

# Students' Emotional Exhaustion during Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Due to COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

This study focuses on factors leading to emotional exhausted among public university students in Malaysia during implementation of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) sessions due to Covid-19 pandemic. It is to identify how these factors could affect their mental and emotion. This study collected survey from 392 students from three various university in Malaysia. The study is descriptive and analytical which using quantitative method using SPSS and PLS-SEM analysis in order analyse the relationship between all the variables. Referring to the correlation analysis, the finding is expected to reveal that there is a positive and strong relationship between all the variables.

**Keyword:** Emotional Exhaustion, Public Universities, Open and Distance Learning, Covid-19 Pandemic

## Introduction

Recently, the country was outraged by the death of two UiTM undergraduate students due to brain haemorrhage, which brought the attention of netizens with over 12,500 tweets, 8981 shares and 4.4 million comments on Twitter (Yosof, 2021). The cause of the deaths has led to various speculations and assumptions spread on social media saying that they were overwhelmed with assignments that some parties blamed the lecturers solely on this issue. Nevertheless, putting the blame on one party will not solve the problem. Hence, this study

was conducted to identify the factors of students' mental and emotional stress during ODL sessions.

### **Literature Review**

The implementation of ODL due to Covid-19 pandemic was a decision needed to be made due to the closure of every learning institution in order to impede the spread of the deadly virus, which was declared a global public health emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO) in early 2020 (Mahase, 2020). In Malaysia, the enforcement of Restriction Movement Order (RMO) beginning 18 March 2020 has greatly impacted every sector including education where all schools and universities were ordered to close, and learning session was to be replaced with ODL (Awani, 2020).

Studies have reported that pandemic or outbreak that causes abrupt changes in daily routines affect one's psychological health which can lead to panic disorder and depression (Qiu et al., 2020). Thus, the sudden execution of ODL from the traditional physical classroom has also greatly affected students' attitude towards their learning development. Raaper and Brown (2020) stated students' mental and physical wellbeing are significantly impacted by this shift. Similarly, based on a survey of 3800 respondents, Wang and Zhao (2020) also reported that graduate students face higher level of anxiety than general public due to the pandemic. However, the factors that contribute to the anxiety are not strongly derived from lecturer or family relationships.

Though blended learning has been part of most curriculum in Malaysian higher learning institutions for over 20 years, students are still highly dependent on face-to-face discussions with lecturers and classmates. In a study by Kireev et al (2019), it was found that ODL interrupts students' motivation to learn as they are not well-prepared to work completely independent and without the close guidance of a teacher especially if it involves complex chapters and assessments. Other than that, since the learning session has shifted to their family home, students have also reported that lack of access to materials such as stable Internet connection, reference books and technological equipment, has disrupted their study or even to the extent of quitting the course (Mittelmeier et. al., 2019 & Illarionova et. al., 2021). This negative attitude towards ODL due to the pandemic affects the number of student enrolment into universities all around the world (Thatcher et. al., 2020).

According to Ngampornchai and Adams (2016), ODL is highly relevant especially for flexible teaching and learning at tertiary level, however, they also stated that student's commitment is the main challenge in handling effective ODL sessions. They found that students are prone to skip sessions as well as not actively participating in online discussion. Interestingly, this study was conducted pre-pandemic but the findings are still relevant to be discussed. Abakumova et. al (2020) reported that 51.5% of the respondents in their study claim that ODL is an ineffective teaching method and the lack of "live" interaction with teachers and peers contributes to their negative attitude towards ODL sessions. This also leads to emotional stress as students find it hard to find motivation in continuing their study via ODL without the interactions that they usually have during face-to-face classroom.

Nevertheless, there are multiple studies that have found positive student attitude in regard to e-learning. Previously, Bolliger and Erichsen (2013) stated that blended learning, flexible

learning and ODL are more convenient to students and allow them to appreciate technology in classroom. Elfaki et al (2019) found that ODL improves students' learning process and academic performance, compared to the traditional physical classroom. The respondents agree that ODL provides the opportunity to acquire new skills and increases learning quality with the integration of various media. In UiTM, Google Classroom, Edmodo, WhatsApp, Zoom and MOOC platforms have been utilised as main ODL platforms as agreed upon with students. In line with ODL classroom, massive open online courses (MOOCs) were created to assist those who wish to study online as long as they have access to a computer with Internet connection (Kurzman, 2013). These various platforms allow both lecturers and students to have more interactive ODL sessions.

In addition, since students have to continue their study from home via ODL sessions, family plays an important role in influencing student's attitude towards this new shift from face-to-face classroom. Parental engagement helps to give assurance in their children's learning process by motivating them and at the same time providing them privacy. Although parents have major concern over the closure of learning institutions, they are at least at ease having their children in a safe environment. Most parents have shown support in their children's study by befriending technology and providing necessary tools to aid ODL sessions (Bhamani et. al., 2020). Cooperation and effective communication between parents and children also result in quality education and conducive learning environment (Slovacek & Cosic, 2020). In short, supportive family engagement brings comfort to students' learning session at home.

Another important factor that contributes to effective ODL sessions is lecturers' readiness and professionalism. Lecturers' technological knowledge is vital in classroom preparation and this can be challenge for those of age 50-60 years old. Voloshinov et al (2020) stated that lecturers' lack of desire to adapt to innovative technologies and inadequate computer literacy have affected students' attitude. Furthermore, lecturer-student interaction is reported to be significant in ensuring successful teaching and learning sessions. Students highly appreciate lecturers' encouragement and constant feedback which are proven to affect student engagement and satisfaction positively (Muzammil et al., 2020). It is then vital to study the factors that contribute to students' mental exhaustion during ODL as previous studies have shown that it is not solely based on student, lecturer and family relationships. Table 1 shows the stress factor indicators among public university students in Malaysia.

Table 1  
*Stress factor indicators among students*

<b>Construct</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Item</b>
<i>Student</i>	B1	I complete assignment at the very last minute
<i>Attitude</i>	B2	I have a hard time understanding the lessons during ODL even though the courses are simple
	B3	I find it difficult to collaborate in groups during ODL
	B4	I revise lessons at the very last minute
	B5	I diligently complete the assignment
	B6	If I have hard time understanding any topics, I will refer to a lecturer or friend
	B7	Overall, I study hard to succeed
	<i>Lecturer</i>	C1
<i>Professionalism</i>	C2	Lecturer is responsive towards students' inquiries
	C3	Lecturer is always ready to provide academic guidance to students
	C4	The lecturer is accessible for discussion
	C5	Lecturer teaches the topics creatively to ensure students' understanding
	C6	Lecturer give assignments outside the teaching and learning scope
	C7	Lecturer helps students master the learning content
	<i>Family-Role</i>	D1
D2		My family always motivates me not to give up in study
D3		My family is willing to listen to my tribulations
D4		My family provides a conducive study environment
D5		My family does not bother me while studying
D6		My family facilitates my learning
D7		Overall, I am happy to be in this family
<i>Other Factors</i>	E1	I have problems accessing the internet while studying
	E2	I have conducive and comfortable learning space
	E3	I have complete learning equipment
	E4	I work part-time during ODL to cover my study costs
	E5	My friend finds it difficult to cooperate while completing group assignments
	E6	I get stressed out studying during MCO
	E7	Overall, ODL is burdensome to me

Resource: Researcher 2022

### **Methodology**

Research methodology comprised of vital steps to conduct the research and it was significant to discover the most relevant strategies in order to get efficient outcomes to respond to the problem statement of the research (Kothari, 2004). This study is descriptive and analytical. The primary data were obtained through questionnaires administered to the diploma and degree students from public university in Malaysia who studied in three various universities which were research university, comprehensive university as well as focus university. Random sampling technique was used in this study and the survey was conducted online by using Google Form to obtain the responses. The entire population for this study was one million

students that came from all races and ethnics in Malaysia which included Malay, Chinese, Indian, Bumiputera Sabah and Sarawak (Iban, Murut and Bidayuh). The sample size for this study was 384 students that have been identified primarily by referring to the Krejcie and Morgan's table. Since a total of 392 students participated in this study, the minimum sample size requirement has therefore been met.

A five-point Likert-based scales were used to represent most suitable answer of the from the respondents. The description of the Likert scales used include, 1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3- Neutral, 4-Agree and 5-Strongly Agree. To test the reliability of the answers of the questionnaires, reliability analysis is used in the study. The reliability analysis has been conducted by referring to the rule of thumb made by Perry, Charlotte, Isabella and Bob (2004). They described that Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) 0.90 and above shows excellent reliability, 0.70 to 0.90 shows high reliability, 0.50 to 0.70 shows moderate reliability and 0.50 and below shows low reliability. The descriptive analysis have been tested using SPSS 27.0 and four independent variables factors (students' attitude, lecturers' professionalism, family-role and other factors) and dependent variables (student stress) have been tested using Smart PLS 3 (Ringle et al., 2015). The study used mean, standard deviation, correlation analysis to examine the relationship between all the variables (students' attitude, lecturers' professionalism, family-role and other factors) with emotional exhaustion. Besides, the analyses also have been carried out to identify the most influential factors that give impact on Emotional Exhaustion during ODL session in public universities.

### **Significance of the Study**

The analysis of this study are expected to identify identify the factors of students' mental and emotional stress during ODL sessions. Through the findings, this study also aims to provide insights on language learning strategies deemed effective by the stakeholders. The completion of this study can assist Arabic language lecturers to diversify their teaching strategies in order to achieve high level of student understanding. Besides that, it can also prompt the tertiary institutions and curriculum developers to examine a more comprehensive language course that will achieve its main objective which if for students to acquire the language effectively within the designated time frame.

### **Conclusion**

Wholesome support from family affects the mental and emotional well-being of students in their learning sessions at home. This study provides exposure to the importance of the role of parents and families in assisting children's learning development. Parents also play an important role in ensuring that children do not experience mental and emotional stress in the process of ODL implementation.

In general, this study helps lecturers understand the constraints and challenges faced by students and their families while conducting ODL at home. This is because the ODL will instigate differences of opinion from various parties. For example, from the lecturers' viewpoints, they may not find it difficult to implement online teaching, however, from the point of view of parents, especially families with many children or unstable economic status, ODL will be a constraint and a challenge for their whole family.

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