

## **THE EFFECTS OF OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) ON EMOTIONS OF UniSHAMS'S STUDENTS**

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### **Abstract**

Since the pandemic of Covid-19 started and many countries now had transitioned to less stricken regulations, many services are now open with full capacities. UniSHAMS is a private higher education located in Kedah, Malaysia, was no exceptions in facing challenges especially in providing the students with Online Distance Learning (ODL) during these times. The mental health issue has become major concern since there are findings suggest that students, as well as the general population, may be experiencing psychological effects from the outbreak of Covid-19. This study aims to evaluate the emotions of the students while experiencing ODL and whether the continuation of ODL type of learning can be implemented although the students can now have a traditional 'face-to face' class. A quantitative along with qualitative analysis was conducted to analyse the perspective of the students while attending ODL classes since the outbreak of Covid-19. A total of 126 UniSHAMS's students have participated and shared their feedback based on the questionnaire distributed. The data revealed a higher level of positive emotions than of negative emotions. Students who attended online course reported a high level of hopeful, followed by joyful, proud, and relieved. They felt as well negative emotions such as frustration, anxious, bored, ashamed, anger and hopeless. The latter showed lower values thus indicated positive emotions of the students generally yet the negative emotions are still there and have to be addressed as well.

Keywords: ODL, emotion, UniSHAMS's students.

### **Introduction**

Online Distance Learning (ODL) is a learning process in which the students and the teachers are not necessarily be face to face for the knowledge to be transmitted. It's usually associated with the usage of technologies to provide the students with effective learning environments. Due to the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, the ODL has become a must in order to provide the students with education although all around the world, school and universities are forced to shut. The conventional physical classes must be replaced and hence students also need to adapt to this new learning process.

Learning either by conventional or any methods, posed a challenge themselves in their own continuum. Undoubtedly, the learning environments have an impact not only on cognitive part but also on emotional and motivational aspects of learning. There are a lot of studies to evaluate the effectiveness of learning methods, however question on how students experience online-learning environments emotionally has not been answered sufficiently, so far (Stephan, Markus and Glaser-Zikuda, 2019). In the traditional academic context, Pekrun et al. (2011) suggested that showing positive emotions can improve students' creative thinking and reflection, thus supporting their academic performance, whereas negative emotions are associated with lower levels of performance. In other words, positive emotions such as enjoyment, hope, and pride were positively associated with student effort, self-regulation and more elaborated learning strategies, whereas anger, shame, anxiety and boredom have been

associated with lower performances (Pekrun et al., 2011). In addition, a university survey conducted in Spain found higher levels of anxious and depressive symptoms in students than university staff (academic and administrative), suggesting that students have suffered more from the psychological impact of the current health emergency of COVID-19 (Odriozola-Gonzalez, et al., 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to identify the emotions perceived by the students in ODL, in order to make sure they are experiencing an effective learning process and be able to motivate themselves. By having positive emotions, students will be able to expand their learning strategies and increase their digital and technological knowledge, which is a critical skill for employment later on.

There are many factors that can directly or indirectly effects the emotions of students during ODL. The interaction between students and the instructors plays important role to the emotion of the students. The synchronous ODL is much preferable in which demonstrated by D'Errico et al. (2016). Research on technology acceptance tries to find factors that explain user attitudes, behavioural intention, and ultimate usage behaviour. Davis (1985) postulated the expected benefits and the expected user-friendliness as important indicator for user acceptance in technology enriched learning environments. Therefore, when the online learning system is perceived as easy to be used, the student will experience positive emotions and perform better in online course (Venkatesh and Bala, 2008). Nevertheless, the advance technology without access to the internet is useless. There are some students that cannot access the internet due to their geographical area. This situation gives some challenges as students are left behind in their studies and been left demotivated or stress (Allam et al., 2020; Chung, Noor, & Mathew, 2020; Noraini, Yusuf, & Ahmad, 2020). Moreover, some students are affected by inconvenient environments such as disturbance from family members (Sun, Tang & Zuo, 2020), while some students may use the factor of easy access to the internet to cheat, plagiarise and copy answers among themselves in their assessment (Gonzalez et al., 2020; Kearns, 2012; Nizam, Gao, Li, Mohamed, & Wang, 2020; Timmis, Broadfoot, Sutherland, & Oldfield, 2016). These situations will trigger negative consequences such as fear of failure and low self-esteem if they remain unchecked, therefore indirectly affecting learning motivation.

Ultimately, this study will try to determine the answers for the following questions:

1. How frequent the student's felt on each emotion either negative or positive from their experience during ODL.
2. What are the factors that contributed to their feelings towards ODL from their experiences.
3. How to implement ODL better by considering their emotions while conducting this method of learning.

## **Method**

The data was collected using a survey form. Google Form was utilized as the tool to collect the response because of conveniences and easily accessible by the target correspondents to achieve sufficient response rate. The survey also targeted specifically the International Islamic University of Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah (UniSHAMS) students. The demographic items include the respondent's gender, age, locality, mode of study, program level and field of study. The responses from the survey were analysed using the descriptive tools, the frequency, and the percentage for quantitative analysis. In addition, qualitative analysis also was conducted in which the response of the students towards their ODL's experiences that relate to their emotions. The qualitative analysis was conducted by analysing the comments of the students from the open-ended question in the survey.

**Results and discussion**

A total of 126 UniSHAMS’s students had participated and shared their feedback on their emotions during ODL implementation. The response rate was satisfying, and this was contributed by the convenience offered by the tool used in the data collection process. The demographic background of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

No	Category	Frequency	Percentage %
1.	Locality		
	Local student	125	99
	International student	1	1
2.	Mode of study		
	Full time	100	100
	Part time	0	0
3.	Gender		
	Female	87	69
	Male	39	31
4.	Age		
	18 -25	121	96
	26 – 40	5	4
	41 – 55	0	0
	Above 55	0	0
5.	Program level		
	Foundation	62	49
	Diploma	24	19
	Bachelor Degree	39	31
	Doctoral degree	1	1
6.	Field of study		
	Management/ Finance/ Accounting	52	41
	Islamic Studies	42	33
	Science	17	14
	Art/Technology	13	10
	Human Science	1	1
	Muamalat and management science	1	1

The demographic characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 1. The total sample for the survey comprised of 126 respondents. The locality distribution of the survey respondent is 99% local students and 1% international students. 100% of the respondent are full time students. The gender distribution of the survey is 69% females and 31% males. The results also reveal that the respondents are predominantly age between 18 until 25 years, which comprised of 96% of the sample. For the program level taken by students, the result shows that 49% from foundation level, 31% from Bachelor's degree level, 19% from Diploma level, and 1% come from Doctoral degree level. Lastly, results show the distribution of the field of students in which majority 41% are from management/ finance/ accounting field, 33% are

from Islamic studies, 14% from science field, 10% from art/technology and 1% come from Human Science field.

Table 2. Interpretation of the Mean Value Score

Mean Score	Interpretation of the Mean Score
1.00-2.33	LOW
2.34-3.67	MEDIUM
3.68-5.00	HIGH

The mean scores are calculated from the frequencies of the students' feelings, in which the higher the value, the less time they feel that emotions while attending online classes. The interpretation of high mean score means that the particular emotion felt by students and followed by medium, which were lesser and low, as the least felt by the students.

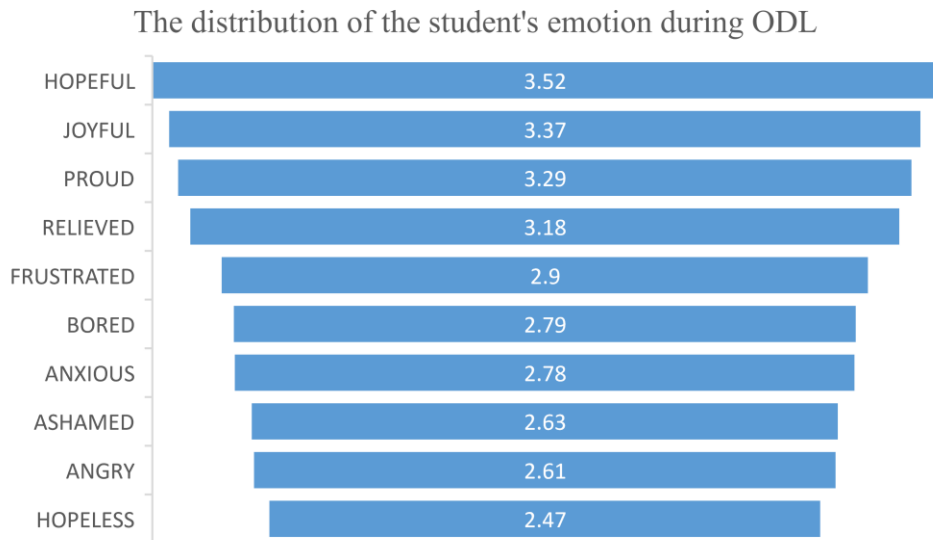


Figure 1. The mean score of the students' emotions from their experience learning by online method.

From the mean score interpretation, the frequencies of the student's feeling for all the emotions asked in Figure 1 are medium level. This mean value used to summarize the emotions felt by the whole population of the respondents to see the pattern for most of the populations. The scales used in survey are from never, rarely, sometimes, often and always. The medium score of the mean value suggested that most of the students had chosen sometimes as how much they felt that emotions during ODL. The medium score of the mean value also suggested that the students' preferences are towards the centre of the scale given.

Data from the survey suggested that many of the students felt positive emotions rather than negative emotions. All the positive emotions which are hopeful, joyful, proud and relieved are on top in the mean score value as shown in Figure 1. Although the students were not asked directly about their factors that influence their emotions during ODL, this study identified and categorized the factors from their open-ended questions regarding their experience during online learning. Thus, some of the students' opinions were shared to suggest the factors that affects their emotions, either positively or negatively. Firstly because of ODL, students can save time to travel and cost of living in university and other expenses that

accompany traditional learning (Ms & Toro, 2013). Many students shared the same thoughts of ODL in which they preferred because of the low cost apart from the expenses used for purchasing data or Wi-Fi at their home. The challenge on the other hand was that there are some students can't afford the online cost or their residents are remote.

“Online education is far more affordable as compared to physical learning. This is because online learning eliminates the cost points of student transportation, student meals, and most importantly, real estate.” – Correspondent 6

Instructors, as well as students realize that online learning methods encouraged pursuing lessons from anywhere and anytime. The students become self-directed learner and learns simultaneously and asynchronously at any time (Gautam, 2020; Mukhtar et al. 2020). In addition, students can easily access the teaching materials using online platform such as video recording of the lectures, slides and many more.

“It even gave me ample time to balance my social-life and student life that it made me feel better and motivated on studying. Not to mention the ability to refer back to my notes and lecturer videos when needed.” – Correspondent 9

“For me, studying online is quite easy and more advance, because I can attend a lot of programs in one day, and of course I can collect a lot of merit mark because a lot of programs are online, and I can do revision by a recording class in Google classroom, than a face-to-face class, honestly, I can't remember all of what my lecture teaches and sometimes I can't note everything fast, because lecture of course want to explain a lot in class but there's a time for me. Online learning is fun, easier, more courage, more spirit to success.” – Correspondent 90

Students seem to enjoy the ODL because they can be close with their family members and friends by several correspondents that gave similar feedback on their experience in ODL as followings.

“My general opinion, can increase closeness with family, can organize learning time on a daily basis and lastly can add insight and ability to use various applications in the online learning process.” – Correspondent 26

“According to my opinion, I feel through the situations we faced before, it educated me to pay more attention to my family. This is because during this pandemic, I was able to spend more time with my family because we stay at home together and indirectly as well, I gained a lot of new knowledge about information technology.” Correspondent 17

“For me, sometimes it was quite bored and I realized that many lab skills I missed to practice and didn't manage to get exposure about many things. Sometimes it was quite joyful as I still could have time with family while having online learning and the timetable was so flexible.” – Correspondent 62

“So far so good. I can balance my time with family and studies. I can help my family. Take care of my family especially my father was sick since 2018. I have more time with them and joyful studies!” – Correspondent 89

The negative emotions felt by students were probably caused by the difficulty to interact efficiently during the online class session. Somayah et al. (2016) found that the absence of personal interactions, not only between students and teachers but also among fellow students is a crucial element of drawback for ODL. This lack of interaction can be observed, in which majority of students like to turn off their camera during online class.

“Sometimes it takes time to communicate or discuss things with friends from the same course as we barely know each other because of the online distance.” – Correspondent 25

“It has been a tough time that we faced during pandemic, but we have to adapt with the new normal and move on with the reality that covid is still all around us. While there's many advantages in term of flexibility in online classes there's also so many disadvantages especially

for students such as, we are not experienced the campus life, not socialising with people around, thinking skills getting bad. One can be introvert since they never met each other even their own classmates.” – Correspondent 2

One of the emotions felt by students are bored which is felt more frequent by quite large number of them.

“To me for a short period of time it is acceptable, but if it involves too long a period of time it is not acceptable because the learning situation is no longer the same and the input from learning is getting less and less making students quickly bored with the online method.” – Correspondent 51.

To overcome this, the teaching methods of constructivist pedagogy, suggested learning environments need to include a variety of instruction strategies including tasks that have personal relevance for learners (Reeves & Reeves, 2008). Goldingay and Land (2013) reported student experience of social presence and feel more motivated by the weekly video ‘selfies’ uploaded to YouTube by the lecturer.

There are some students that felt that online class is not sufficient and some courses needed a practical class on site. Here, hybrid class can be implemented to provide best of both methods, online and physical class.

“For IT student especially need more practical tutorial, instead only instruct us to only watch video from YouTube.” – Correspondent 23

“Online give a little bit impact on student performance, decrease in skill.” – Correspondent 65.

Lack of facilities such as connections of internet are other drawbacks of ODL that can affect students’ emotions to negative.

“From my own perspective I think that this online class can sometimes be a bit hard for the students with no internet and the one with low-income housing.” – Correspondent 49

### **Conclusion**

There are mixtures of feelings felt by the students during ODL, however, their positive emotions were overall higher than negative emotions. On the positive note, majority of the students felt that they were provided with sufficient materials and guidance by the lecturers. Although some might struggle with ODL, the instructors and the management of the university generally had provided a good service in adapting the situation during the pandemic with the MCO in place. However, improving the teaching methods and providing better facilities can make ODL more efficient, and might be offered to attract more students out there especially those having difficulties to travel or have to commit to their work or just prefer to have it flexible.

### **Recommendations**

This study suggests that the implementation of ODL can be continued and be considered as an option with the improvement of the teaching methods to suit different kind of students and also making sure that their emotions are also being considered. If the ODL to be implemented, a questionnaire to monitor their emotions can be included in the Teaching Evaluating Report (TER) so that the lecturers can have feedback and adapt to the students’ need. Other than that, an interaction between the instructors and students must always be prioritized because it is the main factor in affecting the students’ emotions. For an instance, make a video ‘selfie’, having a real time video conference, giving assessments and ~~also~~ feedback, using different assessment’s platform such as Kahoot, Quizizz, Wordwall and giving a group discussion to encourage peer-peer interactions.

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