



# ESL Lecturers' Adaptation to the New-Norm of Online Teaching in Malaysia

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**Abstract:** Since March 2020 in Malaysia, tertiary educational sectors have been forced to shift to online classrooms under the Movement Control Order (MCO). The abrupt change to online learning has affected educators' style of teaching and in navigating themselves for online classrooms. This study aimed to investigate ESL lecturers' adaptation to online teaching and learning during the outbreak of COVID-19 in Malaysia. This paper adopted a case-study approach with four lecturers were interviewed. The findings of this study indicate that lecturers use online platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom. Additional applications such as Kahoot, Quizizz and Padlets are also used to reinforce students' English skills. Additionally, issues on the effectiveness of online learning such as Internet connectivity, the paradigm shift from traditional to online classrooms are highlighted by the participants. The findings also highlighted other factors, such as understanding motivational strategies, language learner's needs, and Sociocultural factors. This paper provides ramifications of online learning such as incentive, laptop rental, and mastering the applications of technology in education.

**Keywords:** online teaching, educational technology, English as a second language

## 1. Introduction

COVID-19 has affected globally where universities worldwide are forced to shift from conventional teaching to online teaching (Selvanathan et al., 2020). In relation to this, Pietro et al. (2020) argue that the closure of physical schools and the implementation of distance learning may entail four major consequences for students' learning such as they could potentially spend less time in learning, and learning through online mode could potentially make them feel stressed. Significantly, online learning has subsequently changed the way how students communicate and exchange ideas between them and educators. In addition to that, some students may showcase less enthusiasm in the classroom as they lack learning motivation in the online learning mode (Pietro et al., 2020).

COVID-19 has also affected Malaysia towards its educational sector. Selvanathan et al. (2020) conducted research by exploring the students' perspective on the educators' readiness toward teaching in the new normal. From the results, the students showed a high dissatisfaction with the fact that they cannot interrupt the lecturers during the teaching. This suggests that there are barriers to the interaction between lecturers and students throughout online teaching. (Selvanathan et al., 2020). On top of that, students also express their dissatisfaction with the group activity conducted throughout the pandemic. Some Malaysians cast doubt on the effectiveness of teaching mode using virtually due to their insufficient preparation to adopt online learning as the new method of learning throughout the pandemic. (Selvanathan et al., 2020). For the instruction section, the result exhibited that the students showed high dissatisfaction with their performances during COVID-19. Their findings reveal that the students prefer to take the courses in conventional learning mode rather than online learning. Besides,

proper technology is a requirement to improve internet access, allowing the students to freely access the internet for their classes as well as seeking information about their study materials. In addition, some universities provide limited e-library services for downloadable resources. (Selvanathan et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the education system as studies are now done in the virtual realm. The abrupt change from conventional to virtual classroom has impacted both lecturers and students in navigating themselves in the online classrooms. Therefore, it is imperative to identify the impact of COVID-19 towards education, as well as exploring the educators' point of view who are expected to prepare materials for their students and engage with them in online learning mode well. Accordingly, the current research aims to investigate the following research objective:

- a. To investigate ESL lecturers' adaptation to online teaching and learning during the outbreak of COVID-19.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Teaching and technology**

Wajszczyk (2014) emphasizes that the use of ICT has long been used in education. However, it is still not properly introduced to both students and educators and there is still a lot of research left to be explored and there are still many questions that can be raised. Raja and Nagasubramani (2018) describe the use of technology in education has allowed students to be drawn to visuals as long as educators know how to present them in an attractive manner. Also, the advancement of technology has enabled students to enroll for online degree programmes at universities. It is a concept that will continue to grow in the future with the widespread accessibility to the internet. Selvanathan et al. (2020) describe in detail synchronous and asynchronous learning. Through technology such as virtual meetings or chatrooms, synchronous online learning allows lecturers and students to communicate directly during class. While asynchronous online learning allows lecturers and students to communicate before and after the online class via thread discussion and emails. With regards to the online e-learning approach, it can be just as effective as traditional face-to-face classroom learning (NurHaiza & NurNaddia, 2020). The use of online classroom implementation can enhance student-centered learning while also assisting in the formation of a shared learning community. Student-centered e-learning allows students to fully participate in the learning process and track their progress.

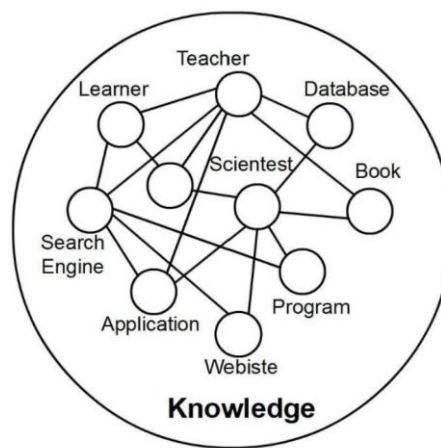
### **2.2 Lecturers' skills in using technology in Malaysia**

Malaysian lecturers also have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as traditional classes have been abruptly shifted to online classrooms, leaving many educators struggling at the beginning of the paradigm change. There is limited literature that explores Malaysian lecturers' adaptation to technology in teaching, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Siddra and Norizan (2020), their research reveal that the ESL lecturers in their study exhibited good fundamental digital abilities in using presenting tools without much assistance. Nonetheless, the lecturers also had struggled to resolve technical issues that arose through the usage of technology in their classroom. By extension, this suggests that generally Malaysian ESL lecturers are doing well at adapting to using technology in teaching procedures. However, the ESL educators require ongoing support from their particular academic institutions in order to fully integrate digital technologies into their teaching. Lecturers must continue to expand their ICT skills, particularly in order to be able to resolve small technological concerns (Siddra & Norizan, 2020). In addition to that, this is also because technology keeps on changing and it is essential for them to keep-up-to-date with the latest teaching approach. By

all means, teachers and institutions must be well-equipped with appropriate expertise and skills to implement online classroom teaching effectively (Yassin & Razak, 2018; Lee et al., 2021; NurHaiza & NurNaddia, 2020).

### 2.3 Theoretical background

People can now learn and exchange knowledge in a manner which were not conceivable before the digital world, such as throughout the Internet as well as among themselves. Siemens (2004) defines Connectivism as a theory based on the idea that information is a network which is always being gathered and updated. It stresses on how internet technologies (wikis, web browsers, online forums etc.) have aided in the creation of new learning experiences. Abik et al. (2012) suggest that this theory (Connectivism) should be utilised whenever feasible as a result of the adoption of new kinds of online, remote learning and e-learning. Learners are freed from the cognitive processes of obtaining knowledge through the study or instruction when they use connectivism (Abik et al., 2012). AlDahdouh et al. (2015) asserts that Connectivism advocates by providing the learners with unpredictable and real-life problems, rather than equipping the learners with fully prepared problems as shown in Figure 1.



*Figure 1*

Adapted from AlDahdouh et al. (2015, p. 16)

Connectivism enables the learners with the possibility to respond to unexpected problems. (AlDahdouh, 2015). The metaphor of a network with nodes and links is important to connectivism. A node is anything that may be connected to another node in this metaphor (AlDahdouh, 2015). In the figure 1 above, the nodes shown links to other nodes by a bridge. For instance, the use of 'Webiste' [sic] is linked to 'Search Engine' and 'Teacher' plays a fundamental role in introducing these domains of knowledge to the students. Essentially, each of these nodes are interconnected. Therefore, this suggests that for a student who has a foundation of knowledge in using online platforms as an example, will be able to form a bridge that links the gap to another knowledge acquired. Instead of being a bridge node to this network, the teacher will act as a facilitator to establish themselves in the network, to be connected to a new node. Essentially this is the crucial role of a teacher as a language educator.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Design

This paper adopts a case study approach with four lecturers who were interviewed. A case study research is an approach and experimental investigation that examines phenomena in its natural setting. In general, a case study is used to develop an understanding of a person, a process or a group. For instance, the primary characteristic of a case study is to explore and analyse a particular phenomenon (Ishak & Bakar, 2014). Therefore, this makes the case study approach suitable in order to explore how the lecturers adapt themselves in teaching in the realm of new norms.

#### 3.2 Data collection

As this research explores through a qualitative method, an online interview was conducted with four respondents who are university lecturers. Adhabi and Anozie (2017) state that an interview is a sort of consultation that aims to understand more about a topic from the perspective of the person being interviewed. The data of the interviews will be analysed thematically. Thematic analysis is used to examine all aspects of participants' interviews in order to create a comprehensive picture of a shared experience (Guest et al., 2012).

#### 3.3 Sampling Method

The sampling for this case study used the purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling (or known as judgemental sampling) is a type of sampling approach in which the researchers select participants to take part in the study based on their own judgement. It's a non-random strategy that doesn't require any underlying ideas or a predetermined quantity of participants (Etikan et al., 2015). Ishak and Bakar (2014) suggest that there are three reasons why purposive sampling is suitable for case study *“when a researcher wants to select unique cases that are especially informative, when a researcher would like to select members of a difficult-to-reach, specialized population, and when a researcher wants to identify particular types of cases for in-depth investigation”* (p. 32). There are four lecturers who have more than ten years of working experience who were involved in this study. Table 1 below shows the background information of participants.

Table 1. Participants' background information

Interviewees	Nationality	Years of experience in teaching English	Qualifications
Interviewee A	Malaysian	10 years	Bachelor's Degree in Applied Language Studies English for Professional Communication (Major in Applied Language Studies)
Interviewee B	Malaysian	11 years	Foundation in TESL, Bachelor in Education (TESL) & Master's in English Studies
Interviewee C	Malaysian	10 years	Bachelor in Education (TESL)
Interviewee D	Australian	17 years	PhD in Applied Linguistics, B.A. in Language & Intercultural Communication, Cambridge CELTA, DELF Diplôme d'Études En Langue Française

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Supporting educational learning apps

What we find interesting are the challenges as well as the lecturer's adaptations in using technology in teaching English to tertiary students. First of all, all of the respondents stated that the teaching platforms were conducted either through Zoom or Google Meet. Supporting educational learning apps include Quizizz, Kahoot and Padlets. For example, Tran et al. (2019) asserted that the use of Padlet makes it easier for pupils to be inspired and motivated, which improves the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Furthermore, the use of Quizizz is also valuable in relation to students' assessment and engagement (Tran et al., 2019). Besides that, Hodson (2017) claims that when Kahoot is implemented in the class, student interaction usually increases dramatically thus this facilitates the learning process (cited in Tran et al., 2019).

### 4.2 Importance of understanding second language learners' needs

Each interviewee points out the importance of understanding the motivational needs of English language learners, as well as identifying suitable approaches to teaching them. Interviewee 4 points out:

Interviewee 4: "As a language learner myself I think it's important as a language teacher to imagine yourself in the learner's shoes. Language learning is not a linear process...."

The excerpt above suggests that learning a language is a lengthy process and lecturers should avoid the monolingual mindset by assuming that learning a second language is simply like acquiring a native language. Each interview recalls that they had been supportive towards their students and this is related to the 'affective filter' theory. According to Stephen Krashen (1985), the 'affective filter' is a theoretical construct in second language acquisition that attempts to explain the emotional variables associated with the success or failure of acquiring a second language. The affective filter is an invisible psychological filter that can either facilitate or hinder language production in a second language. When the affective filter is low, this is the right moment when students feel comfortable; thus, they could potentially engage with their peers and teachers in using English.

### 4.3 Internet connectivity issues

Based on the observations of the interviews conducted, the researchers have realised that each lecturer does encounter difficulties when it comes to teaching. The internet connectivity problem was faced by Interviewees 1, 2 and 3, except for Interviewee 4 (did not mention anything about having issues with the Internet).

Interviewee 1: "I have a lot of students whose house areas do not have a good internet connection and this is driving me guilty. I can issue them warning letters for not attending my online classes but is that their fault?"

The excerpt above suggests that the lecturer is aware of her students' attendance issue and she could have issued a warning letter to her students, but she chose not to because the issue was about internet connectivity which is out of her control. Such issues happen to both parties who rely on the Internet. Similarly, in Interviewee 2:

Interviewee 2: “Poor internet connection. It is the worst. Especially when it is the time for a Google meeting. When the problem occurs, I need to use other methods such as using mobile data to conduct the lesson.”

The excerpt above shows that this lecturer also faced the same problem, where she had trouble with her unstable internet connection, especially when she wanted to conduct her online class by using Google Meet. She also stated that she had to use her phone data to ensure the teaching process goes smoothly.

#### **4.4 Lecturers adaptation to technology in teaching**

Each interviewee highlights the difficulties of using online teaching platforms when they use online meeting platforms such as Google Meet or Zoom. Here, lecturers describe their experiences of learning on how to teach using these platforms prior to conducting the online classes to students. The lecturers also pointed out that most challenges occur at the beginning of the paradigm shift from traditional to online classrooms. Interviewee 3, in particular, mentioned the awkwardness of hosting an online meeting by saying:

Interviewee 3: “I was kicked out of my own google meet. I opened a different tab to share my screen that showed how to look for the content standard and learning standard in the primary school scheme of work. While I was showing them and explaining it, I got a WhatsApp message from one of the students saying that Miss, had the class ended? Because I was no longer hosting the google meet.”

Furthermore, Interviewee 1 shared her story where she has knowledge sharing sessions among her colleagues and they are conducted either among them or outside trainers. For example, they learn Online Learning, educational gamifications like Kahoot and Quizizz, Padlet, Google for Education Applications, Screencast O'Matic and so on. Additionally, Interviewee 3 mentions that she is now much more familiar with tools such as Google meet, Google classroom, Kahoot and Padlet.

Besides that, Interviewee 2 mentions that she has adapted to ODL very fast (Online Distance Learning). Opara (2020) suggests that online distance learning has evolved into a multifaceted instrument for teaching and learning. What she highlights is that she needs an excellent internet connection in order to teach successfully. She also encouraged her students to use ‘Padlets’ when students do their assessments. Meanwhile, Interviewee 4 mentioned that it was a big adjustment for students and teachers when everybody had to switch to Zoom. She has had funny moments when she made mistakes in using Zoom at the beginning, and now she has improved significantly and feels much more confident in using online teaching technologies.

### **5. Discussion**

One of the ramifications of COVID-19 in the Malaysian context is the availability of the internet, particularly in rural areas. Sufian et al. (2020) describe that the internet is a crucial source of access during the pandemic, and it must come with high-speed data access to cater the students and lecturers need to share various types of education strategies such as watching educational videos. In terms of internet connectivity issues, the Malaysian Government offers an initiative for tertiary education students to access the internet for learning purposes. According to the New Straits Times (2020) “The government has announced a free 1GB data per day initiative for all to be used each day”. Despite the Malaysian government offering this initiative, there is, however, an issue of internet coverage particularly in the rural areas in Malaysia. Reportedly, there are still some students who do not have access to the internet when they need to attend online classrooms as some areas in Malaysia have little

or no internet coverage at all (Mia Emily & Emma Marini, 2020). A few months ago before this research, there was a case where a student in Sabah had to climb up a tree in her village in order to sit for her exam. It went viral and the Ministry of Education (MoE) then has avowed to take action to alleviate such issues.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, smartphones are among the learning tools however, due to financial constraints, many students, particularly pupils from low-income households (B40) are unable to obtain them (Lee et al., 2021; Alfira et al., 2020). This suggests that not everyone can afford technological devices, especially families with financial and geographical constraints (Gomes, 2020; Lee et al., 2021). One possible avenue to avoid students from being unable to attend online classes for not having a laptop is by offering a ‘Smart Rental’ option to alleviate their problems. ‘Smart Rental’ is a computer and laptop leasing service that allows anyone to lease a laptop with back-end support for the duration of their contract (Gomes, 2020). The focus is on offering students access to education via laptop or computer and not for making a profit. The suggestion is in tandem with Lee et al. (2021) as they postulate that possessing technological devices are crucial in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic as students are confined to online learning in their home.

Moreover, educators must have proper training during the COVID-19 pandemic. To make it easier to provide knowledge to students, educators must equip themselves with varied expertise on mastery of new digital technologies and master knowledge connected to online learning and teaching (Lee et al., 2021). Interviewee 1’s idea that her colleagues would share interesting ideas on teaching using online platforms on a weekly basis is brilliant for educators to go along with. This can be interpreted as the lecturer showcasing their ability to catch up with the current teaching approaches. Educators should always be up-to-date with the latest teaching approaches where their readiness will definitely aid in the successful delivery of lessons in the classroom. This is supported by Fernando et al. (2020)’s discussion who suggest that teachers and students should be provided with any training or workshop, in order to increase their skills in technology and online learning pedagogy.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the global pandemic spread of COVID-19 not only forced educators to relocate from face-to-face classes to online classes, but it has also subsequently made their work more challenging as they had to adapt to new habits and ways of working in the new normal. In short, this paper has identified skills developed and adapted based on the new normal teaching by the lecturers. Findings reveal that lecturers choose Google Meet and Zoom platforms for online classes. Additional applications such as Kahoot, Kuizziz and Padlets are also used to reinforce students’ English skills. Challenges include internet connectivity for Interviewee 1, 2 and 3 who are Malaysian lecturers. Moreover, the lecturers’ adaptation to technology in teaching and motivational strategies applied by them were also discussed. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that lecturers should apply understanding motivational strategies by understanding language learner’s needs and sociocultural factors, especially by offering incentives such as laptop rental and mastering the applications of technology in education.

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