



Teacher educators' and students' perspectives on transitioning from conventional to online teaching and learning

Marlizayati Johari, Aliamat Omar Ali, Juraidah Musa, Nordiana Zakir, Masitah Shahrill

Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah Institute of Education, Universiti Brunei Darussalam,
Brunei Darussalam

*Corresponding Author: marlizayati.johari@ubd.edu.bn

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sudden transition of teaching and learning from the perspectives of the teacher educators and students of an education graduate faculty in one of the universities in Brunei Darussalam. During the first COVID-19 outbreak in the country, higher education institutions shifted the conventional teaching and learning approach from mostly face-to-face to fully online teaching and learning. The online questionnaires were distributed to the teaching staff and students via email, and the response rates of the online questionnaires for teacher educators and students were 88% and 57.6%, respectively. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the data, where frequency and percentage were then utilised to describe the patterns of the responses. It was found that half of the teacher educators and students perceived there were more interactions through online teaching activities between the teaching staff and their students. However, both staff and students mentioned that their physical and mental wellbeing was also affected by the sudden transition to online teaching and learning.

Keywords: teacher educators; students; Covid-19; online teaching and learning; wellbeing

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact in many countries around the world. It has unleashed a global health emergency to prevent the further spread of the disease (World Bank, 2020). One of the measures to combat the pandemic is social distancing, and most countries have been forced to implement lockdowns and the mandatory closure of businesses and educational institutions. The COVID-19 pandemic hit Brunei Darussalam when the country's Ministry of Health announced the first case in March 2020 (Ministry of Health, 2020). As a result, the Brunei government took a number of immediate actions to prevent the virus from spreading, including implementing strict border controls, communication activities, and community engagement (WHO, 2021).

In response to the strict communication activities, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs announced that all educational institutions under their control would conduct teaching and learning sessions using an online format (Ministry of Education, 2020; Shahrill et al., 2021; Shahrill et al., 2021). The University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD) has also declared that all lectures were delivered online and only important physical interaction courses were allowed under the strict COVID-19 standard operating procedures (Shahrill et al., 2021). As one of the faculties, the Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah Institute of Education (SHBIE) shifted all its teaching and learning to an entirely online format. The shifting has required SHBIE academic staff to adapt to the changes by designing fully online learning activities that provide meaningful

learning experiences for students. Before COVID-19, SHBIE academic staff had been in practice for its online teaching and learning. The Canvas learning management system is used to communicate with students by sharing educational materials, conducting online discussions, submitting assignments, and making announcements (Lamit et al., 2017; Salleh et al., 2021; Shahrill et al., 2021; Shahrill et al.2022).

SHBIE is a graduate teacher education faculty that offers programmes of Master of Teaching, Master of Education (Coursework and Research), Master of Counselling, and PhD in Education (SHBIE, 2019). Students are mostly registered in the Master of Teaching programme, which aims to train them to become teachers. The primary purpose of this study is to provide comprehensive evaluations of the sudden shift of education from face-to-face to entirely online from the perspectives of SHBIE academic staff and students.

Impact of COVID-19 education on educators and students

While closing educational institutions appeared necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protect educators and students, it disrupted their teaching and learning processes. Thus, several studies have been conducted on the impact of a sudden change to online pedagogy. Ferri et al.(2020) reported that there are several challenges in terms of technological, pedagogical, and social aspects. They further elaborated that technological challenges were related to the stability of internet connections and the availability of gadgets to support online teaching. Pedagogical challenges are related to the lack of digital skills of the teacher and learner, the lack of ability and skills to create structured content based on various online resources, the lack of students' interactivity, and the motivation and lack of social and cognitive presence of teachers. Lastly, the social challenges are associated with student-teacher interaction, limited physical spaces to study at home, and a lack of support from parents who are also using the same space.

According to the studies conducted by Müller et al. (2021) and Al-Karaki et al. (2021), one of the most prevalent challenges for educators is students' engagement and interaction during online sessions. Müller et al. (2021) stated that the main challenge from educators' perspectives in online learning is engaging students. They have difficulties gauging and promoting engagement in different domains. The study listed cognitive and collaborative engagement and social and emotional engagement as domains. Based on the in-depth interviews, educators had difficulties with where students are in their thinking and learning since there is a limitation to observing the students' reactions during the online classes. On the other hand, the study stated that educators believe online learning may increase autonomous learning, foster student-educator relationships, and improve educators' online teaching techniques.

Similar findings were also revealed by a study conducted by Al-Karaki et al. (2021). According to the study, students' engagement and interactions are insufficient throughout online teaching and learning activities. The study is based on the perceptions of educators in UAE higher education institutes. Most educators in this study reveal a lack of visual communication from the students. Therefore, Al-Karaki and colleagues suggest that educators should use innovative ways to encourage students' engagement and interactions.

Wellbeing in adapting to the transition of online teaching and learning

COVID-19 has transformed the educational landscape overnight and shed light on educators and students' wellbeing in adapting to full online teaching and learning. During this transition, educators and students have shown their ability to nurture a resilient spirit and accept new ideas of teaching and learning with an awareness of the importance of working together as it is not an isolated skill (Lemon & McDonough, 2021).

According to Parker, wellbeing is defined as the "foundation for better emotional health and resilience... lies at the heart of a connected, fulfilled, and joyful experience of life" (Parker, 2021,p. 9). The educator's wellbeing, such as self-compassion and self-care, strengthens the educator's character and personality. Hence, it is essential to emphasise the importance of educator wellbeing, as when it is supported, students' wellbeing will improve. Wellbeing and good mental health are the most significant aspects for students and educators, as learning will not happen when compromised (Hargreaves, 2021). Hargreaves (2021) argued for the need to be

mindful of educators' requirements to enhance their expertise in digital learning and the psychic rewards that teachers get from their work outcomes when executed successfully and sustainably.

Muldong et al. (2021) mentioned that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, companies, universities, and schools are adopting a work-from-home approach. The work-from-home approach results in increased stress for educators due to the shift in online learning. Contributing factors include the challenge of using online tools for learning and prolonged working hours because of difficulties separating work from personal matters. Additionally, the issue of not having a private workspace at home that can separate work and personal routines contributed as a factor. Furthermore, psychosocial support is needed during and after the pandemic for employees working from home for their long-term mental health (Muldong et al., 2021). Hargreaves (2021) reported that educators working from home and transitioning to online teaching and learning during the pandemic are "competing family demands, including having to supervise their children" (Hargreaves, 2021, p. 152).

Othman (2020), discussed in her study on managing students and faculty expectations, raised the issue that with working or learning from home, both educators and students need to sort out their work-life balance to cope with the transition to online teaching and learning. She further discussed the issue of accessibility and familiarity with the sudden shift in online teaching and learning that contributed to the individuals feeling overwhelmed, which instigated feelings of anxiety and stress. Communication is vital with all stakeholders involved in the transition to online teaching and learning (Othman, 2020). The ability for educators to provide an engaging and fast response will help motivate students to learn online.

Zizka and Probst (2021) conducted a study on the Swiss HEI educators in the COVID-19 semester, highlighting challenges faced by the educators despite the emergency training support provided by the faculty. Their study found that even confident and competent educators in online learning are not spared and are constantly challenged to conduct online learning. This is because of the feeling of less contentment with the traditional face-to-face sessions (Stevens et al., 2021; Zizka & Probst, 2021). Educators with a growth mindset are open to new ways of teaching and bring us to the understanding that educators and students with a growth mindset will be able to adapt to unique circumstances by being confident in using the various online learning tools and the LMS (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Herawati et al., 2022). This helps nurture positive wellbeing.

On the other hand, Zizka and Probst (2021) found that educators and students who were unprepared for online learning faced additional stress and felt uncomfortable with online learning. Another significant finding is time, as educators were trying too hard to provide digitised content, leading to an increased workload for both students and educators. This aligns with the findings presented by Dvir and Schatz-Oppenheimer (2021), as the challenges are there for both conservative and innovative educators due to the need to redesign and digitalise content curriculum from the traditional face-to-face sessions to the sudden transformation towards online learning. Educators are constantly contested with their pedagogical competency (Othman, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has become a catalyst to add pressure to educators to provide a 'flexible', responsive curriculum in the space of digital competency by working remotely from home (Sia & Adamu, 2021; Herawati et al., 2022).

Sia and Adamu (2021) found that four reasons induce mental stress amongst lecturers in Malaysia: the rush to use the LMS without full digital competency; some lecturers use their mobile internet as they do not subscribe to home internet; the sudden change of examinations and practicals to coursework; and assessing work online exposes the lecturers to longer computer screen time.

In view of the current challenges and opportunities for online teaching and learning due to the pandemic, this study aims to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sudden transition of teaching and learning from the perspectives of academic teaching staff and students at SHBIE. Hence, the following are the research questions to be addressed in this paper: How does the transition to online learning affect the teaching and learning of educators and students in the education graduate faculty? How does the transition to online teaching and learning affect the wellbeing of the educators and students in the education graduate faculty?

METHOD

Brunei Darussalam was hit by the pandemic when the first case was reported in March 2020. To collect data for this study, online questionnaires were distributed in April 2020, which was towards the end of the semester when COVID-19 was affecting the teaching and learning of the university. An online questionnaire was distributed to the teaching staff and another to the students via email. Each group of participants was given a link to the online questionnaire using Qualtrics. The response rate of the online questionnaire was 88% for the educators and 57.6% for the students. The online questionnaire has ten main questions, and a number of them contain a few sub-questions. The questions have a range of two to five options for answers, with the majority of the questions having open-ended options as part of the answers.

The online questionnaires were developed based on a mini workshop with three groups of students (seven in each group) and one group of ten academics from one of the teaching faculties at UBD. Next, the Deputy Deans of Academics of the other teaching faculties at UBD reviewed the draft online questionnaires. The objectives of the surveys were to investigate the experiences and challenges academic staff and students at UBD faced in going through the sudden and unexpected changes in their teaching and learning during the pandemic.

A total of 36 teacher educators and 178 students from SHBIE responded to the online questionnaire. The gender breakdown of the two groups shows that there were 9 males, 26 females, and one blank response for the educator group; there were 34 males and 144 females for the student group. The majority of the respondents (more than 80%) for both educators and students are Malay and Brunei citizens. The student respondents consisted of 60% first-year students, 37.7% second-year students, and less than 2% from their third and fourth years of candidature.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

Descriptive statistics is used to analyse the data, where mostly frequency and percentage are used to describe the pattern of the responses. There are discrepancies in the students' response rates for several items. For example, in the last few items of the students' online questionnaire, there were only about 66 students responding to those items. Hence, the percentage weightings are based on the total number of student respondents for each of the items. For this paper, it is critical to note that only the data that answer the research questions of this present study were extracted and reported.

Data from the educators' online questionnaire

This section reports the data gathered from the online questionnaire distributed to the teacher educators at SHBIE. It consists of data relating to the general concerns perceived by academic staff pertaining to working remotely during the pandemic, their perceptions of online teaching, and lastly, about selfwellbeing.

General concerns relating to working from home and online lectures

One of the general concerns gathered from the online questionnaire is with regards to personal expenses incurred by the educators, whereby 63.8% of the respondents reported that they were concerned about the increase of personal expenses while working or teaching remotely from home. The increase resulted from the extended use of air conditioners, the internet, and other utilities. For instance, 61.1% reported having spent more on mobile data add-ons.

In terms of online teaching, it was recorded that the use of Zoom applications has increased exponentially, i.e., from 16.7% before the pandemic up to 80.6%, while Skype uses increased from 36.1% to 47.2%, and an increase to 63.9% from 52.8% was recorded in the use of Google Drive. Nonetheless, even before the COVID-19 outbreak, it was recorded that at least 70% of the educators admitted to using these tools for student interaction, such as for communication,

students' engagement or interaction, providing feedback, and to monitor students' progress. Despite the recorded increase, 41.7% of the educators felt that there were difficulties in recognising students' reactions or responses in online lectures and reduced interaction with students through online activities. In contrast, 52.8% of the educators perceived that there was more students' interaction through online teaching activities for more than 50% of the modules that they were teaching. It was also found that 58.3% of the educators also reported that they found it a challenge to conduct online classes due to low internet bandwidth at home. Another challenge that was identified by 66.7% of respondents pertains to the limitations offered by free applications used in online lectures. Nevertheless, at least 70% agree that the experience has given them the opportunity to be more creative and innovative and has enabled them to learn new techniques and tools for online teaching and learning.

Being in a teacher education institute, most respondents are involved in a teacher preparation programme offered by the institute. It is worth noting that when the online questionnaire was distributed, 44% of the student-teachers or teacher candidates were in their first semester of the Master of Teaching (MTeach) programme and were out for off-campus teaching placements for four days each week, and the same arrangement goes for the Master of Counselling (MCounselling) students. On this account, 41% of the educators expressed concerns that the pandemic compromised students' performance in their placements.

Academic staff's wellbeing

This study also collects data relating to respondents' physical and mental wellbeing. While 77.7% agreed that there was an increase in screen time, 66.7% of educators from the survey reported that their mobile phone use has also increased excessively. Thus resulting in frequent eye strain or dry eyes (63.9%), stiff neck and headache (72.2%), and back pain due to longer hours at the desk (75%). On top of this, 50% of the educators at least believe that they experienced carpal-tunnel syndrome due to increased use of the keyboard. Last, at least 60% agreed that they were eating more, which has led to weight gain.

The pandemic and online teaching and learning have also taken a toll on educators' mental wellbeing. Unexpected disruptions, more workload, and meeting deadlines had caused almost half (44.4%) of the educators to be stressed. Also, it was found that 36.1% experienced anxiety due to the uncertain direction of work. Then, unfortunately, 30.6% of educators became depressed due to their expectations that the pandemic would prolong and worsen.

Data from the students' questionnaire

This section discusses the results gathered from the questionnaire distributed to students. Similar to the previous section, this section consists of general concerns collected from the students, their perceptions about online learning and teaching during the pandemic, and lastly, data relating to their wellbeing.

General concerns and perceptions about learning remotely

For the students, it was found that internet connectivity has become one of the main issues that piques them the most. 56.7% stated that their internet connections were unstable, and 50.8% reported that they had to spend more on data add-ons. Almost half of the students (49.6%) stated that the reason for this is because online lectures were delivered through long videos (live or pre-recorded). As a result, 59% of the respondents had requested support from the university for an internet subscription. However, it was noted that 83% of the students had received 'reasonably well' support from the faculty members.

Even though another issue that is prevalent amongst the students is their concern about not being able to learn practical or clinical skills online effectively, only 1.7% of the student respondents perceived that the overall online lectures they experienced were poorly conducted. However, the rest of the students anticipated the experience positively (39.2% acceptable, 30% good, 20.8% very good, and 8.3% excellent), and this might be due to the fact that 71.8% of students are in favour of learning from audio and visual resources. Moreover, it was found that the respondents thought the online lectures had given them a sense of being an independent learner

(95.4%), being self-motivated (75%), being able to manage time (75.4%), and being able to adapt to online learning (84.6%). The results are encouraging despite the fact that learning from home during the pandemic was challenging, as 81.5% of the students reported that they were distracted, and 81.8% consequently needed support from their family members to give them more personal space so that they could work without distractions.

A breakdown of what the student respondents thought of the online lectures is as follows: 53.9% of the respondents believed that lecturers are more interactive as compared to face-to-face on-campus lectures; 50% of the students believed that the occurrence of interactions has increased at least in 25% of their total modules; and 52.3% expressed that the lecturers were not spontaneous in their interactions with them. While it was indicated that 93.3% of students preferred to work collaboratively in groups before the pandemic, 56.9% found that it was a challenge to do so in a full online setting. They further perceived that the online and remote learning had compelled them to work individually rather than in a group (89.6%), since the situation required them to adapt to a self-driven learning style (88.3%).

Students' wellbeing

Physically, 59.1% of the student respondents expressed that the situation forced them to have less time for exercise, and additionally, 60% of them stressed that extracurricular activities were no longer available during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic's immobility contributed to 71.2% of back problems, and 63.6% reported they had dry eyes. In contrast, being at home has allowed 84.9% of the students to have a better diet as they were eating more home-cooked meals, and noticeably, 57.6% reported having gained weight.

Unfortunately, the data revealed that the students were found to be stressful, anxious, and depressed, with 69.7% reporting that they were stressed out from deadlines and due to unexpected and added workload. Meanwhile, 54.6% of the students expressed that they had anxiety problems, and 50% felt lonely. Moreover, 40.9% of the students revealed that they were depressed, and 69.7% requested high-quality student counselling support from the university or faculty. Nevertheless, 77.3% of the students stated that they had more time for self-reflection, and 51.5% felt more relaxed. In addition, 84.9% of the students agreed that they received good support from their family for their study at home during the period.

Discussions

The findings of this study seemed to indicate similar patterns with Ferri et al. (2020) in terms of the technological and pedagogical challenges of online teaching and learning. Even though Ferri et al. (2020) argued in their study that there was a lack of support from parents, this is not the case for this present study, where the majority of the student respondents reported that they have received support both from family for their study at home and from the teacher educators. This finding is encouraging, as it is the most prominent factor in supporting students' wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic (Eloff, 2021).

Technologically, the teacher educators and students in this study faced similar situations when it came to internet connections. Not only were the connections slow and unstable, but it was found that they had to spend more for them. Nevertheless, this did not hamper the educators' and students' spirit to sustain online teaching and learning. Furthermore, not only does the situation allow the academic staff to be more innovative, but it is also found that interactions are somewhat improving and students perceive the online learning experience positively, aside from making them independent learners, being able to self-motivate and manage time, and adapting to online learning. Relatively, the findings are in tandem with the positive results reported by Shahrill et al. (2021). UBD educators found that the experience has presented an opportunity for them to be more creative and innovative and has enabled them to learn new techniques and tools for online teaching and learning.

In spite of this, Shahrill et al. (2021) also reported that one of the negative effects from the UBD educators' perspective (82.2%) was the loss of control over students' participation in online teaching. Despite most studies suggesting that participants' engagement is considered to be one of the strongest predictors of positive outcomes in online education (Arbaugh & Benbunan-Fich,

2007), findings from Coman et al. (2020), Muller et al. (2021), Al-Karaki et al. (2021), and Warfvinge et al. (2022) indicate that the prevalent issue of online teaching and learning is a lack of students-to-students and students-to-educators interactions. However, this is contradictory to the findings of this present study. As at least half of the educators and students agree that online teaching and learning provide them with a better avenue for more interactions, it is believed that this can be attributed to the university's initiatives in introducing and subscribing to a learning management system (LMS). Since 2014, Canvas and SHBIE have been actively using this platform in the teaching and learning process. This was supported by the findings of this study, where 70% of the educators have been using online platforms for student interaction such as communication, students' engagement or interaction, providing feedback, and monitoring students even prior to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Nonetheless, it was found that there was an increase in usage for other platforms such as Zoom and Skype, which raised questions about the affordability of the university's LMS subscription to fully support online teaching and learning. For example, although the university has invested heavily in online tools in the past five years to support online teaching and learning (with the provision of Canvas and Microsoft Teams), research (Qualtrics), staff training (provided by the UBD Teaching and Learning Centre), and communication (e-mail), leaders of all levels seem not to be quick to take advantage of this opportunity to encourage staff to utilise those tools for better and all-out online engagement. Staff are still expected to be given the liberty to decide on the online tools they will use. Instead, as an example, the use of mobile phones, perhaps through messaging applications (such as WhatsApp), has become the main means of endless communication between parties such as colleagues, students, and, to some extent, the administration, and this has had an undesirable impact on the educators and students, which led to more time spent (during work and after office hours) on their mobile phones. This contradicts the findings by Sage et al. (2021) who found that undergraduates' use of smartphones for coursework contributed to lower feelings of isolation, which then led to higher grades and less stress. As the majority of the student respondents in this present study perceived the online teaching and learning experience to be very positive, it is also important to note that most of the respondents were female. The findings corroborate the study from Warfvinge et al. (2022: 1), which reported that "male students were overall more negative about the experience of online learning, whereas female students appeared to be better able to benefit from the shift to online learning."

It is narrated that half of the educator respondents recorded more interactions amongst students in the online sessions, and similar sentiment is also recorded from the students' point of view. However, it can be concluded that a small portion of the educators are mostly still comfortable with traditional teaching methods, i.e., face-to-face and in-the-same-room lectures. Most reported that it was difficult for them to gauge students' reactions or responses in an online classroom. Despite being in a teacher education institute, a minority of respondents do not anticipate applying other methods to identify students' responses, such as formative assessments. This means that it is not the students who are struggling to engage better with their lecturers; it is the educators themselves who are not adopting a more innovative and interactive method in online lessons. In addition, from the findings, it can be deduced that despite there is a clear shift towards a new normal, the situation nevertheless has ostensibly contributed to more workload for teaching staff and students while expectations remained unchanged, if not higher, and this can be due to the perceived lack of clear directions. This in turn affects not only their physical but mental wellbeing too. Thus, respondents from the survey reported that they suffer from stress, anxiety, and depression, albeit this is not clinically verified.

On one hand, educator respondents, as clinical specialists, are reported to be concerned with their teacher candidates' school placements, which also have to be conducted online. Even though the respondents themselves are still unfamiliar and unclear with the online teaching and learning situation, they are demanded to be agile in both conducting online classes and giving guidance to the teacher candidates to teach online. This circumstance alone can contribute to stress and anxiety.

On the other hand, not only does working from home culminate in extra expenses, but it also reduces mobility and consequently promotes other health issues such as weight gain, stress, and so on. These findings are in line with other studies such as Othman (2020) and Muldong et al. (2021). Adding to this misery are the infrastructures that are unreliable, such as the internet speed, which was typically slow and unstable, especially during the first wave of the pandemic in Brunei. As a result, to accommodate this issue, most lectures via Skype or Zoom are held with just audio. Although working fully online from home positively pushed the majority of the educators to explore and learn new teaching techniques, it also means that the time spent at home during office hours is compromised due to commitments such as family members, i.e., attending to children who are having online classes, food preparation, and many more. This has evidently disturbed the work-home balance, which can lead to stress, anxiety, and depression for both educators and students. Zainal Badri and Wan Mohd Yunus (2022) reported that the psychological wellbeing of remote-learning university Malaysian students has higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression, social dysfunction, and loss of confidence when they experience an increase in academic work undermining family roles but not their unhappiness. They further found that the increased occurrence of family roles undermining academic work was associated with elevated stress, anxiety, depression, loss of confidence, and unhappiness, but not social dysfunction. Nevertheless, it was found that working or learning from home has fostered respondents to have more engagements with their family members.

CONCLUSION

In this present study, we explored how the impact of the pandemic has affected the conventional teaching and learning of teacher educators and students in the education graduate faculty (SHBIE) with the sudden online transition and how the subsequent transition has affected their physical and mental wellbeing. The general findings from this study revealed that both parties were affected by the sudden transition from conventional face-to-face to fully online teaching and learning during the start of the pandemic. Despite the unstable internet connectivity and spending more screen time, the respondents, however, perceived that they had experienced more interactions through online teaching activities between the teacher educators and students. Importantly, the shift to the online modality gave them added opportunities to learn and discover new and creative ways of innovative online teaching and learning.

It is critical to highlight that working from home has increased respondents' personal expenses for utilities. Other matters that were underlined are that teacher educators had to juggle between work and family, but for the students, the familial support they received when studying from home was very encouraging. Nevertheless, the general consensus revealed that both teacher educators and students perceived that the transition brought on by the pandemic had indeed affected their physical and mental wellbeing. The questions that linger are how do these individuals cope and manage their physical and mental wellbeing, and what support system can be offered by the relevant university or faculty management to assist in dealing with the identified mental health issues?

At the time of analysing the results and writing, Brunei was hit by the second wave of the pandemic, which again affected and disrupted the educational landscape at the higher educational levels. Future studies will require in-depth qualitative investigations on how teacher educators and students cope with the sudden changes brought upon by the pandemic, if any, and to provide recommendations for actions and further assessments to tackle all these challenges.

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