Studying at Home Due to the Covid-19 Outbreak: Experiences from Non-Law Students

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ABSTRACT: *Introduction to commercial law subject (LAW 240) that is offered at the tertiary level to non-law students about the basic concept of commercial law with the outcome to expose the students to a general overview of commercial legal environment in Malaysia. Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, this course is delivered through Online Distance Learning (ODL), and the change in the mode of deliver has taken place for four semesters starting from semester March 2020 until semester October 2021. Whether ODL will continue for March 2022 semester, depends on the Covid-19 outbreak figures? and the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia's directive. The objective of this study is to find out if non-law students from Faculty of Accountancy of UiTM Perak Branch, Tapah Campus are having trouble studying at home and discuss the major challenges faced by them. Therefore, online qualitative survey was conducted using Google Forms due to the current situation because students are using digital platforms for ODL. To achieve the objectives, a qualitative methodology is used by adopting case study and descriptive qualitative design focusing on non-law students experiences in ODL. It is important for both students and lecturers to consider the challenges studying at home due to the covid-19 outbreak. It is hoped that this study will add to the existing body of knowledge.*

KEYWORDS: *Non-law students; Online Distance Learning (ODL); challenges; covid-19 outbreak; studying at home.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Legal education is no longer limited to law students because those pursuing professional courses such as accountancy are also required to study law subject such as commercial law and company law as set out by the professional bodies for accreditation (Abdul Razak, Osoman, & Mohammad Patel, 2020). Therefore, accounting students for the Diploma of Accountancy at UiTM Perak Branch, Tapah Campus are required to take Introduction to Commercial Law subject (LAW 240) in third semester of study.

On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus (2019-nCoV) outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). The Covid-19 outbreak began as a health catastrophe, and governments imposed a lengthy lockdown to cope with this health crisis (Chetia, 2020). In an effort to control the spread of the Covid-19 outbreak, most governments around the world have temporarily closed educational institutions such as schools, training institutes and higher education (Bhamani et al., 2020;)(Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

To deal with the challenging circumstances, educational institutions keep identifying alternative learning approaches (Dhawan, 2020) and the outbreak has resulted in a change in the mode of teaching and learning. In the context of education, online learning blends learning and knowledge transfer by using digital applications to enable communication between lecturers and students (Wargadinata, Maimunah, Dewi, & Rofiq, 2020). However, according to Musingafi, Mapuranga, Chiwanza, & Zebron (2015), one of the most major ODL concerns is the high percentage of student drop-out and late course completion. As reviewed by Daniel (2020), students will be unable to complete their education curriculum and assessments in the normal way.

Therefore, this study aims to find out if non-law students from Faculty of Accountancy of UiTM Perak Branch, Tapah Campus are experiencing any difficulty studying at home. It also attempts to discuss the major challenge faced by after experiencing ODL for four semesters starting from March 2020 semester until October 2021 semester. Based on the current circumstances and outbreak trend, the Ministry of Higher Education will

determine whether ODL should be continued for the next semester (March 2022) *vice versa*. Hence, it is significant to explore the experience of students studying at home with the major challenge they are experiencing.

II.   METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative method. Qualitative methods are generally used in a natural context to identify relevant topics with the researcher as key to the process (Safdar, M.Abbo, Knobloch, & K.Seo, 2016). As explained by Hsieh & Shannon (2005), one of the numerous research methods used to examine text data is qualitative content analysis and the process of data analysis begins with manual or computer searches. There are two types of questions in qualitative surveys which are topic-based and demographic (Virginia, Victoria, Elicia, Louise, & Charlotte, 2020). The descriptive qualitative design was employed in this study to obtain relevant responses of non-law students' experiences while studying at home amidst the Covid-19 outbreak.

Due to physical constraints in collecting the data, Google Forms is used to as a survey tool find out if non-law students from Faculty of Accountancy of UiTM Perak Branch, Tapah Campus are experiencing difficulty studying at home. Google forms is also utilised due to the current situation because students are using digital platforms for ODL. Referring to Nurmahmudah & Nuryuniarti (2020), Google form is a tool in the form of a template or worksheet that is simple to comprehend, it comes in a variety of languages, and the template can be used independently or in combination to collect information from respondents. Questions was shared to non-law students to collect primary data from the respondents. The study was carried out at the end of the semester to obtain their feedback and views on their ODL experience.

III.   FINDINGS

The respondents: There are 302 respondents among non-law students from the Faculty of Accountancy of UiTM Perak Branch, Tapah Campus taking Introduction to Commercial Law (LAW 240) subject for the semester of October 2021 who responded. Respondents are from various classes taking LAW 240 as shown in Figure 1 below.
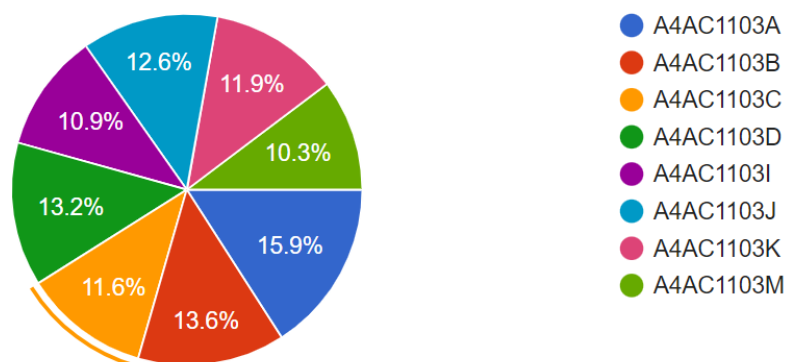
Figure 1: The distribution of class in the research sample.

Studying at home: The findings of this study show that 51.8% of non-law students find it difficult studying at home.

4. **Do you find it difficult to study at home?** *Adakah anda berasa sukar untuk belajar di rumah*?
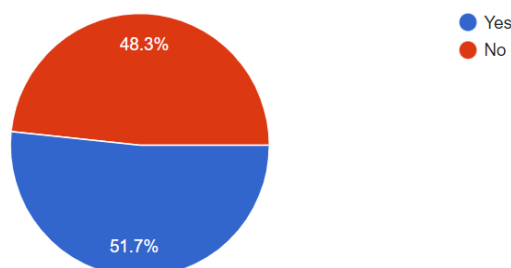
302 responses

Figure 2: Survey on studying at home

Major challenge in ODL: The online survey was answered by 302 respondents of various classes who are taking LAW 240 at UiTM Perak Branch, Tapah Campus. The survey indicated that a huge number of respondents face internet connection as the major challenge in ODL with 56.3% as shown in Figure 3 below.

10. **What is your major challenge in ODL?** *Apakah cabaran utama anda dalam menghadapi ODL*?
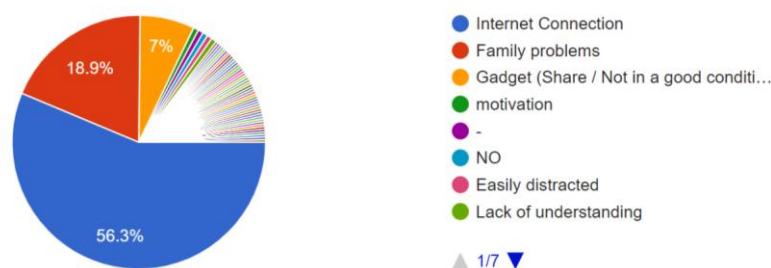
302 responses

Figure 3: Major challenge in ODL

IV. DISCUSSION

Students and lecturers in Malaysian higher education have been exposed to ODL which began in the semester of March 2020 and still continues through the semester of October 2021 due to Covid-19 outbreak During the four semesters, students and lecturer discover new experiences. The objective of an online qualitative survey focuses on non-law students is to identify whether students experience difficulties while studying ODL for law subjects. The question asked whether the respondents find difficulties while studying at home and 51.7% of 302 respondents responded that they find it difficult studying at home as shown by Figure 2 of the findings above. Due to the outbreak, majority of the world opted to total lockdown, and people who are affected by the Covid-19 disease must be quarantined; this situation has also impacted schools, colleges, and universities (Dhawan, 2020). The Covid-19 outbreak and total lockdown announced by the government becomes a huge dilemma to the education systems because institutions are closed down and face-to-face classes are switched to online classes and virtual education (Daniel, 2020). As a result, students started studying from home.

Prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, the challenges of studying law for non-law students were the module, the curriculum design, the lecturer's style in teaching and the legal terms used in the subject (Abdul Razak et al., 2020). However, the process of transitioning the mode of teaching from face-to-face to ODL created new challenge which is Internet connection. As illustrated in Figure 3 the findings show 56.3% of 302 respondents selected Internet connection as a major challenge in their ODL experience. As discussed by Wargadinata et al., (2020), when implementing online learning, the education system needs to ensure the availability of Wi-Fi signals and Internet data quota packages that could easily be accessed by lecturers and students. Hence, the use of suitable and relevant pedagogy for ODL that involves connection to information and communications technology (ICT) (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021) must be readily accessible for both lecturers and students.

According to research conducted by Wargadinata et al., (2020), the availability of Wi-Fi and data pulse quota packages for each students who are economically and financially limited, or those in geographical

locations with weak internet signals, are the challenges in implementing online learning. According to Pokhrel & Chhetri (2021), many countries face huge difficulties in obtaining a stable Internet connection and access to digital devices. In addition, many financially deprived students in developing countries are unable to afford online learning devices and some of them are not ready for ODL. This circumstance is caused by geographical location, financial, and family problems. As stated by Sahharon, Bolong, & Omar, (2017), when it comes to the digital era, both developed and developing countries struggle to reach the goal of covering the digital gap between urban and rural communities.

The COVID-19 outbreak has impacted students' life in many ways such as level, grade, course of study, and programs (Daniel, 2020). This study has identified that students choose Internet connection as a major challenge because most of them are studying at home and the challenge is related to the Internet coverage at their location. According to (Irawan, Dwisona, & Lestari, 2020), one of the contributing elements to students' stress levels is the ODL, which demands them to use online media that they have just practiced and must be quickly understood.

V. CONCLUSION

This study has discussed the major challenges of ODL faced by non-law students. The significance of this study is that it contributes to a better understanding of the experiences of students who have taken ODL for four semesters, which is almost two years. Based on the findings, it was observed that a stable Internet connection is essential for ODL mode delivery. Furthermore, the Internet connection must be improved because every activity, including teaching and learning, is conducted online. Poor connection will result in demotivation and unpleasant feeling among both lecturers and learners. Therefore, the government must prioritize the stability of Internet connectivity for education purposes, whether in rural or urban areas, because education gives people hope, confidence, and dignity.

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