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## **Emergency Remote Teaching Practices During COVID-19 In Malaysia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The spread of Covid-19 around the world has affected everyone in many different aspects, education is not excluded. One of the distinctive impacts of this pandemic on education is the closure of educational institutions to minimize and avoid further spreading of the virus. This has caused tremendous stress on all educators and students because both parties are left with no choice but to resort to online learning platforms to hold their classes. This shift into virtual classrooms has left them flocking to online learning platforms to resume the learning. Although there are a lot of advantages to remote learning, we must also be aware there are issues that need to be addressed regarding remote learning. The outbreak of Covid-19 has certainly been a tough time for everyone, including educators, students, and policymakers. It is therefore vital to have the right attitude in tackling the problems that arise from the current change in education. When it comes to practices, there are a lot of aspects to cover. The policymakers need to painstakingly come up with options that prioritize both the educators and learners. Educators also need to review their lesson plans and equip themselves with ICT knowledge. The best practice that they can do after the Covid-19 outbreak is they should study more about our education system and change where necessary so that students can catch up with the lesson that they have left behind because of this pandemic.

Keywords : Emergency Remote Teaching, Practices, COVID-19, Issues, Solutions

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### **I. Introduction**

According to World Health Organization (2020), COVID-19 or coronavirus disease 2019, is a worldwide pandemic brought by a type of infectious virus that causes respiratory infections in humans. The virus was still unknown before December 2019, until a sudden outbreak related to pneumonia with an unidentified cause happened in Wuhan, China. This pandemic rapidly spread across the countries around the whole globe. Unexempted from the spread, the virus outbreak indeed

has reached even to our own country, Malaysia, on 24 January 2020 when the first case was discovered. The outbreak caused a nationwide Movement Control Order (MCO) to be issued by the Ministry of Health

(MOH) from March 18 for four phases (Malaysia Ministry of Education, 2020). Nowadays, media outlets such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and even the Internet are stormed with updated news related to COVID-19. Many countries across the world are affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Mass gatherings are banned and some countries are under lockdown, which forces places such as workplaces and education institutes to close.

COVID-19, a problem that has recently occurred and affected many countries across the globe has also become a major issue in the education field. Students who depend on physical meetings and interactions to garner knowledge daily are one of the affected groups of victims in this pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic is first and foremost a sudden health crisis being faced by the whole world. Besides the economic sector, education is also affected. For the education sector, many countries, including Malaysia have taken various measures to control this disease by closing down schools, colleges and universities. This severe short-term disruption is felt by many families because all levels of learning starting from pre-school to tertiary have been moved online. Hence, this has caused not only caused a massive shock to parents' productivity but also students' social life and learning. Indeed, for many, the outbreak of the Covid-19 is a shocking pandemic no one is ever prepared for. Revealed as a fatal virus, this sudden foray of the Covid-19 brings terror to everyone as the possibility of the situation being as severe as the previous Flu pandemic is significant.

The spread of Covid-19 around the world has affected everyone in many different aspects, education is not excluded. Covid-19 has brought a huge impact to various industries around the world. Although education is a relatively independent industry, it has also been affected to a certain extent. In Malaysia, the MCO was

implemented on 18th March 2020. Due to MCO, schools and universities were forced to close and classes were all halted. This caused a delay in the progress for students of all levels from primary school to doctorates. Many efforts are made to reduce the impact on the lack of progress, such as starting online classes but for research that require work to be done in a laboratory, it cannot be helped

(Aristovnik, Keržič, Ravšelj, Tomaževič, & Umek, 2020). Also, major exams like 'UPSR' and 'PT3' were cancelled while 'SPM' and 'STPM' are delayed. Students' enrolment in colleges and universities are also delayed which causes several problems, one of them being financial pressure. Employees in the education sector are also at risk for unemployment especially contractual workers. The impacts on education are mostly negative and some are unavoidable but efforts have to be made and have been made to overcome and conform to this 'new normal'.

## **II. Remote Learning During The COVID-19 Pandemic**

The first implication on education caused by this pandemic is a change of learning mode. Malaysia is placed in a partial lockdown and citizens are advised to stay at home. As a step to prevent the spread of Covid-19, the physical class has switched to remote learning. Due to the partial lockdown, educational institutions are closed and the Ministry of Education announced the commencement of online learning, which is also known as e-learning or remote learning. As a result of this misfortune, institutions and other means of education have been given the solution to switch to online learning to ensure that learning continues as effectively. Online learning is not something uncommon in today's world, where people opt for it whether for comfort, adapting to work hours or just having the freedom to study anywhere. And now with the pandemic going on, online learning has become important than ever. Remote learning utilizes the usage of electronic technologies such as computers or smartphones to access the Internet and it takes place outside the traditional classroom. Remote learning is an option that completely buries the

need to attend physical gatherings at school and in universities. Thus, reducing the spreading of the disease all at once.

To make sure that the education process is not disrupted, school teachers, as well as lecturers, are conducting online classes for students. This shift into virtual classrooms has left educators and students flocking to online learning platforms such as Google Classroom, Google Meet and Zoom, and instant messaging apps such as WhatsApp, and Telegram to resume the learning. For example, educators are using platforms such as Google Meet, Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom to conduct online video meetings so that they could easily interact with students

(Alim, Linda, Gunawan, & Md, 2019). Malaysia has experienced a consistent reduction in the number of cases with initiatives such as remote learning being enforced for the time being. From here, we see that the significance of technology in tackling issues in education during this trying time is clear-cut. Therefore, multimedia in education can be weaponized to combat the challenges of this pandemic. Therefore, there is no doubt that multimedia has enhanced the quality of remote learning which simultaneously helps in eliminating physical classes temporarily for reasons such as a global pandemic. People from around the globe has mixed experiences and views on the new norm of education, whether remote learning has been a smooth experience or not and whether it is effective to educate students through digital screens (Mokhtar & Karim, 2021).

### **III. The Challenges of Emergency Teaching and Learning Practice During COVID-19 Pandemic**

One of the distinctive impacts of this pandemic on education is the closure of all educational institutions that were ordered by the government to minimize and avoid further spreading of the virus. This has caused tremendous stress on all educators and students because both parties are left with no choice but to resort to online learning platforms to hold their classes. The pandemic of Covid-19 has

impacted various sectors in most countries and this includes education. As this virus is highly contagious, schools and all educational institutions are closed. Without a doubt, this incident has provided a tremendous impact on many aspects of education. The unprecedented rise of Covid-19 in our country caused multiple disruptions in the lives of many. The education sector is one of the most heavily impacted by the pandemic. With the implementation of MCO, it's no surprise that schools and universities have closed their doors to prevent any more clusters of infections. Despite this, education must go on. Although there are a lot of advantages to remote learning, we must also be aware there are issues that need to be addressed regarding remote learning.

### **Infrastructure (Technological devices)**

Remote learning is a mixed-feelings topic since some people receive it well and some do not. Not all students might be able to cope up with e-learning. One of the negative impacts is poor Internet access or connection at homes. Internet connection becomes a challenge for this to operate effectively. This is due to the infrastructural limitations and perceptions individuals have towards remote learning. In terms of infrastructure, not all students have fast internet and good wi-fi in their homes, thus limiting their ability to take part in synchronous lessons. To ensure that the learning process is smooth, every student should have the necessary equipment which includes an electronic device and a stable internet connection. However, students and educators who are in less fortunate situations will find this to be a problem, because of the lack of electronic devices and internet connections. Besides, not every student is privileged to own their computer or laptop and be able to use it all the time as they might have to share it with their other siblings who also might have an online class at the same time as theirs.

In terms of perception, not everyone takes kindly to remote learning because they believe it is nowhere near as effective as physical of face-to-face learning. Some students live in rural areas that have poor Internet coverage and even those living in urban areas, they still encounter this problem, maybe due to the high use of the

Internet in the same area. Some less fortunate students don't have access to remote learning. Some students especially the ones from rural areas, poor family backgrounds or with Internet coverage will struggle to study online. Due to this, they might feel demotivated and slowly give up as they are not able to access the learning materials provided by educators or attend online classes. Therefore, e-learning may be a luxury period for those who have good and fast Wi-Fi connections at their homes, but not for the unprivileged people.

### **Lesson method**

Educators have to remake their lesson plans and also marking scheme since exams and presentations cannot be taken out in class. Educators have to play an important role in making sure students attend the online classes and not slack off. Educators had to go through the extra work of reshuffling and redesigning the students' coursework's as well as their final exams. This would be easier for educators that are well-versed in information, communication and technology (ICT) materials and platforms, but for those who are only familiar with traditional classroom settings and teaching methods, this would even be greater trouble for them considering they had to learn and familiarize themselves with ICT materials within a limited time. Remote learning makes educators find it difficult to teach in remote learning mode as the face-to-face mode is more efficient because they can get students' feedbacks easily. Not all students have the same concentration level or even level of understanding when given online tasks/classes. Students don't learn much from remote learning mode as physical class involves students' senses such as auditory, visual and kinesthetic, which can strengthen students' memory about the content of the lesson.

A way of doing this would be to find games or interesting applications online that can be used during the classes. This is easy as the resources available on the internet are unlimited. However, there is only so much an educator can do to ensure their students attend online classes. This is because, at the end of the day, students are the ones who must take the initiative to attend an online class without being

forced to do so. Some educators are doing video meetings to teach their students, whereas the rest prefer to use social media such as Whatsapp to communicate, assign tasks and share materials. However, it is quite obvious that not all learning institutions and educators are taking the initiative to consistently carry out remote learning. Thus, this could probably create a learning gap among students as they are not consistently studying which will be eventually difficult to monitor their academic progress once they are back to the learning institution after a long break.

### **Online assessments**

The education system also had to go through a sudden change as the assessment for learners need to be updated to make sure teaching and learning will still be conducted in a safe environment and this can lead to a major revamp that can disrupt the established lesson plans prior the pandemic outbreak. Educators and students were taken aback by the sudden change and were worried about the execution of classes and examinations which is expected of them. Besides that, traditional examinations are now replaced with online assessments in schools and universities. Educators are now placing more emphasis on continuous assessments instead of examinations as a means of evaluating students' understanding. Assignments are posted online and a platform will be set up for students to submit their work within a timeframe. The assessment method had to be changed and it is more burdensome to the educators and students. Oddly, remote learning also leads to educators giving students even more assignments. In addition to that, because there is no space for students to provide feedback regarding the heavy workload to the educator, students' struggle to meet due dates stays hidden in the dark. Slowly, the students feel stressed and emotionally and mentally drained in this learning pattern. This raises red flags as depression triggers click around this point in the students. In higher institutions, online assessments are used to replace traditional exams and continuous assessments are all altered to fit the e-learning situation. For instance, presentations are converted into recorded presentations. Because students and lecturers are both new to this area, the assessments will likely have larger measurement errors than usual.

The lack of interaction in remote learning is a serious issue and since the environment between home and classrooms are completely different, ways to increase interaction during contactless learning must be discovered to avoid problems arising regarding the students' mental state. Students tend to get more stressed than having face to face learning because all that they are left with are assignments, without having any friends to socialise with. They are cooped up in their rooms and are constantly facing the digital screens trying to finish their assignments and meet the deadlines. Rarkryan (2020) stated that although normal classes may have been difficult, having friends makes it so much manageable and less stressful. There is minimal human interaction online which explains why some students can go to an extent of facing depression. Moreover, important examinations were either cancelled or postponed because of Covid-19. Examinations like UPSR and PT3 were called off to prevent the possible spread of the virus. Instead, the education minister suggested the use of different assessment methods to evaluate the students. SPM and STPM have also been postponed, which will certainly lead to a delay in the study of students.

### **Learning mode environment**

As MCO implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic, the most and obvious impact is that it seems impossible to conduct face-to-face classes during that period. As we know that teaching is happening through the communication between educators and students. Another issue that the learning environment might pose is that learning from home might not be the best option for many students. Being in an environment that is 'too comfortable' can be detrimental to a student's studying as they can be unmotivated to study. Not having classmates or friends around can take away the encouragement to learn from a student. Staying at home for extended periods can also negatively affect the mental health of a student (Nordin, Iqbal & Bajwa, 2021). Because of this, it can demotivate a student from learning or studying. The classroom discourse, the body language from both educators and students and other factors which required face-to-face conditions to achieve seem difficult to



realize. Remote learning lessens the amount of social interaction that happens in students' life. Students spend their day, cooped in the house in front of their screens as they listen to lectures then proceed to do their assignments, only to repeat the same pattern every single day. This pattern results into lacking social interaction between their friends and people outside the room. Eventually, they will get frustrated due to the lack of human contact. Moreover, remote learning usually also does not give space for students to conduct an open discussion among their peers nor allow students to get thorough explanations from the educator on the things they do not understand.

Without face-to-face class, educators and students are struggling to teach and learn in a new learning mode as they need to learn how to teach and learn effectively. Some educators have little knowledge about ICT skills. They may need more time to learn how to use the Internet to conduct the online class. It takes time to learn these skills and it is difficult for them to apply immediately while they are exploring. Besides that, students are struggling also as they don't have the opportunity to communicate with the educators face-to-face, the effect of communication for contributing learning outcomes would be affected. And the students won't have enough motivation to study online since the educators cannot monitor them and give them feedback in time. Almost all co-curricular and hands-on activities organized by schools and higher institutions are cancelled. Because of this, students can only gain the bare minimum of knowledge because there is no application in real life. They cannot experience what is taught in a classroom by doing or get other knowledge such as networking and organization from joining co-curricular projects. The students may lose interest because of self-learning. With remote learning being more of a student-centred approach, they have to be independent with their studies. This poses a lot of problems for school students, as they often fall prey to bad time management, laziness, procrastination, bad attitude, etc. With too much time on their hands and no school or rules to tell them what to do, it is easy for students to just refuse participation and make excuses that they do not have access to the internet or cannot download or access files.

Even good students can become victims of this due to the loss of motivation from not understanding the materials and not having proper hands-on help from their educators. Therefore, for these students, being involved in classes and assignments has become somewhat of a hassle. Another demographic of students who are negatively affected by this pandemic education-wise would be the

students who have learning disabilities (Nurfaradilla, Hazrati, Siti & Lilia, 2020). Students with learning disabilities usually need an environment catered to their needs that only trained educators would be able to help them with. The parents of these students might not be able to help these students enough as well, due to other responsibilities (such as other children, working from home, etc). These students can easily get left behind if attention isn't properly given to help them.

### **Readiness for remote learning**

Education mode has become different from the traditional model of education has been changed. Education efficiency is reduced because educators and students are not very familiar with online teaching and learning. The school is not well prepared, their online education system is incomplete, and the school cannot adjust the education plan in time, causing the teaching habits of educators and students to be disrupted. In addition, for some students with a poor internet connection or poor equipment, online class will not only affect their learning efficiency but also affect their enthusiasm in learning and waste their time in trying to access the classroom and submit classwork again and again. The outbreak of Covid-19 has certainly been a tough time for everyone, including educators, students, and policymakers. It is therefore vital to have the right attitude in tackling the problems that arise from the current change in education. The best practice for educators and policy-makers to improve the situation is by examining the readiness and choosing the most relevant tools for students. Educators should ensure that all students can utilize the online tool by surveying their quality of network access at home. For example, if the educator uses a heavy online platform or application that requires extremely strong

internet connectivity, some students with poor connections will be unable to join the classes.

Educators are forced to learn to properly use those platforms to ensure that input could be given in the net. Because we have never faced situations like this before, many are unprepared for this mode of learning, hence it is regarded as not effective. Educators need to make sure that they are tech-savvy to use all tools and apps available and they also must make their input interesting and creative. Meanwhile, for the students, they must face problems with internet connection as not everyone has a high-speed internet connection. Other than that, they must endure other obstacles such as procrastination, emotional problems, lack of gadgets and others when doing remote learning. To solve this, educators may choose to carry out asynchronous online learning for students by having simple online discussions or tasks so that everyone could have equal opportunities to participate and learn. The educators and students need to learn more ICT skills and online skills since they are required and necessary to be mastered and applied during this Covid-19 pandemic.

#### **IV. Solutions to overcome these challenges**

When it comes to practices, there are a lot of aspects to cover. First and foremost, the policymakers need to painstakingly come up with options that prioritize both the educators and learners.

##### **Internet connectivity**

In addition, policymakers should take the initiative to provide support for educators and students. This support could be in the form of teaching tools and an internet connection. Cheaper internet plans should be offered to students and educators. The Malaysian government took initiative in providing 1GB of internet data daily for students to use for online classes even though this is not fully applicable for students in rural areas with unstable connections (Malaysia Ministry

of Education, 2020). The best practice for educators would be to cater to their student's needs, but at the same time be mindful of their own needs. If a majority of their students do not have a strong internet connection, it is best if they implement only an asynchronous style of learning, such as forums, activities and assignments. If the students have an adequate internet connection, then an asynchronous style mixed with asynchronous style of learning would be recommended for them to optimize the students' learning experience.

### **Initiative for TV- based learning**

The Malaysian government also introduced television-based learning that began on 6 April 2020 through Radio Televisyen Malaysia's (RTM) new channel named 'TV Okey' as consideration that all students might have televisions in their home even if they do not have Internet access (Azahar, 2020).

### **Asynchronous learning**

Moving on to what educators can do, a form of e-learning known as the asynchronous style should be appropriate as a practice during this pandemic. With regards to low internet connectivity, this mode of learning gives the learners the ease to access the learning materials and complete the required assignments at their own pace. With the extra time allocated as well, educators can utilize it to get in touch with learners and help in the areas they are struggling with, which maximizes the learning experience further. Through synchronous learning, students have the opportunity to ask questions directly to their lecturers via video calls and asynchronous e-learning helps students with low internet accessibility to keep on track as they can join the class at any time and learn on their own pace.

### **Alternative assessment method**

Educators need to be aware that not all students are privileged enough to have access to the internet. In light of that, it is important to allow these students to take their time in completing the assignments. Educators can address this issue by resorting to other methods such as communicating via text messages and checking up on them to see if they are facing any difficulties keeping up with the class. It is

important to be conscious of these kinds of students and try to motivate them as much as possible. Educators must not pressure students towards the weight of exams, especially for university students as doing e-learning without any physical classes tremendously affect the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Imagine students with poor connections and not enough electronic gadgets, they would be stressed as they have not managed to learn successfully at home. On that note too, these assessments cannot bear the same benchmark set previously as learning procedures have taken a different route. The credibility and validity of these assessments must also be considered to suffice learner qualifications for future educational opportunities.

### **Training**

Other than that, the Ministry of Education should take courses for educators in e-learning. this way, they could be more prepared for it and would be able to present their input online better. The MOE can also make a guideline for the educators to follow when designing their lessons so that the teachings are more standardized and systematic. Educators must also be able to prepare themselves with ICT knowledge since the learning mode is now online, we will or maybe use various online applications while learning. Moreover, there are a lot of fun online sites that can be interactive, it would be a really good idea if educators make use of these sites so that students will be able to enjoy online learning sessions and find them a tad bit more meaningful than usual. In addition, policymakers should provide sufficient training to the educators so that they are prepared for the online teaching and learning process. Since this e-learning method is newly implemented, some educators might not be familiar with the online tools or equipped with digital skills (Bergdahl, Nouri, & Fors, 2019). Perhaps, online workshops, training, tutorials and self-help guides should be provided to the educators so that they could learn ways of running effective live-streaming classes, designing alternative assessments and using online proctoring tools for assessments. When the educators are confident and well-equipped with the necessary knowledge, they can teach effectively online and

also encourage students to embrace the online learning environment. To conclude, e-learning could be implemented successfully if all the necessary measures are taken to improve the efficiency of a learning experience for students.

### **New school curriculum - PDPr**

The best measure that educators can take after the Covid-19 outbreak is revising the current education curriculum and formulating a new curriculum system to adapt to the current situation. In Malaysia, policymakers introduced a curriculum known as PDPr that accommodate the current situation. The academic calendar is messed up because of this outbreak. Therefore, it is best to improvise the curriculum and complete the academic session in a simplified yet effective manner to avoid the timetable or calendar shifting too much. We do not know when we can go back to normal lives. Therefore, we need to adapt to this “new normal” where safe interactions are virtual. Before the lift of the control order, educators and policymakers ought to make a good plan of how physical classes are to be conducted. Physical classes should not be compulsory for a certain amount of time to ensure the safety of both students and educators. However, classes that require hands-on learning can be conducted only by gathering less than a certain number of pupils at a time. Curriculums should also be revised to achieve synchronization for all students. This is to ensure that no students get left behind.

### **V. Closing**

The emergence of Covid-19 has taken a huge toll on every aspect of our country, one of which is in the education sector. Due to Covid-19, schools, universities, and other educational institutions had to be closed down. Our technological advancement is, unfortunately, still at a slow pace. With struggles regarding internet connection and even access to digital tools for students from impoverished households, a lot is at stake for the government to consider. This, of course, is not implying that education is impossible with how the pandemic has turned out but the decisions made have to consider a lot of aspects to not leave

anyone behind. A drawback when it comes to online learning is that it completely relies on one's internet connection. While this might not be a problem for students and educators who live in urban areas, it might be a problem for those living in more rural areas. Internet coverage is not present in each kilometre of the country as certain places do not have internet connectivity at all. Some places do have internet connectivity, but do not have a fast enough connection for it to be viable for learning. Furthermore, not all students can cope with remote learning. Students might feel uncomfortable learning at home with all the distractions around them. For example, some students have to help their parents with house chores such as cooking, doing the laundry, or taking care of their little siblings. They don't have the ideal conducive environment to study. Self-learning is not easy at all.

For students who do not have printers at home, they have to spend most of their time reading from the computer screen. It will affect their health as well as their motivation to study. Students will also feel isolated and stressed, as they have no friends to refer to and share their problems. Besides, students are burdened with too many additional tasks as it is a way to replace the face-to-face class. Also, educators and lecturers might encounter the same problems as students. They have other priorities that need their attention at home. The change in students' learning environment affects their learning efficiency, and many of them do not have a good sense of consciousness, thereby resulting in a decline in academic performance. Policymakers go through the curriculum again to provide a guide for educators as they need to adapt to remote learning. Training should be provided where educators can learn of different platforms that they can occupy for students' learning effectiveness during lessons or when giving out tasks. An example would be that educators can practice the usage of ICT in incorporating classroom activities so that they are more familiar with the learning platforms.

To conclude, the implementation of remote learning during this covid-19 pandemic can be seen to have advantages, and also limitations towards the people involved, which are mainly students and educators. Whatever the impact may be to

different people, we must all agree that remote learning is something that we all have to learn to adjust to because this pandemic has yet to show any signs of leaving. It is believed that governments are trying their best to improve the online learning system to provide the best learning opportunity possible for students. Hence, it is important for everyone, including the educators, students, as well as parents to all participate and give their full cooperation to make learning a better experience, despite being in this pandemic. Whatever the current situation is, it is hope things get better and the nation's education system is capable of coping up with the current changes that we are facing. In short, remote learning could be beneficial, especially for younger generations as they grew up with digital media and easy access to technology. Therefore, educators play an important role to understand students wants and needs to fit them into their lesson plans. An understanding educator would ease the minds of students as well as the learning process. Besides, in midst of the Covid-19 outbreak, it is best to reduce the burden of students whose families have difficulties making ends meet.

Covid-19 has affected so many things in this world, and even after this pandemic is over, new routines will be the new normal. The best practice for educators to prevent this pandemic from happening again is that they always need to practise effective remote teaching during emergency period. It can be difficult to do so, but the preventive measure has to be implemented. Other than that, educators also need to review their lesson plans and equip themselves with ICT knowledge. As for policymakers, the best practice that they can do after the Covid-19 outbreak is they should study more about our education system and change where necessary so that students can catch up with the lesson that they have left behind because of this pandemic. It is very crucial for every student, regardless of their age, to not be left behind. Thus, policymakers are responsible to ensure that this would not happen.

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