

# Challenges and Emotional Well-Being of Students in Facing New Learning Norms

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**ABSTRACT:** The closure of educational institutions due to the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the Teaching and Facilitation (Pd Pc) method, from the face-to-face PdPc method in schools to the implementation of Teaching and Learning at Home (Pd Pr) completely online. This online PdPr method demands commitment and cooperation from all parties especially in terms of knowledge and skills related to information technology, provision of digital devices and good internet access and good emotional management. But students in this era of the Covid 19 pandemic face several issues and challenges. Therefore, this study was conducted to identify the challenges and emotional well-being of students in the learning of the Covid 19 era. This study is a qualitative study that uses a semi-structured interview method. A total of 5 respondents consisting of secondary school students who should have taken the Form 3 Assessment (PT3) and Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) tests were interviewed. Data were analyzed using thematic methods manually. Four main themes have emerged as a result of this study namely demographics, non-face-to-face learning challenges, the absence of stable devices and internet and emotional well-being affected by the pandemic. The implication of this study is to provide input to teachers, counselors and parents in particular to better understand the emotional well-being of students to continue learning. Next, it can be suggested to the counselor to do appropriate interventions to ensure the emotional well-being of students is taken care of.

**KEYWORDS** –Covid-19, emotional well-being, devices and internet, online learning, pandemic

## I. INTRODUCTION

The world was shocked by the attack *Coronavirus disease* (COVID-19) which spread rapidly starting in the city of Wuhan, China at the end of 2019. World Health Organization (WHO) reports that as of May 8, 2021, the epidemic has infected 156.5 million people worldwide with deaths exceeding 3 million people [1]. After more than one year Malaysia detected the first import case on 25 January 2020, 436,944 thousand patients were confirmed positive with 1,657 deaths recorded (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2021) [2]. Following the epidemic which has a high infection rate began to spread widely, on March 18, 2020, the Malaysian government has enforced the Movement Control Order (MCO) for the whole country as an effort to curb the spread of this pandemic.

As a result, many sectors were affected, including the health, economy, services, and education sectors. Restrictions on movement caused many face-to-face activities to be stopped drastically, including the closure of all levels of educational institutions. The situation has forced all parties to find alternative ways to ensure that daily affairs can still be carried out. As a result, the field of education is undergoing changes in various aspects, including teaching, and learning methods that need to be implemented online for the continuity of the learning process. These drastic changes have put pressure on various parties, both schools and teachers as well as parents and students themselves because they need to make various adjustments immediately.

This online home teaching and learning (PdPr) method is something very different from conventional methods. It is not possible to succeed without commitment and cooperation from all parties especially in terms of technology related knowledge and skills [3]. This is something new especially among school students. As a result of these changes as well, students and parents take time to adapt as not all students are ready to have sufficient knowledge and skills in technology to enable them to be independent in the PdPr process. In fact, not all students have the facility to participate in online learning. This implementation requires students to build their own lifelong learning skills [4]. This is because they do not receive direct guidance and instruction such as face-to-face learning in school, instead they need to be more proactive in finding new information and skills so as not to drop out of lessons. Time interacting with teachers and friends also became shorter than usual.

This challenging period resulted in some students who are mentally and emotionally disturbed in the process of adjustment. Eikhwan Ali & Mahirah A Rashid (2020) stated that the stress faced by students differs from one to another depending on their daily situation [5]. The emotional stress encountered despite being characterized as a normal response to a crisis, can be a threat to the psychological well-being of students if not addressed properly. White (2004) says psychological well-being is emotional health based on high self-esteem and having positive relationships with others as well as feeling less anxious, not in depressed and not behaving delinquently [6]. Emotional well-being is important because it shapes an individual's behavior and pattern of interaction with the environment.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The pandemic that ravaged the world has left such a huge impact and changed the landscape of human life. Daily routines no longer run as it used to be and the average community is imprisoned in their own homes. Some consider the current situation to bring benefits in certain aspects, but more are negatively affected by this situation. The education sector itself faces great challenges to ensure the continuity of the teaching and learning process when any face-to-face activities cannot be carried out. Existing plans had to be stopped and new plans had to be made. Since education should not be hampered by the current situation and various alternatives can be worked out, teachers and students need to explore and adapt to new learning methods.

The mass media has surveyed and extensively reported on the constraints faced by some communities especially the rural population in adapting to this online learning. Limited internet access and the absence of specific device tools for each child are the first layer of challenges that need to be overcome. These tools have never been an individual need in education at the school level. However, there are many parties who act quickly whether from the authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or individuals who come forward to offer assistance by providing free data and digital devices to those in need to minimize educational dropouts. This situation occurs not only in Malaysia but also in other countries facing a similar situation [7]. Such a spirit of cooperation is what is needed when facing these difficult times.

At the same time, in addition to the ability to adapt to technological change, students also face the challenge of changing attitudes to accept the PdPr practices implemented [8]. Learning at their respective locations makes all students go through PdPr with minimal monitoring from teachers. Without proper discipline, motivation and determination from students, there is a huge risk of dropping out of school with the learning of these new norms. [9] Rozita (2020) stated the lack of PdPr is limited reference material, lack of verbal communication, limited internet access and uncertainty of schooling and testing sessions. This is due to changes in policies in line with the current situation which is not very stable.

From another angle, there are various benefits of online learning when accessible from wherever teachers and students are. A study of early childhood educators in Johor found that the use of information technology is an effective teaching method because it is easy to access, can be used according to the suitability of their time and can be repeated if necessary [10]. However, another important issue to discuss is environmental factors. PdPr does not take place in an ideal setting where teachers and peers are local, wearing school uniforms and following a pre-arranged schedule. This makes it difficult to create an environment that prepares students physically, cognitively and emotionally to go through the learning process in a disciplined

manner. Nur Hazirah & Masayu also emphasized that the problem of learning atmosphere that is not conducive and does not support learning has caused the PdPr process to be somewhat disrupted [10].

Time management issues are among the major challenges faced by students [7]. Furthermore with the absence of monitors and school rules as usual. With the various demands of the lesson, personal and family affairs as well as other disruptive elements will draw students' focus on the lesson, causing students to easily fall asleep or have difficulty balancing the commitments that need to be met. In fact, there are teenagers who are given the task of managing the house and monitoring the younger siblings. The absence of time boundaries challenges students to manage their time well in addition to the various roles that must be played. Failure to manage time will be an additional stressor for students going through PdPr to find balance in life.

All these factors have put academic pressure on students in going through PdPr. Academic stress is defined as an unpleasant situation due to the demands that need to be settled by students resulting in anxiety and affect the well-being in their study process [11]. According to a study, student's well-being is significantly influenced by academic stress, resilience and social adaptation [12]. The ability of a student to adapt to the environment can increase resilience which in turn helps to overcome the stress experienced and control their well-being.

The stress and emotional disturbances that cause these behavioral disorders can be overcome with a variety of methods. In addition to the technical matters mentioned earlier, from a religious aspect, ritual practices such as prayer, recitation of the Qur'an, supplication, remembrance of the Creator and other practices that connect oneself with the Creator can be an alternative solution to this problem [13]. Strong faith is the foundation of faith and peace of mind in facing future uncertainties and good hope in turn can ward off excessive stress in life.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative study that uses a semi-structured interview method. The design of a qualitative study is appropriate for a study of an exploratory nature [14]. The interview protocol was used during the interview process. According to Noraini (2013), the specialty of the interview is the sequence of questions, the form of the question, the way the question can vary according to suitability because it depends on the reaction of the study respondents during the interview [15]. Five study participants were involved in this study consisting of Form 4, Form 5 (2020) and Form 5 (2021) secondary school students. The data obtained were analyzed using thematic methods manually.

### IV. FINDINGS

#### Profile of study participants

This study involved 5 study participants who can be categorized into the following characteristics; age, gender, and type of examination. Table 1 summarizes the background demographics of all study participants.

*Table 1: Background of study participants*

Study participants	Age	Gender	Examination
SP1	16	Girl	PT3 2020
SP2	16	Girl	PT3 2020
SP3	17	Girl	SPM 2021
SP4	17	Girl	SPM 2021

The results of interviews with 5 study participants have produced three main themes to answer the two main research questions in this study. The two questions of the study were what the challenges were faced by students in learning during the occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic and both the level of emotional well-being of students throughout the Covid-19. Two main themes have answered the first research question namely internet usage and device convenience and difficulty of asking teachers. While one theme answers the second research question which is emotional instability. While another theme is Demographics. The Fig. 1 below shows the themes obtained in this study.

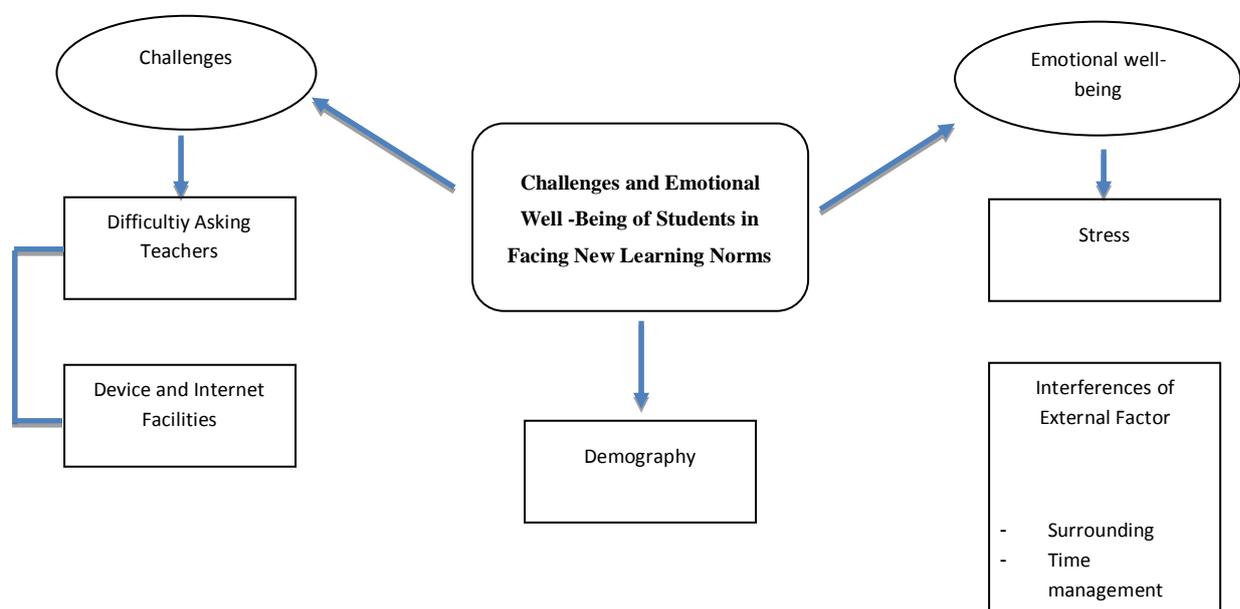


Figure 1: Themes in this study

#### 4.1 Demographics

The demographic themes obtained in this study are the personal information of the study participants such as gender, age, home study experience (PdPr) in the Covid-19 pandemic era and the exams that need to be taken. All study participants live in the state of Selangor.

#### 4.2 Difficulty Asking Teachers

The difficulty of asking teachers obtained in this study refers to the difficulty of communicating bilaterally about the lessons learned. Students prefer to study face -to -face at school because it is easy to ask questions and get explanations. Students also found it a bit difficult because teachers took longer to respond to questions posed because communicating using the device took more time. This can be evidenced through the results of interviews with study participants such as the conversation below.

*"I think I missed a lot in class because I really don't understand one thing in the online class, so if I want to understand what the teacher is teaching, I have to watch the video on youtube, I want to ask the teacher, but got slow response"*

SP3

*"It's a little difficult to understand because if you ask the teacher through Whatsapp, it's hard to explain. Then the math teacher will explain in the simplest way and I don't understand anymore because the teacher doesn't tell me why I got this answer and suddenly this is the answer"*

SP1

*"I'm more comfortable asking the teacher about what I don't understand if I study physically"*

SP5

#### **4.3 Devices and Internet Facilities**

The online Home Teaching and Learning (PdPR) process requires good device facilities and internet access. However in a pandemic situation online learning cannot be done if there is no good internet access and the sharing of student devices with siblings and family members results in limited usage time. Therefore, it is seen that students have challenges in the convenience of the device and the stability of internet access. The results of the interviews showed that the students had technical challenges as in the conversation below.

*"Learning online is difficult because the internet is stucked, there are not enough laptops and online class time is disrupted because of the noise of the younger siblings. I am most frustrated when my class is at the same time as my sister's, it will be difficult because there is only one laptop and the smartphone has a small screen and it is difficult to open my moe (Ministry of Education domain) email"*

SP1

*"I don't understand because of internet problems, sometimes online learning becomes stuck when there is no internet at home"*

SP4

However, other challenges also arise when students have good internet access and devices but cannot focus on lessons because there are other distractions such as the attraction of watching YouTube and playing online games.

*"Learning online is not very effective for me because there are various types of distractions at home because the strong internet access attracts me to play games with friends, do not join classes and do live on the internet"*

SP5

*"I feel discouraged and I use the internet more on social media and upload my Tiktok videos with friends"*

SP2

#### **4.4 Emotional Instability**

The outbreak of Covid-19 affects students in dealing with daily life. This situation is seen to be more annoying when the government announces the opening of schools but students will remain study online. In addition, the announcement of the opening of the school for students who take important exams has an emotional impact on students. This situation creates an impact on the psychology of school students. This can be proven through the results of interviews conducted.

*"...I easily lose focus when studying online. When I lost focus, I asked the teacher a question through the google meet chat but the teacher did not answer because the teacher did not notice. The feeling of fear all came again because I didn't understand what the teacher was teaching. I was stressed, I went to the toilet, I cried in there."*

SP2

*"I'm extremely stressed because teachers gave a lot of online works and feel like quitting school but can't afford to live out there without knowledge because SPM is tough"*

SP5

*"My emotions are unstable because of stress and it's easy to cry, but I try to stabilize my emotions by trying not to push myself too much when studying and thinking positively. It's because I'm worried when I miss lessons because I'm worried for SPM this year"*

SP4

However, it is seen that even the opening of the school face-to-face is allowed for students who are taking the exam, these students also often feel scared and worried with the increase in daily cases of Covid-19 which is more than 3000 cases per day. Students are quite disrupted emotionally. It can be proven through interviews with study participants.

*"..... I went to school on the first day of school on January 20, 2021 feeling nervous and to this day, I still feel afraid of an epidemic in my school. I want to finish SPM and don't want to study online anymore "*

SP5

*"... online learning is quite challenging because it disturbs my emotions because I don't even understand what I'm learning, when I go to school eventhough I'm scared and worried, but it feels okay when studying face to face"*

SP3

*"In the beginning, I had a hard time adjusting to the new environment and I think I missed a lot in class because I really didn't understand one thing in the online class"*

SP4

However, this study shows that students can manage their emotions well in various way when they have difficulty controlling emotional stress in the online learning process without direct inter actions with the teacher. This can be proven in interviews.

*".. one night, thank God, I realized that I should do the night prayer and ask for easy understanding even it's hard to catch up. I believe God will help me "*

SP1

*"... By listening to my favorite songs and having fun, I know I have to be strong to go through this life"*

SP5

*"... last year I finished revising all the topics I missed by watching the video on youtube"*

SP4

Due to not being able to control the Covid-19 pandemic situation, especially among students, they had to face the challenge of online learning difficulties well. Moreover, they also think they need to always think positively and need to accept living in this new norm. They built their own coping mechanism in this hard time.

## V. DISCUSSION

This study explores in more depth the challenges and emotional well-being of students in facing learning in the new norms that occurred abruptly since the Movement Control Order (PKP) which began on March 18, 2020, resulting in the occurrence of lesson dropouts when face-to-face learning is not feasible. These findings are in line with the study of Sundarasan et. al. (2020) who concluded that almost one-third of students in Malaysia experienced moderate to very severe anxiety during this PKP period [16].

Meanwhile, in a study of students at the tertiary level reported that factors of age, gender, field of study and financial status had a significant relationship with the level of anxiety [17]. Some of the elements are also experienced by students at the secondary school level who will step into IPT such as online learning, uncertainty about academic performance, graduation time and opportunities to pursue studies or career prospects for the future are major stressors for students. At the same time, restrictions on physical activity and decreased levels of interaction with peers also had psychological effects on students.

Learning motivation is also what is missing in students. Unconducive environment and other distractions such as responsibilities at home, the attraction of online applications and games as well as limited interaction with teachers are among the other challenges that make students discouraged and stressed to undergo PdPr. This poses a problem because teachers are the main mentors in the learning process and this role still needs to be maintained even if the medium of learning has changed [4]. Effective communication between educators and students is an important aspect in solving lesson-related problems. However, teacher feedback that is highly expected to guide students is difficult to achieve optimally through PdPr.

In supporting the effectiveness of learning new norms, various parties need to play a role and work together in their respective capacities. [5] Eikhwan & Mahiran (2020) stated that the existence of registered counselors and tele-counseling lines should be utilized to overcome the pressures that are being faced. School counselors with the help of teachers also need to play a more active role in monitoring the emotions of students during this critical period so that the emotional stability of students is maintained and the effectiveness of PdPr can be achieved.

Parents as the closest individuals also have a great impact on the emotional well-being of students. A study revealed that the acceptance of parenting style has a significant impact on the development of emotional intelligence of adolescents [18]. Particularly, authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles have a positive impact on the development of children's emotional intelligence. The study also found that Asian adolescents could accept both styles because assertiveness was considered a sign of parental love and concern for children, rather than punishment and restriction. It is therefore important for parents to observe the parenting style of children to preserve the emotional well-being of students and support the process of learning new norms as the main and closest supporter at home.

Another thing that can be observed in maintaining the emotional well-being of students is their social skills. Social skills refer to the ability to communicate, collaborate, and place oneself in surrounding social situations with positive and effective interaction. In this regard, teachers also play a role in utilizing social media as a medium of communication and learning as a measure of maintaining students' psycho emotions [19]. Zaiton (2020) states that people around serve as social support to help student's self-control [20]. This can be achieved by helping students build good interpersonal relationships, build active and resilient attitudes in the face of adversity, and reduce the stress experienced by making sure they are heard. Indirectly, this practice can eliminate stresses experienced by students in going through PdPr during the pandemic period.

While digital technology takes us one step closer to modernity and diverts our attention to the impact of this pandemic, Zaiton (2020) also explains that in the long run, relevant experts think it will result in negative social and emotional impacts [20]. In general, this effect was supported by respondents who expressed low self-control when facing a device because they often chose to open online applications rather than complete lesson assignments. The findings also show that the religious aspect is seen to reduce the emotional stress faced by

students. Respondents stated that practices such as night prayers, reciting the Quran and praying bring peace and reduce anxiety. This is in line with a study of practicing spiritual values to overcome depression in pandemic which states that spiritual aspects including philanthropic practices and the concept of acceptance towards the test can be an alternative solution to emotional stress and instability as faced by the average society during this pandemic period [13].

## VI. CONCLUSION

Clearly, no one is immune to the impact of this pandemic and needs to make changes and adjustments in various aspects immediately to live a more stable life. However, students are among the most vulnerable due to age and developmental factors that have not yet reached full maturity in terms of psychoemotional and psychosocial. Issues faced by students such as difficulty interacting with teachers, constraints of device facilities and internet access as well as emotional well-being found through this study are also partly unable to be resolved by themselves except with the support and assistance of others around them. Parents' guidance and appropriate online interventions need to be designed to help curb students' emotional instability in this challenging phase. Further studies

## VII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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