involves recording or identifying passages of text or images that are linked by a common theme or idea allowing you to index the text into categories and therefore establish a "framework of thematic ideas about it" (Gibbs 2007). As such a qualitative analysis was made from the language teachers' responses which were interpreted to illustrate in what way similar experiences were shared and relevant.

The coding strategy has been to search for common experiences corresponding to the questions in the interview. An inductive approach was used allowing the data to determine the themes. The data which consisted of common responses were then reviewed for connections and similarities. A theme was plotted out based on the codes identified in each of the responses. When doing this, frequent key words and phrasings in excerpts were highlighted to formulate the themes for the findings.

Results

Theme 1: Teachers must have positive attitude towards online teaching.

There were mixed attitudes among the respondents about teaching online during the COVID-19 period. From the data analysed, the reasons were coded as familiarity and uncertainty. Respondent 1 said "I'm not sure how much is expected from me or the students when teaching online as everything is so uncertain. Do I have a choice?"

The respondents also felt as though they were given no alternative but forced to teach online and it made them uncomfortable but they remained positive. Respondent 2 said "I don't like to be forced to teach online, but it is alright now", whereas Respondent 3 was willing to "just follow what I was told and learned what I need to know to teach online. So, I should be positive." Respondent 4 felt the shift to online teaching "is sudden and I'm still adjusting, but after a few weeks, it does make me feel less uneasy now." Respondents 6 stated that 'online teaching bothers me, it does take time to make it possible'. With time, Respondent 7 described that teaching online as "fine now but initially it turned my life upside down." Even though Respondent 8 has a few more years before retirement, she too remained positive because "I get help from the younger lecturers each time I called them. So no problem. I just keep to basics." On the other hand, Respondent 5 was very positive about teaching online as he has "conducted such classes before. It saves time and even money for the students because they can stay at home."

Generally, there were mixed feelings about teaching online. Some adapted more quickly than others and for most the early awkwardness receded when they grew more comfortable with the technology. The analysis shows that the senior teachers have fears about teaching online but overcame them after attending webinars organized by the university and assistance from fellow colleagues. This corresponds with Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2013) who stated that the attitude the teachers in a high school in United States is influenced by the user's perception on ease of use of technology, so it is of importance to understand users' confidence.

Theme 2: Students must have accessibility to telecommunication services for online teaching to be possible

The common words and phrases used by the respondents to describe telecommunication service are: 'no problem, line is good' to describe the teacher accessibility to the Internet, and 'poor connection, unclear, not stable' to describe the internet connection in the rural areas in Sarawak where some students were staying at the time this study was conducted. The data obtained was coded as good Internet connection for teachers and poor internet connection for rural students.

Respondent 1 who lived in the city mentioned that he utilised a lot of data, the connection was good and the other colleagues who were also staying in the city did not experience any problem with the internet connection "accessible as long as I pay the bill but some of our students staying in city area have rather poor internet connection because their parents cannot afford to pay the bills." This shows that accessibility to telecommunication service was not available for some students living in the urban areas, too. Even Respondent 2 who stayed in the city without facing any problem teaching online responded by saying "A few of my students staying less than 5 miles away from me have poor connection. What more to say those staying in Baram and Belaga (rural areas)?" Respondent 7 was unable to teach his rural students who lived in the long houses due to poor connection as "the internet line is not stable in the area. Some of these rural students are staying in the *rumah panjai* (longhouse). I don't expect any internet connection in the long houses." However, Respondents 3 and 4, who also lived in the city without any problem teaching online, did their best to assist by "guiding my students using WhatsApp" while Respondent 4 tried "many ways including making phone calls to assist them."

In China, during the COVID-19 pandemic period, Huang, R.H. et al. (2020) stated that a reliable network infrastructure was crucial to support cyberteaching, especially for the under-served regions in China. The Higher Education Ministry in Malaysia too, was aware of the telecommunication problems in the rural areas and has requested teachers find the best platforms to teach online. Parmjit, S. cited in Daniel Rahman, (2020) stated that the higher institutions in Malaysia were well prepared for this shift to e-learning and students were receptive to various ways used by their teachers.

Teachers at the university where this study was conducted informed students to be in locations where they could have access to the internet to reduce online teaching disruptions. Respondent 8 “manage to reach all my students, even in Bekenu *alhamdulillah*. I asked them to stay with relatives with good internet connection. These are the lucky ones with supportive relatives.” All the respondents said that in order to overcome the internet problem for students who were staying in the long houses during the pandemic period, they posted learning materials in boxes using express boats to deliver these boxes to their rural students.

Theme 3: Teachers must have knowledge of technology for online teaching.

From the responses given by the respondents regarding technical knowledge necessary for online teaching, two codes were formulated from the data: Basic knowledge of computer skills; technical assistance for teachers. All the respondents agreed that online teaching required them to have basic technical skills. In fact many of the respondents have the basic technical knowledge as Respondent 3 assured “I’m rather good at computers. My technical skills are excellent, too. I can fix the problems easily. I help others too.” It was echoed by Respondent 5 who has “no problem teaching online. I just need basic knowledge of computers and internet with some applications.” The positive attitude of the teachers to enhance themselves by getting assistance from colleagues was a remarkable effort as shown by Respondent 2 who “just asks colleagues to help upload notes online in Google Classroom.” Fears of handling technology were overcome by Respondent 6 who “freaked out each time something pops out, luckily, the computer science lecturer is a reliable colleague.”

Older respondents such as Respondent 8 were assisted by the younger colleagues who “taught me all the online teaching skills. I’m scared as these things are very fast for

me and I’m quite slow technically.” Besides that, the university technical team was available to assist the teachers as shown by Respondent 7 who said “Thanks to the university technical online teaching team. I m well guided by them and so far I’ve become quite an expert myself until I can help others, too” added Respondent 4 who also said that “The university provides webinars for teachers to learn how to teach online. So far, I can cope well.”

The language teachers at the university tried their best to equip themselves with technical skills to teach online during the COVID-19 period. Boaz, Elliott, et al. (2000) noted that teachers of online courses will be much more successful if they have ready access to highly knowledgeable faculty and staff who can guide them through the process of course design and implementation, as well as provide ongoing technical suggestions and support.

Theme 4: Teachers should use successful online teaching strategies.

All the respondents provided a variety of teaching strategies coded as: engaging with students; synchronous and asynchronous teaching. Respondent 1 said “My most successful online teaching strategy is engaging with my learners online.

Since the students were either at home or remained on campus when this study was conducted, the teachers made sure that all the students were able to attend the online classes according to the timetable given. Respondent 2 said that “It is stressful for the teachers when they are unable to have face-to-face communication with the students.” Respondent 3 guided “my students by using WhatsApp.” Respondent 4 also claimed that he tried “many ways including making phone calls to assist them.” As Parmjit, S. (cited in Daniel Rahman 2020) mentioned, teachers have difficulties adjusting to a teaching paradigm where they could not see students raised their hands, asking a question in class and getting immediate feedback.

The teachers in this study prepared more background reading for students before each class and engaged them in discussions. They also engaged students by getting them involved in a variety of activities. Respondent 7 “made sure all my students are engaged and not left out. So, I make use of group activities, pair work activities.” Such activities enabled the teachers to ensure that all the students’ voices could be heard as the teachers were not able to attend to the students individually. Thus, by engaging students using the pedagogical strategies

demands of online learning, teachers no longer have to think of just the conventional delivery (Parmjit, S. cited in Daniel Rahman, 2020).

The respondents applied various online teaching strategies and Respondent 2 agreed that "the online teaching seminars are very good, because now I can use a combination of both synchronous and asynchronous activities." Since chatroom was popular among students, the respondents were happy to use chatting as a strategy to conduct discussions in the chat groups. Such synchronous online teaching and learning kept the teachers in touch with their students as mentioned by Respondent 5 that it was possible to "ask my students questions and they too can ask me questions instantly in the chat group." The teachers also made use of asynchronous teaching method requiring the students to submit their portfolios and assignment by e-mail. Respondent 6 also "instructed my students to submit all their assignments to my Dropbox."

Like other respondents, Respondent 3 "make sure that I give continuous feedback. The feedback is constructive feedback so that students can clearly identify their errors and improve." The respondents agreed that it was hard to give immediate feedback when teaching online especially when there was no face-to-face communication. However, effort was made by the respondents to ensure that students remained engaged by giving continuous feedback for assignments submitted.

Theme 5: Teachers should be able to manage their online teaching time.

Generally, it was an enormous challenge for the teachers who were less familiar with online teaching methods to manage teaching time wisely. After a few weeks of teaching online, all the respondents said that they were able to manage their time. The teachers were aware that giving immediate feedback was good in remote learning but it could cause interruptions to their lessons. In order to save time Respondent 1 would "ask students questions directly to gauge my students' understanding." This is consistent with Lin Shi, et al Magjuka (2016) who found that to manage time itself and giving feedback when teaching online courses could be an enormous challenge for teachers.

The respondents found ways to manage teaching time for their lesson and activities to be conducted effectively. Among the strategies used by Respondent 2 to manage teaching time was to "control the students turn-taking in discussion. I also put a chunk of materials into weekly

modules, mark the start and end dates for each module." Time management became more effective after the respondents learned how to save time by avoiding repetitions for announcements, messages and even the content of their lessons. Respondent 3 could "save a lot of time when I don't have to repeat the content especially when students join the online classes late." So, the respondents adhered to the existing timetable strictly to avoid delays in teaching time. As for Respondent 4 "explaining a difficult task properly before assigning it to students in Google Classroom saves a lot of time and headaches." Such delays bothered the respondents as experienced by Respondent 6 whose "students do not always check the course website all the time". In order to avoid interruptions, the respondents sent the tasks assigned to students using multiple platforms.

Since, the respondents in this study were required to follow the online class timetable prepared by the university, interruption was easily avoided. However, all of them discovered that working overtime and during weekends became a new routine. This was because some students with poor internet connection were not always able to join classes according to the new timetable, so the teachers were expected to arrange alternative times to suit the students' situation. Respondents 4 contacted students using instant messaging, chat rooms and "the frequency of interaction with my class during office hours, class time and messaging me anytime." The teachers gave such flexibility of time when guiding students, and reviewing their tasks. To save time and to ensure that students were able to understand the lessons, the teachers ensured that the delivery was clear with a concise content. For Respondent 8, it was "important to make my content clear and concise in Google classroom to save time. I also make sure I don't over-emphasize the content."

Theme 6: Teachers should utilize multiple online teaching platforms.

The respondents were aware that the Malaysian Higher Education Ministry has provided guidelines detailing the roles and responsibilities for teachers, to ensure the smooth delivery of teaching and learning throughout the Movement Control Order (MCO) period. All the respondents have been informed about teaching platforms guidelines and access to communications technology. All the respondents in this study used a variety of online teaching platforms and social media applications during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

The respondents used a variety of online platforms for delivering lessons, instructions and assignments to

students. Respondent 1 used “Google classroom to plan and give instructions, assignments and Google Meet to see their faces.” The respondents were also aware that not all students could have access to certain platforms as noticed by Respondent 2 who used “a variety of online platforms because some students cannot get access to certain platforms.”

When choosing online platforms, WhatsApp video call was most preferred as the charges were affordable for students as compared to other systems. However, Respondent 7 “used all the recommended platforms such as Google Meet and Google Classroom. Some of my poor students need to spend money buying internet data packages. So, I also use WhatsApp which is cheaper.” The rural students with internet connection problems found it easier to communicate with their teachers using WhatsApp and Respondent 3 wanted “students to refer to materials which I WhatsApp them.” All the respondents agreed that it was easier to connect with students using social media as reported by Respondent 8 that “many of us have utilised social media platforms such as Instagram and instant messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram as teaching platforms because it is easier to connect with our students using these platforms.”

Convenience of using a certain online platform also made online teaching easier for the respondents. Smartphones, tablets, laptops were used to gain access to common platforms such as Google Classroom and Google Meet. Respondent 4 noted that “students’ participation is better when they suggested that I utilize mobile learning devices, including smartphones, during teaching and time. Since the students always carry smartphones around, they are always alert.”

Multiple applications were used, also because the teachers wanted to make teaching more interesting as stated by Respondent 5 who said “mobile applications are more convenient just as Google Classroom is convenient. I can suggest reading e-books for their reading before the next class. WhatsApp mobile applications are also good for quick communication, taking pictures of diagrams and concepts taught using smartphones in Google Meet.”

Theme 7: Teachers should utilise alternative online assessment.

All the respondents felt the greatest challenge when teaching online was conducting online assessment. Since, the lockdown in Malaysia (1st April, 2020 until 9th June, 2020) due to the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing

and lack of non-verbal communication made assessments only possible through online platforms such as video call, Skype and Google Meet. Respondent 2 conducted “assessments using the standard exam rubrics. That means I’m not compromising with standards even when assessing using Skype.” Thus, the teachers have to think of the best platforms when conducting both written and oral assessments for the students. However, it became obvious to the respondents that with alternative assessments, the student work was assessed—differed from what would occur in a traditional classroom.

The respondents were aware that each alternative assessment approach must ensure that students achieved the learning outcomes. Respondent 4 taught “Reading Comprehension and posted the standard test online in the Google Classroom”. The other common assessment used by the teachers included multiple choice items in WhatsApp as used by Respondent 5 “I make use of true-false, fill-in-the-blank and open-ended questions to get their understanding of the topic. The same respondent insisted that “students do their assessment and return in, E mail/Dropbox for submission of assignments.” The respondents were aware online assessments were not as good as compared to face-to-face assessment. Respondent 3 stated that “assessing online written exams is difficult as the students might not be honest. It is not a good form of assessment.”

Students cheating in online quizzes and other tests were a concern as stated by Respondent 7 who was “worried that the students are not honest.” So, the students were given immediate feedback and different types of assessment to reduce the possibility of cheating. Respondent 8 considered “multiple choices, true and false statements are good as I can give them feedback immediately. I use Google Meet to assess the group discussions.” However, giving feedback immediately after assessment also took much longer preparation time and this stressed out the teachers as claimed by Respondent 6 whose students “always ask for feedback immediately, taking more time and it is tiring.”

Theme 8: Teachers should utilise a variety of online resources.

Generally, the respondents commented on their students’ ability to understand better when taught using many available online resources. Interactive online teaching and learning resources helped the teachers to select the materials suitable for the topics taught. Respondent 6 made “sure materials are interesting and useful for the

students. So, I use the resources with interactive activities to provide self-paced instruction."

Since the class consisted of students with different abilities, the recorded online resources were better understood as they could be replayed. The teachers used online materials directed at the students, so the content could also be covered quickly and enabled the students to work in a self-paced manner. Respondent 8 consisted of "different-ability students, so I use the materials differently. I could also use the recorded materials in a self-paced manner."

Teachers with low and basic computer technology knowledge could get online resources from webinars, websites, resource persons but the internet connection must be good. Respondent 5 attended "all the webinars and online training on sourcing for new online learning resources. However, a good internet connection is also necessary to boost the use of these resources." The resource person was considered as an important person providing teaching materials for the teachers as claimed by Respondent 1 who could "get teaching resources easily from the webinars series and websites sent by the resource person. I just need to contact the resource person for additional resources." The teachers especially those with high knowledge in technology also shared their online materials with other colleagues as Respondent 2 shared "past years' papers and course materials. I also shared materials and videos from YouTube with my colleagues." Searching for materials from other sources including other university websites were also useful to make online teaching more effective. Respondent 3 added that "there are downloadable worksheets related to my topics available in the Internet. Some colleagues also sent useful materials to my Dropbox. I can also get links and resources from other institutions teaching the same topics."

The respondents were also selective when downloading videos to boost students' interest in certain topics as mentioned by Respondent 7 who noted "students' ability to learn better when using online learning resources, especially visualizations." The respondents believed that awareness enabled teachers to look for more online materials using the websites provided by the university. The more resourceful teachers also designed activities using online resources and made sure different ability students could understand materials delivered online. Respondent 4 commented that "creating more awareness among teachers on how to look for teaching resources online solves a lot of problems because online learning resources recommended by the university also include many e-learning modules."

Conclusion

According to Asabere (2012), online learning aims to seek changes in the pattern of the entire academic process. Such changes have been observed during the COVID-19 pandemic period in Malaysia as teachers have been informed by the Higher Education Minister of the need for transformation from face-to-face interaction to online teaching. Based on the findings, remote/ online learning, teachers in Sarawak too have the potential to exploit interactive technologies and communication systems to improve the teaching experience. Online teaching has the potential to transform the way teachers teach and students learn across the board. It can raise standards, and widen participation in lifelong learning. It cannot replace teachers, but alongside existing methods it can enhance the quality of teaching.

The findings of this study also revealed that teachers have mixed attitudes towards teaching online at home when they have low knowledge of technology, thus causing uncertainty. Guidance from the management and technical teams can prepare teachers better when teaching online. This is especially necessary for teachers who are unprepared to teach online but have no other alternative. Findings from the study also showed that initially, those with low technology knowledge felt uncomfortable at being forced to teach online. However, with the support from younger colleagues with better knowledge of technology and with training provided by the university technical team, the attitude of the teachers changed gradually to less negative. So, after COVID-19 is over, teachers will have a new normal of teaching and take the challenges positively. Just as the respondents in the study did, all teachers should acknowledge and agree that online teaching is transforming a teacher's role in the classroom for the better.

The respondents in the study have accessibility to telecommunication service for online teaching because they lived in urban areas. On the other hand, online teaching was not possible for teachers to teach students during the pandemic period who were without internet connection or meagre internet facilities, especially in rural areas in Sarawak. According to Sarawak Government Official Portal (2020), the past five years have seen an increasing awareness in Sarawak on the usage of the Internet as an alternate means of communication. Through the two major Internet Service Providers (ISP's) in the country, TMNet and Jaring, most Sarawakians in and around the major towns and cities are going on-line. However, findings from the study showed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, rural students were still unreachable due to

poor connection, thus making online teaching only possible for urban students. To avoid disruption to their studies, the university management has asked the rural students to return to the university hostels.

The findings of this study also found that teachers could easily connect with students using various types of online learning platforms and mobile applications as long as there was good telecommunication service in their areas. Respondent 8 described the situation – “My student, Aniq, from a resourceful family is able to access the internet and learn from the comfort of an air-conditioned room in Kuching city, but the same cannot be said for, Rina, a student in an *Orang Ulu* (rural) settlement or Jamil who lives in a low-cost flat”. Thus, the findings revealed that online learning requires the right infrastructure and support. Without these, online learning cannot be accessible to every student.

As far as time management when teaching online is concerned, the findings showed that teachers have to be flexible, provide immediate response, control delivery time, avoid repetitions, have proper planning, and present content which is clear and concise. When doing these, the respondents in the study ensured their students understood the content and were able to complete the task given with minimal guidance by utilizing alternative standardized online assessments. The findings also revealed that teachers are concerned about students cheating when taking online assessment and therefore they should use multiple forms of assessments.

The findings of this study are descriptive based on a small number of respondents limited to one institution. In terms of practical implications the findings support the view that teachers need explicit technical and online resources support in order to enhance their online pedagogical capacity. Also, to optimise online teaching requires the right attitude, infrastructure, resources and support. Without these, online teaching highlights the inherent inequalities in education. Teachers and students who have the resources and capital can use online platforms to teach and learn, but those who do not have such resources are further disadvantaged. In the interior areas of Sarawak where internet connectivity is poor, more innovation is required to ensure that online teaching works for them too.

Competing Interest Statement

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

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