

LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) POST COVID 19 PANDEMICS ON UniSHAMS'S STUDENTS

Siti Nor Ain binti Zainon and Nurhidayah binti Ahmad Hassan.

International Islamic University Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah (UniSHAMS),

09300 Kuala Ketil, Kedah Darul Aman.

sitinorain@unishams.edu.my, nurhidayah@unishams.edu.my

Abstract

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is a way of learning remotely without having face-to-face contact with instructor in the classroom. There are a lot of researches conducted long before the Covid 19 virus come into the scene. There are lots of strategies suggested by many in order to make it effective in providing students with the best learning environment. Then comes Covid 19 pandemic that has shaken the education world, in which majority of the higher education institutions switched to ODL amidst the questions of readiness, in both ends, the university and the student. This paper will investigate specifically UniSHAMS students' preference towards ODL methods used during the pandemic and learning strategies that can be adapted post Covid 19 pandemic when all the students are allowed to be in campus. A total of 66 UniSHAMS students have participated and shared their feedback on ODL implementation. The data was summarized using descriptive analysis. Students' satisfaction towards different strategies of ODL to replace face to face class were found to be: implementation of real time conference video (66.15%), recorded video (51.51%), recorded audio (46.15%), by sending presentations (58.46%), written communications (54.84%) and others (35%). Many of the students (47%) felt their workload during online class has been the same as before. 39.4% agreed to continue ODL while 37.9% is not sure and 22.7% disagreed to continue ODL in future. Recommendations on improvements for better ODL implementations are also provided. This study proposed effective learning strategies by presenting the data collected from the students that have experienced ODL during the pandemic. Some students indicated that ODL should be continued but blended with the traditional face-to-face class to get the best of both worlds.

Keywords: Open and Distance Learning, Learning Strategies, Post-pandemic, UniSHAMS.

Introduction

Due to an unprecedented outbreak of Covid 19 virus all over the world that cause the enforcement of Movement Control Order (MCO) not only in Malaysia, many other countries are affected as well. Peoples have to change their lifestyles, to more solitary life as to prevent the transmission of this deadly virus. In many areas of life, the routine and norm has become drastically changed where everybody had to shift to the new norm. In education before the pandemic outbreak, the students were going to the school and learn from the teachers, face to face. However, because the schools and higher institutions were instructed to close down, the learning process became halted. Many had thoughts that the situation will go back to normal in no time, however, we are still facing the danger of contracting the virus, two years from the start of the virus outbreak. In order to continue the education system, many had to adopt Open and Distance Learning (ODL) strategies whether it was ready or not (Chung, Noor and Mathew, 2020).

Both instructors and learners are given no choice but to proceed with Online and Distance Learning as the replacement of the conventional face-to-face method. The issue is whether ODL implementation has actually satisfied the learners in their academic achievement, as the students are the important stakeholders in all educational institutions (Mathew and Chung, 2021). Allam, Hassan, Mohideen, Ramlan and Kamal (2020) described ODL as a teaching method in which students are not physically required to come to lecture sessions and can complete their studies anywhere. The learning process also can be done by utilising the internet (Kenny and Zhang, 2010) to access lectures easily through a laptop or mobile phone (Hussin, Manap, Amir and Krish, 2012).

Many studies have also discovered challenges posed by ODL to students during MCO either psychologically (Lischer, Safi and Dickson, 2020), lack of motivation (Hashim, Kadir, Mansor and Azudin, 2020) and facilities constraints (Zhang et al, 2020). However, as the pandemic phase has now shifted to endemic, students are already familiar with ODL as they have used it and had to adapt in order to overcome the challenges. Thus, a new question has raised on whether this ODL methods should be continued but the usage is mixed with face-to-face class.

Therefore, the objectives of this paper are to find the methods of online that is preferred by the students' and whether it should be used although the lecture will be conducted physically like before the pandemic. Furthermore, valuable insights on the improvements of ODL implementation can be obtained by understanding the students' data where these recommendations are necessary for a more effective lesson delivery in the future. Hence, this paper has addressed these questions:

1. What are the feedbacks of satisfaction for different strategies of ODL?
2. What is the effects of ODL to the students' workload?
3. Do the students prefer to continue learning by ODL in the future?
4. What are the areas of ODL implementation that require improvement?

It is important to get the feedback from the students because learning process involve two ways communications. Instructors that are willing to improve their teaching methodology by adapting effective learning strategies, whether they are conventional, ODL or blended, must be able to get the feedbacks from their students. It is to make sure the ultimate goal is to enhance the learning outcomes and provide lifelong learning process.

Methodology

The data was collected using a survey form. Utilizing Google Form as the tool was chosen due to conveniences and easily accessible by the target correspondents to achieve sufficient response rate. The items were divided into two sections, namely the respondents' demographic and the next sections are optional questions to gauge the feedback on the ODL implementation. However, there are students who already come back to campus to have a physical class; thus, these respondents will not be directed to this section. The survey also targeted specifically the students of International Islamic University of Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah (UniSHAMS). 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.

Results and discussions

The demographic characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 1. The total sample for the survey comprised 126 respondents.

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	126	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/ Accounting	Finance/ 52	41
	Islamic Studies	42	33
	Science	17	14
	Art/Technology	13	10

Human Science	1	1
Muamalat and management science	1	1

The locality distribution of the survey respondent is 99% local students and 1% international students. 100% of the respondent are in the mode of full-time study. The gender distribution of the survey is 69% females and 31% males. The results also reveal that the respondents are predominantly between 18 to 25 years at 96% of the sample. For the program level, the result shows that 49% foundation level, 31% Bachelor's degree level, 19% Diploma level, and 1% come from Doctoral degree level. The last part of demographic result shows about 41% came from Management/ Finance/ Accounting study, 33% came from Islamic studies, 14% came from Science studies, 10% came from Art/Technology studies and 1% come from Human Science and Muamalat & management science studies.

Due to MCO during the covid-19 epidemic, the delivery mode for lectures, tutorials/seminars, practical classes, and supervisions/mentorship has shifted towards ODL. A total of 66 respondents participated and shared their feedback on the ODL implementation from the total of 126 UniSHAMS students that filled out this survey. The remaining students were students that had a physical class, and thus choose not to answer on the ODL strategies to replace with face-to-face class. The response rate was satisfying, and this was contributed by the convenience offered by the tool used in the data collection process.

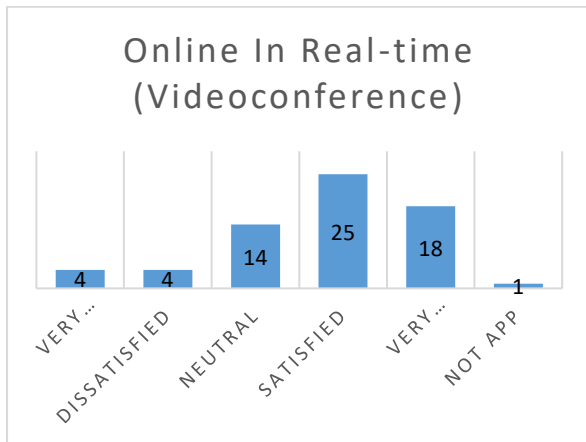


Figure 1: Respondents preference for Online in Real Time Video Conference

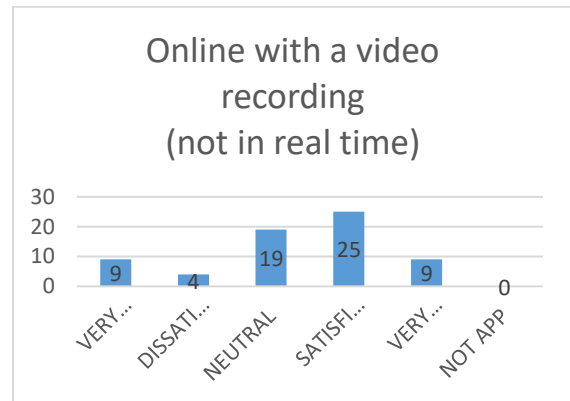


Figure 2: Respondents preference for Online not in Real Time (Video Recording)

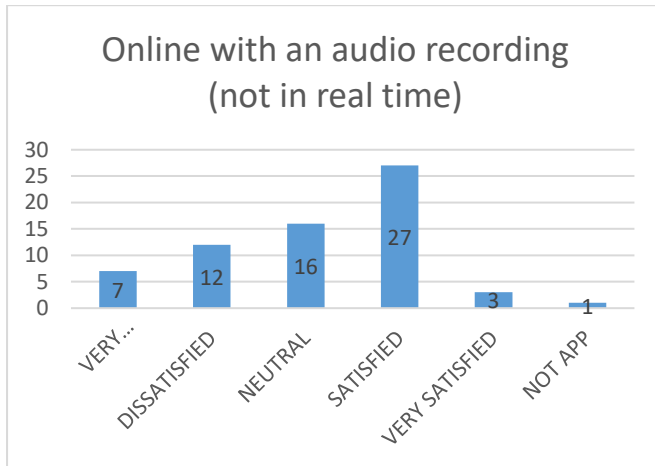


Figure 3: Respondents preference for Online not in Real Time (Audio recording)

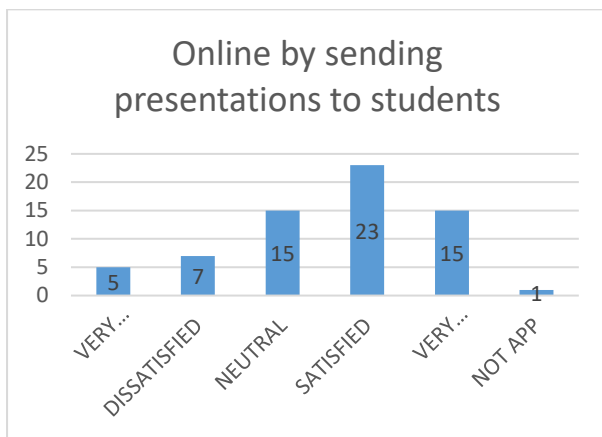


Figure 4: Respondents preference for Online by sending presentations

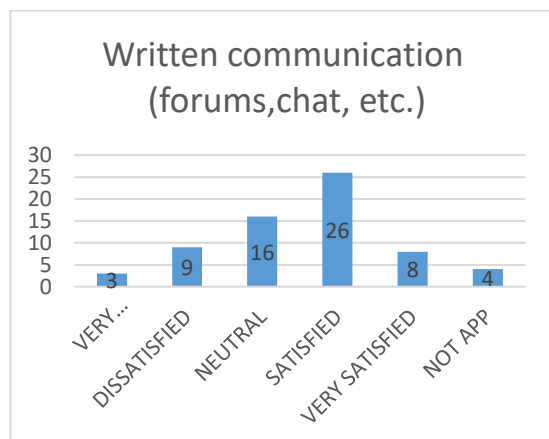


Figure 5: Respondents preference for Written Communication to student

The respondents' preference for the ODL approach for lectures, tutorials/seminars is shown in Figures 1 through 5. Figure 1 shows the majority of respondents' satisfied with Online classes (in Real Time) using Video conferences. However, the majority of respondents were also satisfied with online classes (not in real-time) with video recordings and audio recordings as shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

Indeed, the respondents were satisfied with the online classes by the method of lecturers sending presentations or materials to students as displayed in Figure 4. In addition, the respondents were satisfied with the method of written communication using forums, chat, and others as an approach for online classes seeing as presented in Figure 5. Most students are satisfied with the ODL strategy that has been implemented to replace face-to-face learning for lectures, tutorials, and seminars over the years.

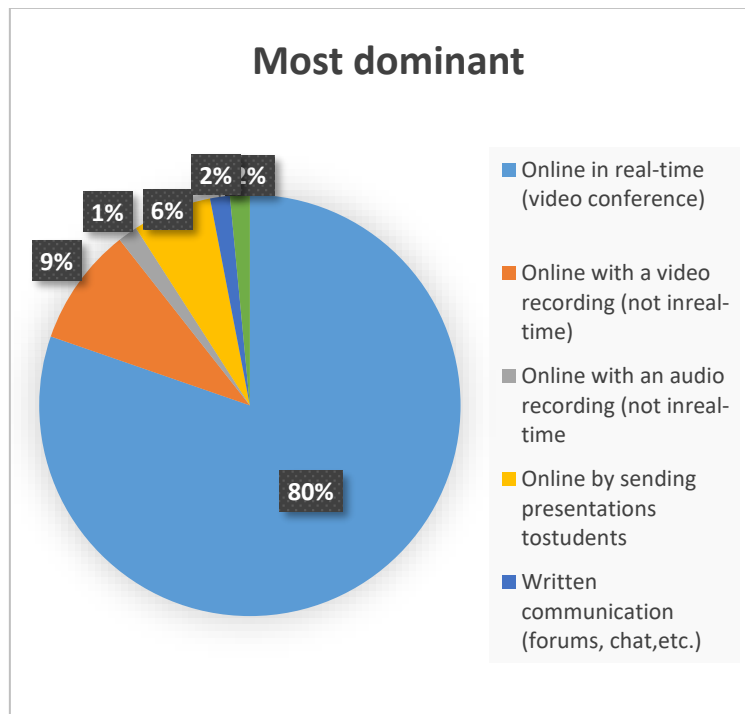


Figure 6: The most Dominant Online techniques chosen by respondents

Figure 6 displays the respondents' selection of the most popular method for online lectures. The method of online real-time (video conference) lectures has been selected as the most favoured online lecture by 80% of respondents. This form of online real-time video conferencing allows students to continue asking questions and receive answers directly from the instructor for the topic being studied. However, this opportunity is only available to students who do not have internet issues at that moment.

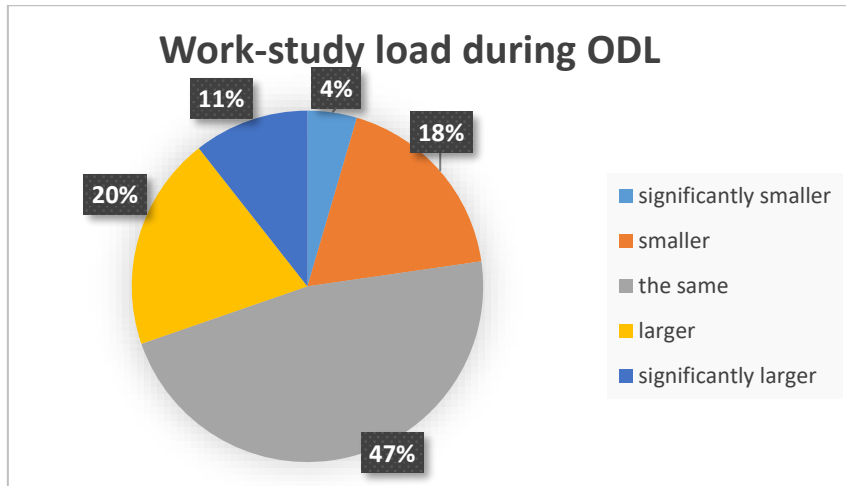


Figure 7: The work-study load is chosen by respondents.

Figure 7 demonstrates that 47 % of respondents believe the study load during ODL is equivalent to the study load during face-to-face classes. However, 20% of respondents feel the study workload during ODL became larger than the study workload before ODL classes. For students with limited online preparation skills, and limited internet data, preparation time is required before and after ODL class in order to comprehend the concepts taught and complete an assignment given after class. Preparation time imposes an additional burden of studying on the students.

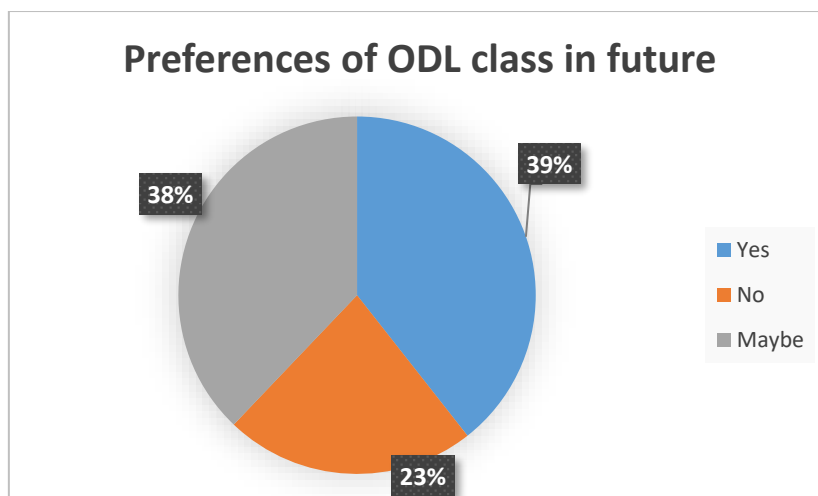


Figure 8: Respondent's preference for ODL class in future

In addition, Figure 8 demonstrates that 39% of respondents favour continuing ODL for future learning, however 38% of respondents are unsure whether to continue or discontinue ODL in the future. Nevertheless, 23% of respondents chose to abandon ODL in favour of traditional learning methods. The difference between students who choose to continue ODL in the future and those who are unsure if they can continue ODL in the future is only 1 %. ODL is an interactive learning strategy, although the interactive effect of this ODL learning is highly dependent on the student's Internet capability, which is also influenced by the student's location and finances (Mukarromah & Wijayanti, 2021).

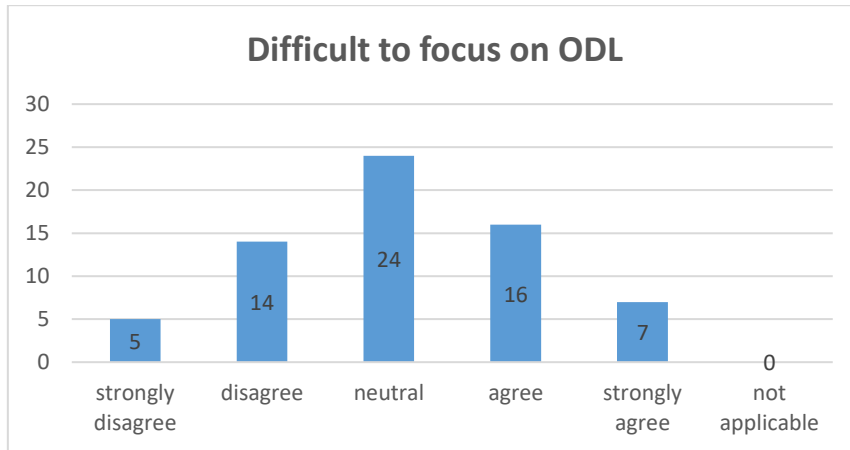


Figure 9: The Respondent's response with difficulty focusing in ODL class

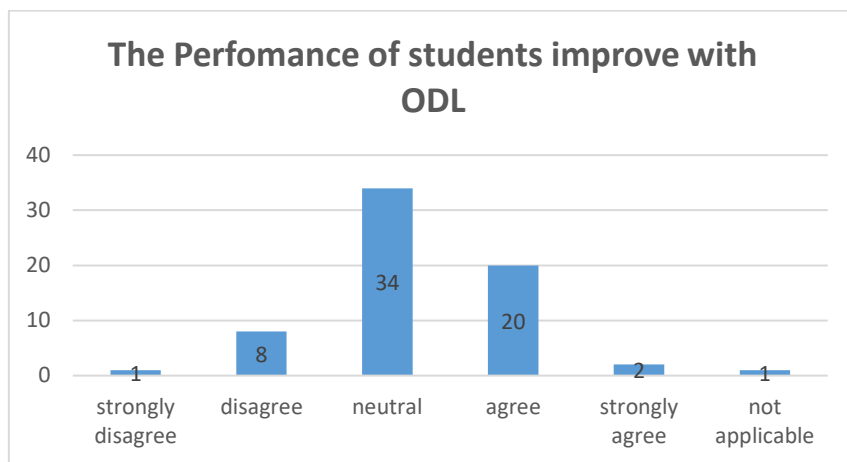


Figure 10: The Respondent's response to the performance of students improve with ODL class

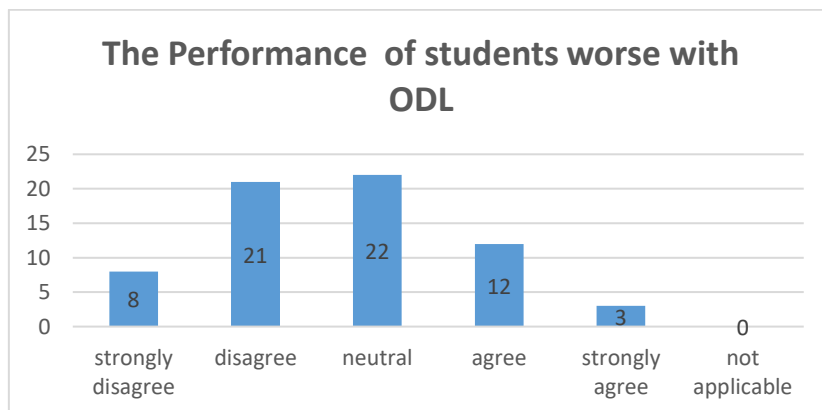


Figure 11: The Respondent's response to the performance of students worse with ODL class

As seen in Figures 9 to 10, respondents frequently select "neutral" when asked about their performance in ODL classes, suggesting that they are likely attempting to adjust to the new norm. Figure 11 illustrates, on the other hand, that 21 students selected to disagree and 22 students chose neutral for their performance to be lower with ODL. This demonstrates that many students experience poor learning performance in ODL classes.

The findings show that many of the students have positive perceptions about ODL implementation. One of the findings indicates that the students enjoyed the interaction when using ODL as a learning method because they can look back to the recorded online meeting and studied the video for revision.

However, there are still very little number of students indicated that ODL should not be continued in the future semesters due to poor internet connection, lack of students' technological knowledge and technical skills (Mohalik & Sahoo, 2020), difficult interacting with the lecturers if they don't understand, bored, and difficulty to stay focus (Nurshahidah et al., 2021). In addition, the poor internet connection will increase the study load because respondents had to wait longer for a steady internet connection in order to comprehend classroom sessions (Ahmed, Hussain, & Farid, 2018; Mukarromah & Wijayanti, 2021).

According to Chung et al. (2020), poor internet connection was a major factor that contributed to their lack of intention to continue using it in the future. In addition, the students will be less motivated to learn, resulting in a diminished ability to maintain concentration in class (Nurshahidah et al., 2021).

Conclusion and future directions

ODL implementation must always consider two ways of communication. It is common during the learning process the instructors are more dominant and the students were passively learnt. They are a lot of platforms for an interactive ODL such as Microsoft Team for synchronous learning and Edpuzzle for asynchronous learning. Many of platforms such as Quizizz, Kahoot and the Google Classroom can provide instructors with many interactive practices to test the understanding and strengthen their comprehension during the learning process. This recommendation is consistent with the importance of having active interaction between the instructor and the students for a more effective learning (Maboe, 2017). To initiate the ODL journey, it is also necessary to supply students with equipment and Internet data consumption facilities to enhance the learning process.

References

- Ahmed, M. U., Hussain, S., & Farid, S. (2018). Factors influencing the adoption of e-learning in an open and distance learning institution of Pakistan. *Electronic Journal of E-Learning*, 16(2), 148–158.
- Allam, S. N. S., Hassan, M. S., Mohideen, R. S., Ramlan, A. F., & Kamal, R. M. (2020). Online Distance Learning Readiness During Covid-19 Outbreak Among Undergraduate Students. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 10(5), 575–590.
- Chung, E., Noor, N. M. and Mathew, V. N. (2020). Are You Ready? An Assessment of Online Learning Readiness among University Students. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 9(1), 301–317.
- Hashim, H., Kadir, N.A.A., Mansor, F. and Azudin, M.Z.M. (2020) Open and Distance Learning (ODL) During Movement Control Order (MCO): Conceptualising the Relationships

between Self-Efficacy, Learning Motivation and Performance of Higher Learning Education Students. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 10 (8), 258-269.

Hussin, S., Manap, M. R., Amir, Z., & Krish, P. (2012). Mobile learning readiness among Malaysian students at higher learning institutes. *Asian Social Science*, 8(12), 276-283.

Kenny, R. F., & Zhang, Z. (2010). Learning in an Online Distance Education Course: Experiences of Three International Students. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 11(1), 17–36.

Lischer, S., Safi, N. and Dickson, C. (2021). Remote learning and students' mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic: A mixed-method enquiry. Prospects: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09530-w>

Maboe, K. A. (2017). Use of online interactive tools in an open distance learning context: Health studies students' perspective. *health sagesondheid*, 22(1), 221-227.

Mathew, V. N. and Chung, E. (2021). University Students' Perspectives on Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Implementation Amidst COVID-19. *Asian Journal of University Education (AJUE)*, 16 (4) (Special Issue), 152-160.

Mohalik, R., & Sahoo, S. S. (2020). E-Readiness and perception of student teachers' towards online learning in the midst of Covid-19 Pandemic. *Ssrn*.

Mukarromah, U., & Wijayanti, W. (2021). Implementation of the online learning at vocational high school during Covid-19: Between obligations and barriers. *Jurnal Pendidikan Vokasi*, 11(1), 92–101. <https://doi.org/10.21831/jpv.v11i1.37110>

Nurshahidah, S. A. S., Sufiean, H. M., Rauf, R. A., Yazmin, Y. F., Shafezah, A. W., & Hamidah, I. (2021). The effect of new online learning readiness on perceived usefulness of open distance learning implementation during Covid-19 outbreak. *AIP Conference Proceedings*, 2347. <https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0051618>

Zhang, W., Wang, Y., Yang, L., and Wang, C. (2020). Suspending classes without stopping learning: China's education emergency management policy in the Covid-19 outbreak. Basel: Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute.