

Various Factors that Influence Postgraduate Students' Online Distance Learning at Malaysian Private Universities

Ghaffar Rafli Rozani, AP. Dr. Ahmad Rasmi Suleiman Albattat,
AP. Dr. Ooi Boon Keat

Master in Management, Graduate School of Management, Management and Science University

Abstract: The following study analyses these variables affecting students, particularly postgraduate students in several private universities in Malaysia. This work also shows how well students can fare when they study through Online Distance Learning or what we now call hybrid learning. This method of learning has been in operation since COVID-19 was first detected in Malaysia in the year 2020 and up to now is mostly applied for graduate classes. The following were the objectives of the study Intended to identify the factors that will motivate the postgraduate students to work harder under the online distance learning program. Further, the study aimed at establishing why postgraduate students have limited time for face-to-face lessons or any other learning related activities on the physical campus and lastly the study aimed at determining how post graduate students performed during ODL. This research involves the use of a survey technique together with a quantitative research paradigm. The research in this study involved active postgraduate students of Management and Science University. A survey approach using the Likert scale is used in this study to collect the data. As a result, to increase the number of respondents and make the survey completely open to students, it was designed using Google Form. Methodology data analysis in this study involves determining how much data there is in relation to each indication and this is followed by an assessment of the data presentation score. The main conclusions were that most of the postgraduate students had many extra commitments and little time for lessons. They also had many family commitments to honour, for the majority of the students are pursuing masters, PhD and doctorate, most of whom are mature, employed and international students. Moreover, there is no immediate motivation to complete coursework the moment, coupled up with lack of adequate encouragement on distance learning as many students prefer campus based guidance.

Keywords: Online Distance Learning, Hybrid Learning, Face-to-Face Lessons, Coursework, Distance Learning.



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Introduction

As technology grows and the educational environment evolves, online distance learning is more of one of the go-to options in the higher education systems especially in Malaysia. Malaysian private universities are important for delivering education to postgraduate learners who wish to pursue their studies while not restrained by a physical campus location. Nevertheless, as it has been evidenced, online learning presents numerous benefits; nonetheless, there are numerous factors which affect the effectiveness and success of the online learning mode of the study particularly among Postgraduate students.

Distance learning becomes possible for postgraduate students because they require flexibility to balance their studies performance, work and family. Also, they are often more independent which means that they can deal with their classes, attend lectures or tutorials efficiently without the need to physically attend a class. Distance learning also allow access to international materials and the emergence of a necessary technological literacy valued in present working environments. Since there are numerous quality online postgraduate programs offered, learners should be able to pursue their education without having to move after completing their first degrees thus the appropriateness of distance learning.

Modern education system has become far more complex and rather flexible and the understanding grows that current methods of education have to be changed and developed. Education industry is experiencing significant transformation as a result of Industrial Revolution 4.0. This is especially so since distance learning has higher technology than other technological platforms with internet technology making the learning environment trendy. Industry 4.0 requires better quality of human capital. In the near future the education sector is expected to refine its students to meet competency levels that seek to employ knowledge and skills preferably referred to as 4.0 Education. In Education 4.0, it is necessary that learning should be able to be carried out at any time and not necessarily at a particular time (Alam et al., 2023).

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Online Distance Learning

Major revolution in information and communications technology in the digital age has influenced distance education ways of the graduate students tremendously. This era liberates our thinking and conditions our bodies to be conscious of every twist and turn in life more so responding to change characteristics of the ways of teaching in our graduate programs. In the students whom employ active learning techniques, show their perception that they invest ample amount of time evaluating the effectiveness of active learning. As each student will also simultaneously encounter different activities in the use of technology in change as well as adoption by lecturers in various integrations of ICT, literacy & content. With the application of technology, each student's apprehension that he or she will not comprehend the lecture content and may not be ready to perform the learning tasks since he or she does not know what is in the module stops. Nonetheless, there are those challenges; yet every student has said that among behaviors effecting them one is dedication and commitment to achieve the dream of finishing a postgraduate program amid a pandemic. Without doubt, in the present time of the pandemic, current technology is very very very helpful in relating learning to every student. This is a way to make each student aware that in adjunct to the modular distance participation, the graduate programs have considered other ways of learning that can be delivered and satisfy the needs of students and faculty. If the challenges encountered during the will be addressed and if the issues identified are transformed into opportunities the distance learning will be made more possible while the instructional learning-activities are going to be made more interwoven (Culajara et al., 2022).

1.1.2 Willingness to Learn

In developed countries the proclivity for gaining new knowledge is relatively high on average. When 1407 students in China were surveyed for learning readiness, 83 percent of them showed high learning readiness while 27 percent students fell under the medium or low learning readiness scale. As it can be observed with more references to many works (Gorges et al., 2013; Rainsbury, et al., 2001, 2002) the readiness to learn is the first key competency that is to be important for job success especially when the environment is changing frequently or is not predictable at all and for evaluation of professionalism at industrial environment. These learning attitudes act as a stimulus for transitioning into learning attitude that creates opportunities for learning, expands the horizon of perception, problem solving ability, confidence, flexibility, and growth, and exercise of high academic achievement. As for the area of education, the learner needs to have powerful readiness to learn to face the difficulties of the epoch characterized by the highly rate of flux and the uncertainty. The future achievements of science and technology require people to be conscious of the environment they are operating in (Hotifah et al., 2020).

1.1.3 Motivations to Continue Study

Rivai (2004) define motivation as a set of individual belief system that has a relation with the goals of acquiring more profound values. Additionally, Robins and Mary (2005) noted that motivation is a person's propensity to engage in exhibiting maximum effort towards the attainment of issues, which have been fashioned within an organization and can be satisfying to the person, or people, who have been tasked with their accomplishment. Concerning determination, there are several factors that affect work motivation as described by Anoraga (2014) including; discipline, high imagination and combination power, self-confidence, resilience to pressure, and responsibility in order to do the work.

1.1.4 Time Management

The most obvious function that time management serves is in organizational work settings, however it also applies to academic contexts. It greatly affects people, especially students who usually complain about not being able to plan for their study schedules properly. It is important to manage time for study or work because its misuse has negative impacts on students. In other words, time management is the process of controlling proper portions with time for tasks, which helps to establish better responsibility and continuity in fellows. The goal here is to stick to a planned time schedule so as to improve on time investing. When used an aspect of effective time management, time can therefore be effective in the process of learning in the following circumstances For instance in the planning of study sessions. There is no doubt that study time management plays a crucial role in academic performance and interprets the general learning accomplishments. Therefore, adequate planning and scheduling of the study sessions makes up the main leverage point within the academic systems to encourage students towards a brighter and rigorous learning endeavor hence, enhancing their performance.

Time management encompasses five key aspects: First, the process of Goal Setting in which one identifies the tasks of the activity and the setting and scratch of both the long and short term goals. Second, task sequencing also known as Appropriate Ranking, which involves allocation of priorities to tasks in order to prioritize them. Third, scheduling, which involves activities like list making, numbering of time for the tasks, numbering of break time, as well as technique of using an agenda, use of beeper among others. Fourth, reducing distractions since people experience interferences while performing their tasks at the workplace. That is why striving for maintaining attention, one should not divert it to irrelevant stuff. Fifth, delegation of task which is the act of assigning dutie to others to perform tasks or discharged certain duties that are within the scope of authority. This means delegating someone to the extent where he or she can make decisions and take actions needed to accomplish the work (Sebayang et al., 2022).

1.2 Problem Statement

This paper aims to establish the role of ODL in meeting educational needs especially during COVID-19 pandemic for post graduate learners. Nevertheless, some problems persist which influence its efficiency and approval among students of private universities in Malaysia. These challenges include technical problems that ODL face in their practice but it is also encompassing didactical, cultural and individual factors that hinder ODL success.

There is need for this study because despite the prospect that ODL has to offer, many postgraduate students experience challenges in time management, motivations to continue their studies, willingness to learn. These issues are responsible for low or high satisfaction and performance among the student populace.

Many earlier studies have looked into the technological and general aspects of ODL but there are no earlier studies focusing on explicating how the challenge variables of time management, motivation to continue study, willingness to learn as well as socio-cultural factors and the integration of these variables impacts on the success of ODL for postgraduate students. These variables have been researched but not satisfactorily in relation to students' participation and performance within an online learning environment.

This research therefore seeks to address these issues by examining the effects of the above mentioned factors to the success of ODL amongst postgraduate students within the private universities in Malaysia. It will explore other factors such as, time management, motivations to continue study, willingness to learn that influence the interaction and usefulness of ODL by students. Because of this it is important to have this factors in mind while designing intervention and policies that would improve the quality of ODL systems with the aim of helping students with various needs.

The variables chosen as time management, motivations to continue study, willingness to learn are crucial because they determine students' capacity to impact with ODL programmes. Through the identification of these variables, the study seeks to help qualitatively inform the factors inhibiting or promoting the achievement of effective online learning in order to inform better pedagogical practice and institutional support structures. This will aid in enhancing the impact and completion rate of postgraduate students learning in ODL settings by filling up the gaps that were outlined in the previous research as well as the dynamic realities that face students.

It is with time management, motivations to continue study, willingness to learn as the major parameters that this study aims at improving the understanding of the existing barriers and facilitators of ODL. This study will help to identify the main issues which would elicit increased focus on training mechanisms to improve students' learning accomplishments and learning retention in postgraduate ODL programs (Gaba et al., 2021).

2. Research Methodology

This research design uses quantitative approach, and this type of research uses survey research. According to (Sugiyono, 2016) quantitative descriptive is research that explains the description and describes the results of research with numbers or numeric. What this means is that this research describes the numbers in the statistical results. The data analysis used in this research is multiple linear regression. Multiple linear regression tests were used to determine the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

3. Findings and Discussion

In this study, Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance is chosen as the primary theoretical framework for several reasons:

1. **Comprehensive Framework:** This way the theory can be effectively used to understand the different aspects of distance education and thus can be applied to various learning circumstances that take place in cyberspace.
2. **Proven Utility:** While some scholars have criticised the theory, many researches have shown the efficiency of the theory toward shaping learner satisfaction and results. This attests to its versatility in various learning environment and scenarios and solidity of the theory.
3. **Alignment with Research Objectives:** The relationships proposed in this study's framework are consistent with the components of dialogue, structure, and learner autonomy enshrined in Moore's theory. Analyzing these elements would help this study derive best practices that could minimize the transactional distance while raising the quality of online learning.
4. **Potential for Integration:** Due to the theory's flexibility, other theories as learning motivation theories can be incorporated in order to give a better account as to what factors shape online learning, something that the theory fails to offer.
5. In conclusion, this paper demonstrates that Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance provides adequate conceptual grounding for investigating the interactions in online education. The scope of the theory, its usefulness in theoretical and empirical research, and correspondence to the objectives of this study explain the decision to use it as the main theoretical foundation.

3.1 Time Management in Online Distance Learning

Organization of time is important and helps the student be able to balance their college education with other activities they engage in online learning. They require proper time table, planning and organizing, setting up of realistic sub targets and avoiding interferences. Calendar: Technology tools that are used to plan study sessions Calendar: Distance from family members facilitates learning environment. Periodic interruption is good for the system and calling for assistance where there is difficulty is good for the student. These strategies enhance the opportunities of online learning environment to support students academic performance as indicated in the paper by Batbaatar and Amin, (2021) pointed out that time management play a crucial role in online learning environment.

3.2 Motivation to Continue Study in Online Distance Learning

This paper argues that motivation greatly influences the outcomes of online distance learning. As an operative principle it provides the force that enables students to become actively involved in their study, to practice and overcome various difficulties, and to reach their objectives. Arguing from the other perspective, lack of motivation can be the cause of failure to concentrate, failure to observe discipline and failure in course completion among students. Thus, development and maintenance of motivation for learning plays a crucial role in determining positive learning results in the context of online distance learning situations. According to (Afrilia AS et al., 2022), the relationship between learning from home and student motivation to learn is relatively close due to the extrinsic motivation, the environment, teachers, and parents.

3.3 Willingness to Learn in Online Distance Learning

Chapman et al, observe that the willingness of students to learn is very vital in the enhancement of online distance learning. Compared to conventional classroom settings where students can have more order and direct communication, online learning can be challenging for a particular person as it prescribes most of the actions to be taken and engagements to be made on an individual basis. Employees with a strong willingness to learn can be described as motivated learners with ability to self-motivate and approach learning as a mere project to implement. SO furthermore, with the regard to the online distance learning, learners encompasses those people who are ready to study,

who contribute to messages' discussions, who ask questions if necessary, and who continue studying despite of difficulties. They know that personal motivation and personal responsibility are indispensable for student success and above all for successful learning in virtual classes and without direct authority. In general, it is emerging that attitude to learning is one of the most influential factors impacting positive outcomes in the context of online distance learning, as well as in other areas of education associated with this mode of training. Masandal & Bakar, (2022) has pointed that though there are certain constraints, online teaching and learning the respondent shows willingness and perception.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Data Collection

On the bases of the concept developed by Sugiyono in 2016, the primary data is identified as a type of data source, which directly contributes to data collection. In this study the kind of data used were; Observation Data and Questionnaires Data. Primary data is essential in research since it's collected immediately from the sample of the research. Primary data was collected from the students postgraduate towards ODL (online distance learning) of private universities in Malaysia).

4.2 Sample Design

In the study, samples were given as follows consisting of the student postgraduate towards ODL (online distance learning) at private universities in Malaysia. In constructing a sampling frame based on a non-probability sampling technique, a list or representation of the target population is developed from which participants will be selected based on specified criteria or attributes. Non-probability sampling techniques mean that conclusions cannot be generalized to the broader population; however, these techniques remain useful in particular study settings. The following is an example of creating a sampling frame using a non-probability sampling approach: First, determine the target population: identify the population of interest in reference to the study. Here it may refer to its users as students in postgraduate universities Malaysia and refers to individuals who are currently learners in higher education institutions in Malaysia and interested in online distance learning. Second, access to student records: Approach the listed institutions and formally ask for permission to access their student records or database. Third, determine inclusion criteria: Develop a list of criteria for choosing students from the sampling frame. It may include factors such as age, the year of study, area of specialization, or courses that employ online distance learning methods. Fourth, sampling selection: having to visit offices, review students' records and strictly take students according to certain criteria that have been set. This could entail physically looking for records or applying search criteria in a database to look for students with characteristics as desired. Fifth, contacting potential participants: Once the sample has been selected, students who were identified through email or other means are contacted to participate in the study. Sixth, data collection: Administer data gathering techniques like questionnaires, interviews or focus groups with respondents that correspond to the research paradigm.

4.3 Research Design

The type of research used in this kind of research is survey research. Quantitative descriptive research is research which is carried with numbers or numeracy in a bid to describe the picture and the findings of the investigation as mentioned by (Sugiyono, 2016). In this study, the survey design utilized was a cross sectional survey. Here, the respondent's choices on cross section, represents a very large population that gives attention to what is needed at a particular period. By "one point at a time" does not mean that the respondent has been interviewed or administered self-questionnaires collected on an ongoing basis (even though the questionnaire is being studied) (Adiyanta, 2019).

4.4 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics is a categorical method of statistical data analysis seek to put into a structured, concise and easily understandable mode of organising numerical data in order to make an analysis of a specific phenomenon, event or condition make it possible to have a particular understanding or meaning. In fact, descriptive analysis can be said to encompass a manner of summarizing data into measures of mean and variance. Then, comparison between the summary data are fulfilled between one group of subjects and another group of subjects depending on the objectives of the analysis. Depending on the type of data either numeric or categorical, the method of data summarization will differ (Rinaldi & Mujiyanto, 2017).

5. Conclusion

The study looks at how Online Distance Learning (ODL) has changed and affected Malaysia, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. It draws attention to the swift shift from conventional in-person instruction to online learning environments in the wake of the Movement Control Order (MCO) and the difficulties that come with it, particularly for students from low-income families. ODL, which has its roots in Malaysia and dates back to 1972, proved crucial during the pandemic when it exposed gaps in students' access to and readiness for digital technology. The study is to investigate how time management, employment policies, motivation, geography, and openness to learning affect postgraduate students' involvement with ODL at private universities. By determining these elements, the study aims to increase ODL's efficacy and inclusivity, making distant learning more flexible and rewarding in the long run and influencing policy choices to raise the standard of postgraduate education at Malaysia's private universities.

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