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ONLINE LANGUAGE TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

A language classroom must have the right environment for learning and cannot be classified as every other subject as it is a subject which assesses students' abilities in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. As language educators are obliged to use online platforms to teach and assess their students due the pandemic, there are many challenges that they face. Thus, the purpose of this study is to look into the issues that language instructors have when it comes to online learning and assessment. All language instructors at the School of Languages, Civilization, and Philosophy, Universiti Utara Malaysia's were given Google Form questionnaires to answer. The data was analysed using SPSS statistic version 26 and Smart PLS-SEM 3.2.8 with a sample volume of 40 (56 percent) (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015). The descriptive statistics of the respondent's demographic profile were conducted using the SPSS statistics tool. Following that, the PLS statistical tool was used to examine the study's measurement and structural model. The measurement model test was undertaken to ensure that the constructs of this study had reached their reliability and validity. The findings show multiple applications and platforms, online marking, nonverbal evaluation, and plagiarism pose the greatest problem for language instructors in terms of technology and assessments. In terms of teaching, the issues are creativity, rapport, heavy workload, as well as lack of communication and participation from students.

Keywords: Online teaching, Online assessment, Language instructors, Pandemic

A. INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) has had a huge impact on people's lives and everyday activities all over the world. The pandemic began to threaten people's health, societies, and economies, (United Nations, 2021). However, most importantly, Covid-19 has had a huge impact on the educational sector. According to UNESCO, the education system is in the worst shape it has ever been, with more than 1.6 billion children and youths affected by the school and university closures (UNESCO, 2021). To avoid academic loss, most educational institutions are ‘obliged' to switch to remote learning and teaching in a matter of days due to the stringent implementation of social distancing.

Although most colleges are showing signs of adapting to e-learning throughout the epidemic, there are still limits from the standpoints of both learners and instructors. Educational institutions will struggle to apply technology in education, according to Elberkawi et al. (2021), because e-learning requires three important technological elements: great electronic infrastructure, competent academic employees, and students. Furthermore, students and instructors with inadequate internet connections may face significant obstacles as a result of their absolute reliance on online learning (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020).

According to Agboola (2006), the education system must be connected with technological advancements in order to maintain its competitiveness. Academicians are left with only one alternative in the midst of the pandemic: online study. The limitations of online learning, on the other hand, are only discovered after it has been in use for a while. Because of insufficient technological equipment, socioeconomic background, digital incompetence, lack of assessment and monitoring, and tremendous workload, the majority of teachers are unable to provide high-quality training remotely (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). This is supported by Bao (2020), who claims that instructors are under-trained and lack the necessary skills to manage online platforms.

Furthermore, due to the unexpected move to remote learning, teachers have had little time to create lesson plans, assessments, technical preparations, or provide any help (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2014). This is unquestionably one of the most pressing challenges in the field of language teaching and learning. It is crucial to recognise the difficulties and roadblocks that come with language learning, because language learning is not the same as studying other disciplines. The aforementioned concerns clearly indicate that more research is needed to fully comprehend the genuine challenges that language instructors encounter when teaching and learning online.

Based on the issues of online teaching and assessment discussed, this study aims to achieve the following research objectives:

i) To examine the challenges encountered by language instructors during online learning amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.

ii) To examine the challenges encountered by language instructors during online assessment amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.

The pandemic of COVID-19 has put the educational system in peril. The educational institutes have to face the challenge in order to benefit from asynchronous learning, which works best in digital media. Because the change from traditional pedagogy in higher education to the online mechanism requires instructors to alter their pedagogy, online teaching is considerably different from traditional learning. The biggest problem for instructors was adapting technology for online instruction in a short period of time. They were also forced to do the exams online, which added to the complexity of the situation. According to Punit (2020), online lessons during lockdown have been a terrible experience for instructors. Beyond the novelty of having online lessons, maintaining the students' enthusiasm and getting them involved in each online encounter would also pose a problem (New Straits Times, 2020).

Many authors have recently undertaken research to address concerns linked to online teaching and learning during COVID 19, but most of the studies have focused on the challenges that students face while ignoring the issues that instructors confront. Only a few authors have addressed the difficulties that instructors encounter when teaching and learning online. For example, Gratz and Looney (2020) investigated faculty members' willingness to teach online and their resistance to change in Los Angeles, finding that instructors lack online teaching skills, lack time for online course preparation, and their subject or course does not lend itself to online teaching. Similarly, Arora and Srinivasan (2020) identified network issues, a lack of training, a lack of awareness, a lack of enthusiasm, lower attendance, a lack of personal touch, and a lack of engagement as important challenges that instructors encounter in the online teaching and learning process.

Many institutions, according to Verma et al. (2020), lack trained instructors who can operate remotely using online platforms and struggle to accept the transformation. Without clear instructions and

guidelines, instructors were forced to conduct classes from their houses. Senior instructors who were not technically savvy were forced to teach online (Sharma, 2020). In remote education, instructors also found it challenging to control the students. Instructors described teaching in the home context as a laborious and demotivating experience (Punit, 2020).

A complete transition to e-learning at universities may not proceed as smoothly as envisaged. Although university students may have used online learning in some of their classes, it does not cover the entirety of the teaching and learning process. The difficulties teachers have while performing student assessments is one area of concentration that merits specific attention. In this regard, a study by Rahim (2020) found that there are at least nine online evaluation recommendations to follow in the remote teaching of health professions education: (1) evaluate prerequisites for implementing online assessment, (2) ensure alignment of assessment activities with stated learning objectives, (3) address the diversity of students' situations, (4) maintain a good balance of formative and summative assessments, (5) stimulate student learning with online assessment, (6) consider format, (7) scheduling and timing of tests, (8) establish clear communication to students regarding assessment matters and (9) ensure high-quality feedback and address assessment validity threats. It is proposed that having these guidelines will assist the faculty in creating online assessments.

Language teaching and learning is undeniably one of the most pressing challenges in education, especially in these times such as the pandemic. Due to the nature of language learning, it cannot be compared to other disciplines, courses or programmes. Therefore, it is critical to recognise the obstacles and barriers that face language learners. By default, language acquisition is concerned with the optimal classroom teaching environment, teaching materials, and teaching techniques (Yildiz, 2020). The aforementioned concerns clearly indicate that more research is needed to fully comprehend the genuine challenges that language instructors encounter when teaching and learning online, as the learning environment online is vastly different from face-to-face classroom environment.

B. METHODS

Research Sample

The research was carried out at the School of Languages, Civilization, and Philosophy, Universiti Utara Malaysia, which is a public university, in July 2021. There are 71 language instructors in total who teach different language subjects, i.e., English, Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, German, and French, among other languages. In the study, 40 language instructors (56 percent) who had taught online for three semesters were included.

Research Instrument

A questionnaire was utilised as the study's tool, and Google Forms was used to create the questionnaire. The study's items were developed based on previous research. The questionnaire was divided into four sections: demographics, online teaching, online assessments, and technology use. The questionnaire was then sent to all of the language instructors via a link.

Analysis of Data

SPSS statistic version 26 and Smart PLS-SEM 3.2.8 were used to analyse the data (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015). The SPSS statistics application was used to compile descriptive statistics for the demographic profile of the respondents. The study's measurement was then examined using a PLS statistical technique. The measurement model test was performed to determine whether the study's components were reliable and valid.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Result

Table 1 shows that women made up 76.2 percent of the 40 respondents. Almost half of the respondents were between 31 and 40 years old (42.9%). Furthermore, 38.1 percent of respondents have worked as an instructor for more than 6 years. The majority of the respondents (57.5%) were English instructors.

TABLE 1. Respondents' demographic

Demographic		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	32	76.2
	Male	10	23.8
Age	20 - 30 years old	12	28.6
	31 - 40 years old	21	50.0
	41 - 50 years old	9	21.4
Nationality	Malaysian	34	81.0
	Non-Malaysian	8	19.0
Teaching Experience in years	1 - 5 years	13	31.0
	11 - 15 years	7	16.7
	16 - 20 years	4	9.5
	21 - 25 years	1	2.4
	26 - 30 years	1	2.4
	6 - 10 years	16	38.1
Teaching Subject language	Bahasa Melayu	3	7.1
	English	24	57.1
	French	2	4.8
	Mandarin	13	31.0

The Measurement Model

The measuring model makes a link between the constructs and the indicators that are associated with them. The measuring model's reliability, convergent, and discriminant validity must all be proven before it can be evaluated (Hair et. al, 2017). Cronbach's Alpha and composite dependability were used to measure internal consistency reliability (CR). The factor loadings of all indicators obtained a level of significance, as demonstrated in Table 2. According to Hair et al. (2014), the holding item rule should be between 0.4 and 0.7. The Cronbach Alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) values were both more than 0.7, indicating that the dependability had been confirmed.

TABLE 2. Factor Loading, CA, CR and AVE

Constructs	**Items**	**Factor Loading**	**Cronbach Alpha's (CA)**	**Composite Reliability (CR)**	**Average Variance Extracted (AVE)**
Assessment	Assessment007	0.938	0.704	0.818	0.607
	Assessment0001	0.629			
	Assessment0004	0.738			
Teaching instructor	Teachinginstructor09	0.632	0.837	0.882	0.560
	Teachinginstructor01	0.816			
	Teachinginstructor03	0.571			
	Teachinginstructor06	0.746			
	Teachinginstructor10	0.831			
	Teachinginstructor02	0.848			
Technology	Technology02	0.881	0.752	0.844	0.578
	Technology03	0.766			
	Technology04	0.753			
	Technology05	0.618			

Discriminant Validity

Its goal is to show how the structures relate to one another. According to Table 3, each construct's square correlation was less than the average variance retrieved by the indicators measuring that

construct, showing satisfactory discriminant validity. The cross-loading criteria were met since the loading of each indication was higher than the loadings of its associated variables' indicators, as shown in Table 4.

TABLE 3. Fornell- Larcker Criterion

	Assessment	Teaching instructor	Technology
Assessment	0.779		
Teaching instructor	0.606	0.748	
Technology	0.537	0.799	0.760

TABLE 4. Cross Loading Result

	Assessment	Teaching instructor	Technology
Assessemnt007	**0.938**	0.680	0.592
Assessment0001	**0.629**	0.192	0.200
Assessment0004	**0.738**	0.328	0.292
Teachinginstructors09	0.403	0.632	0.473
Teachinginstructor01	0.421	**0.816**	0.706
Teachinginstructor03	0.287	**0.571**	0.513
Teachinginstructors06	0.241	**0.746**	0.552
Teachinginstructors10	0.717	**0.831**	0.681
Teachinginstructot02	0.571	**0.848**	0.620
Technology02	0.473	0.721	**0.881**
Technology03	0.360	0.635	**0.766**
Technology04	0.412	0.584	**0.753**
Technology05	0.391	0.457	**0.618**

Heterotrait - Monotrait (HTMT)

In this study, the HTMT value should be less than 0.85 for conceptually distinct constructs and less than 0.9 for conceptually similar constructs. Additionally, some authors suggest a threshold of 0.85. In addition, Gold et al. (2001) argued with this value and proposed a value of 0.90. For this study, as demonstrated in Table 5, the result of HTMT is less than this threshold, that conclude that the HTMT is achieved.

TABLE 5. Heterotrait - Monotrait (HTMT)

	Assessment	Students	Teaching instructor	Technology
Assessment				
Students	**0.762**			
Teaching instructor	**0.643**	**0.914**		
Technology	**0.637**	0.871	**0.995**	

R Square

The R2 value is above 0.26, and according to Cohen (1988), it indicates a substantial model. The result of this study indicated that Square is at 0.74% (See Table 6).

TABLE 6. R-square endogenous variable

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Teaching instructor	0.744	0.724

D. CONCLUSION

The results of the survey revealed that characteristics such as gender and age can influence language instructors' attitudes about online teaching and learning. Preparation and a heavy workload were determined to be the major hurdles for respondents between the ages of 31 and 40, while creativity and technology were the top impediments for those between the ages of 41 and 50. In terms of connection and emotional support, male language instructors were more tolerant of online lessons than female language instructors. However, the findings revealed that different online apps and platforms, coordinating online exams, non-verbal evaluation, and plagiarism are among the language instructors' obstacles in integrating classroom evaluations with technology. In terms of teaching, however, the issues include a lack of communication and student participation. As a result, the findings of this study suggest that language learning requires specialised teaching materials and approaches, as language learning cannot be compared to other subjects. Instructors of various genders, ages, and nationalities require proper training. Finally, it should be noted that language learning is assessed by examining learners' abilities in these four areas: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. As a result, further research is needed to determine how to conduct online tests that are appropriate for each skill. It should be emphasised that in the context of adopting online language learning during the epidemic, the use of proper material and assessments are critical.

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