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TECHNOSTRESS IN ENGAGING OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING: EXPLORING MALAYSIAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LECTURERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES

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Abstract:

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has caused a sudden change in the educational landscape globally and shifted traditional face-to-face classes to open distance learning mode. Due to this transition, it is progressively crucial and of great importance to understand the technostress faced by English language lecturers in adopting open distance learning practices. This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of eleven English language lecturers from three universities in the southern region of Malaysia regarding the technostress faced in open distance learning practice during the pandemic through the lens of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge. Fascinatingly, despite the emergency shift to open distance learning, the results have shown that the participants are keen and receptive to the open distance learning deployment. Moreover, due to their Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge competency, the participants agreed that the technostress experienced is considered manageable and did not affect their work performance. This study's results are hoped to offer insights into understanding the unprecedented phenomenon to ensure positive impacts in tertiary education.

Keywords:

Covid-19, English, Phenomenological, Open Distance Learning, Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge, Technostress

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic outbreak has presented unprecedented trials to the world by stifling people's routines and negatively affecting the global economy. The Covid-19 pandemic has also caused great challenges to educational practices globally by leaving many educators with no options but to quickly embrace and adopt ODL as the only available way to continue teaching. After the Malaysian government imposed the Movement Control Order (MCO) law on March 18, 2020, to curb the outbreak (Bunyan, 2020), all face-to-face and physical classes were suspended in all educational institutions and shifted to online teaching and learning activities. UNESCO (2020) reported that the pandemic has adversely affected more than half education population worldwide through the technological transition. Covid-19 has driven the whole world into unprecedented ODL practices dramatically. The shift from face-to-face to a heavily relied-on technology was the only viable option to ensure the continuity of education during the implementation of the MCO. Hence, the educators had no choice but to abruptly equip themselves to adapt and adopt technology integration to conduct online classes through ODL. The commonsensical ideas of fun and engaging English lessons generally had to also shift with the change. The day's main course is no longer concerned with language teaching beliefs and skills but also comprises technology integration in teaching practices and ensuring dynamic lecturer-student relationships via online platforms (Martins et al., 2019).

Effective ODL implementation is of utmost importance to ensure the accomplishment of educational goals in tertiary settings. However, a key issue addressed in this study is to gain a deeper understanding of ODL implementation on the part of the lecturers, particularly on their lived experiences in executing the tasks. Even though past studies have revealed that students perform better academically through online learning compared to traditional settings (Shehzadi et al., 2020), the situation cannot simply be said to be the same for lecturers. Farid et al. (2015) highlighted that the digital proficiencies among lecturers are found to be insufficient and more so in lesson planning for online teaching. Furthermore, Adnan and Anwar (2020) argued that even though a number of lecturers are considered digitally literate and able to carry out online classes, they are concomitantly unsuccessful in delivering online content effectively. This surely raises the need to understand lecturers' capabilities to maintain effective teaching in the ODL setting.

The immediate implementation of ODL posed numerous challenges, including a lack of exposure to online technologies, inadequate facilities, insufficient resources, and limited knowledge to utilise suitable education technologies. Lynch et al. (2017) highlighted that this situation might affect the teaching process and negatively influences students' performance. The existing literature addressing online teaching and learning has covered various dimensions, including pedagogy, andragogy, faculty, ethics, technology, support planning, assessment, readiness, management, and institution (Torun, 2020). Xu et al. (2021) highlighted that this situation significantly determines the learners' performance. Furthermore, lecturers should obtain knowledge of many disciplines within the scope of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) as a vital component to ensure the accomplishment of educational and institutional goals in a tertiary setting. This includes learning the current instructional technology model and identifying a suitable pedagogical approach (Beeson et al., 2014). Martins et al. (2019) noted that this phenomenon had become a significant factor in meeting learners' needs. Furthermore, it presented challenges to English language lecturers who had not previously or lacked experience integrating technology into their teaching practices, as referred to in this study as technostress.

The new contribution of knowledge in understanding the phenomenon of ODL in English teaching at the tertiary level from the participants' lived experiences would be captivating and enlightening for measures to be taken for improvement. Thus, this study aims to explore the participants' lived experiences of technostress faced in the implementation of ODL. The reality of what causes technostress cannot be kept personal but should be relatively transferable to be understood by others by sharing the compound, personal and professional acumens.

Literature Review

The shift from physical classes to ODL mode primarily concerns the teaching practices to ensure sustainable student engagement in the lessons. This situation is embedded in the course discipline and students' traits with diverse approaches and resources. Careful considerations must be placed as what is seamlessly achieved in physical classes might not be similar in ODL. A commonsensical perspective would clearly agree that the transition is not without challenges, particularly on the executor's part. It requires more than just pedagogical knowledge to disseminate the content of the courses. In ODL, lecturers must be inept at the available technologies that may have been unusual in their practice before the shift (Martins et al., 2019). Rapanta et al. (2021) remarked that this transition is not an enjoyable smooth transition, which can be substantiated by the literature, which is relatively recognized as unwanted, disruptive and unwelcome to many. Nevertheless, by gaining insights into the participants' lived experiences, this study enlightened the understanding of technostress and assisted in planning suitable mechanisms to cope with it.

Technostress and TPACK

Technostress is labeled a disease of the modern era that has significantly increased its impact on educators during the pandemic. The psychological load can occur at various levels in different aspects because each course with instructional technology varies from one another. Technostress can occur at different situations or levels because the link of each course with instructional technology is different. Voogt et al. (2015) stated that technology competency incorporates all critical components, including technological, pedagogical, content knowledge, as well as skills and attitudes. In this study, language teaching and learning have a high expectation of the lecturers in terms of technological integration due to the struggle to ensure an exciting and motivational learning process similar to physical classes (Daniela et al., 2018). Studies addressing have highlighted that technostress is generally sourced from two major factors; environmental and personal factors.

The existing literature has documented environmental factors such as insufficient technical support, lack of resources, and excessive demand created technostress among educators (e.g., Dong et al., 2020; Panisoara et al., 2020). Dong et al. (2020) emphasized that critical environmental factors such as infrastructure, technical assistance, administrative, and collegial support contribute to determining the technostress level. On the other hand, personal factors such as low motivation, low technical ability, lack of technological competencies, negative beliefs and resistance are essential reasons contributing to technostress. In a study conducted at a university in Pakistan, Zeeshan et al. (2020) remarked that personal reasons such as fear and anxiety about using technology are among the significant factors discovered to contribute to technostress among faculty members. Joo et al. (2016) remarked that there is a relationship between teaching competency using technology, famously known as Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK); and technostress. TPACK model is a significant framework that introduces the link between three basic components of knowledge: technology,

pedagogy and content (Koehler & Mishra, 2008). The framework reiterates that effective educators possess content knowledge, sufficient pedagogical skill and technological ability to integrate into their teaching practices. TPACK is also considered a framework to measure and enhance knowledge to integrate technology into teaching and learning processes, which adds relation and fundamental teaching knowledge complexity (Rahmadi, 2021). Mishra and Koehler (2008) brought about the TPACK constructs in education pertaining to the central focus on pedagogy, content and technology for effective teaching practices, as seen in figure 1.
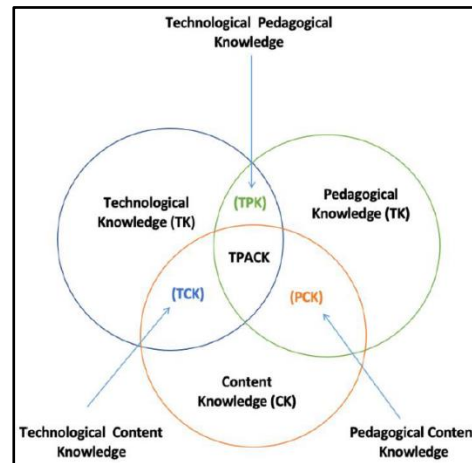
Figure 1: The Relationship Among Constructs in the TPACK Model

TPACK is a model of technology integration that emphasises the need to combine pedagogical knowledge (PK), content knowledge (CK), and technological knowledge (TK) and reflect them in the teaching and learning process. The model demonstrates how technology can be effectively integrated into educational processes by recognising the complex relationship between pedagogy, content and technology components. Through TPACK, lecturers could understand the use of technologies to deliver content effectively in accomplishing different pedagogical objectives. Rahmadi (2021) highlighted that studies addressing general technology integration had been conducted in physical learning settings. However, more studies are needed to gain insight into this area in ODL mode.

All in all, the literature has provided empirical findings that environmental and personal factors are the major reasons for technostress among educators and described its relationship with TPACK. Dong et al. (2020) suggested that a good TPACK level assists in dealing with technostress. Therefore, exploring English language lecturers' technostress through their lived experiences using the lens of TPACK viewpoints would be beneficial to better understand the phenomenon addressed in this study and contributes to the current literature.

Methodology

Research Participants
The present study employed a qualitative phenomenological study to delve into the lived experiences of eleven English language lecturers in implementing ODL during the pandemic. Purposive sampling was used to recruit potential participants to elicit rich data regarding the

phenomenon under study. Potential participants for this study were solicited during formal and informal meetings, courses and informal discussions. The data collection was conducted from January until May 2021, which was during the enforcement of the Movement Control Order (MCO) during the Covid-19 pandemic. The fact that all participants in this study were willing to participate has convinced the researchers that the gathered data would be very informative and descriptive as the purpose of the phenomenological approach is to gain understanding from participants' lived experiences and perceptions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). All participants met the sampling criteria: they were certified English lecturers and permanent faculty members. The recruitment of participants ended when the data gathered reached a saturation level in which the data could provide sufficient information to answer the research question and replicate the study, and no new data emerged (Patton, 2002). Therefore, gaining new information and further coding was no longer feasible.

Data Collection And Analysis
Participants' viewpoints, meaningful opinions, and responses that provide rich and detailed answers were the primary search in this study. Semi-structured interviews were employed to achieve this objective by asking the participants to describe their experiences in detail pertaining to the technostress in ODL practices. Semi-structured interviews allow a collection of rich and personalised information and personal perspectives on the outward behaviours of participants (Patton, 2002). An interview protocol consisting of self-developed open-ended questions was referred to in interview sessions that lasted between 40 to 65 minutes. Field notes were also recorded to record non-verbal communication and memos on interpreting the responses. The recordings were then transcribed and labeled with pseudonyms (L1, L2, L3 etc.) and were instantly examined to ensure accurate interpretation. The researchers further contacted any unclear responses to procure elucidations to avoid assumptions and misinterpretation. The use of semi-structured interviews enabled the researchers to reach clarity and understand participants' perspectives more deeply. Transcriptions and field notes were immediately reviewed after interview sessions to ensure accurate analysis.

This study employed thematic analysis to analyse the gathered data as it fits the theoretical orientation of this study as the data gathered represents the reality of participants' lived experiences. This is due to the realist thematic analysis characteristic, which illustrates participants' experiences, the meaning of the experiences, and the effects of the social interactions (Willig, 1999). Boyatzis (1998) pointed out that thematic analysis is an effective method to identify, analyse and report emergent themes as it focuses on seeking unique patterns or themes in the data. In this study, inductive thematic analysis is utilised in which the identified themes have close relationships to the data itself (Patton, 1990) where the data coding process expanded according to the research questions. The use of inductive thematic analysis also enabled researchers to analyse the data in detail without giving attention to results from previous studies. To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, Cohen's Kappa coefficient statistic was used for inter-rater reliability measurement.

Results and Discussion

English Language Lecturers' Technostress In Engaging ODL: Love And Hate Collision
All the participants in this study have served more than five years teaching various English language courses in their respective universities. Most of them acknowledged that the emergency ODL is inevitable to curb the spread of Covid19; thus, accepting the transition was

also part and parcel of ensuring the greater good for everyone. L8 stated that *"this unprecedented situation comes with unprecedented actions too"* to emphasise the needs of the transition. L10 was also in agreement as she believed that *"lives over everything else"* must be considered when any decision is made during the pandemic. Nevertheless, despite that all participants accepted that the shift is urgently necessary, fascinatingly, they seemed to be meddling with 'love and hate' conflicts when describing their experiences in teaching through ODL mode. Four themes emerged from the description of their lived experiences, namely ODL environmental readiness, personal preferences, technical barriers and personal engagements.

The participants noted that in terms of environmental readiness for ODL, they are open and willing to adopt ODL as long as the teaching and learning can be continued. L1 remarked that the postponement of education comes at a greater cost, and it is something that could not be tolerated. L7, who has been teaching for more than 15 years, pointed out that she believed the faculty members would have minimal issues integrating technology into their practices as they have been practicing blended learning for quite some time. She also believes that most of her colleagues are *"tech-savvy"* and would not face many problems with it. Furthermore, L2, L3, L4, L8 and L11 mentioned that their administration's continuous support in providing courses and webinars related to ODL implementation has tremendously aided lecturers in better understanding the technology fundamentals to enhance the teaching and learning delivery. They professed that those courses helped them to select, combine, strategise and utilise suitable technology in their teaching delivery. In addition, the participants believe that the support from the administration is sufficient, systematic, and accessible, particularly at the beginning of ODL. The lecturers continuously gave professional development courses and webinars, thus strengthening their TPACK. L9 explained that through the ODL courses, she has learned new applications and software, giving her more options to select and combine suitable technology for her lectures. She also believed that university lecturers must learn the need to keep abreast with new technologies and always be ready to accommodate technologies into their instructions. Concerning that, an impressive remark by L1 who is in her mid-50's pointed out that age should not be a factor for university lecturers to be up to date, given the consideration that administrative support is sufficient in providing training and exposure to technological integration in teaching practices. L10 expressed that it is a *"once-a-lifetime opportunity"* to work at home and explore new means of teaching other than traditional face-to-face classes. She shared her experience in the first couple of months where she *"played around and learned new technical skills"* to increase her technology knowledge. This shows that from the TPACK viewpoint, the participants in this study are showing a progressing level of readiness for ODL.

Furthermore, from a personal perspective, all participants agreed that ODL is the only solution to ensure continuity of education during the pandemic. L3 highlighted that her personal preference to continue teaching via ODL mode is due to the fact that she is worry-free and abides by the law imposed. She felt safe and sound to be working from home and monitoring her family at the same time. In addition to that, L8 jokingly said that working from home has lessened her financial commitment as she did not spend much commuting from home to campus. She added that it is also a golden chance for her to spend more time with her children and focus on their education. Many participants were all in agreement that after spending some time in ODL mode, they started to feel comfortable and managed to teach students without much problem. The idea of not to be rushing early in the morning to attend classes after managing their children is preferred by most participants in the study. When asked about their motivation to teach in ODL mode, the participants emphasised that they did not find teaching

online as a burden but rather an alternative measure. L1 explained that most university lecturers could be considered competent in technology since the introduction of blended learning; thus, taking a step further is not taxing, especially noting that help is always available for technical support from the university administration. This signifies that the participants' TPACK is sufficient to assist their delivery via ODL.

When asked to describe the source of their technostress specifically, most participants in the study mentioned that technical barrier is the main contributing factor. Seven participants mentioned that the poor quality of the internet connection often hinders the teaching and learning process. For instance, L9 pointed out that *"the internet connection is very… extremely slow. Sometimes it feels like I am living in the late 90s. When I try to access Google Classroom, Safari would say, 'internet connection not available. Other times, I keep getting disconnected"*. In agreement with that, L4 stated that the *"limited internet connection and delay in getting responses"* contributed to her stress, particularly when she tried to interact with her students. Other participants also mentioned that more than half of their students faced difficulties switching on their cameras due to poor internet connection. This contributed to their stress, especially when assessing presentations and group discussions. Another identified source of technostress from the analysis is technical confusion. L11 explained that during the first few weeks of ODL implementation, she had difficulties understanding and selecting suitable platforms, applications, and software to be used as there were too many introduced within a short period. Even though she acknowledged that the initiatives and prompt actions by the university administration is deeply appreciated, she felt overwhelmed and experienced panic attacks thinking that there were too many to *"digest at the same time".* Moreover, L4, L6, L7 and L10 mentioned that the technical equipment they have was not up to date, and this also contributed to their technostress as getting new devices was not an option during the pandemic. However, they managed to carry out the tasks by using multiple devices at the same time. This shows that they have sufficient TK to manoeuvre and be flexible in their teaching practices via ODL.

On the other hand, the participants of this study elucidated that personal engagement also contributed to their technostress. For example, L2 expressed that she had to juggle her timetable and share her laptop with her children, who also had to learn from home. Other participants, such as L3, L5 and L8 found that ODL is taxing and demanding as they had to convert all their teaching materials and preparations to be carried out online. They complained that the amount of time spent was too stressful and affected their physiology to sit down for a very long time to complete the tasks. The data also depicted that the participants did not favour the excessive workload in preparing language lessons online and felt *"limited"* and *"stiff"* to conduct language activities in ODL. In addition, assessing students' tests and assignments was also not preferred by the participants as they questioned *"the reliability and trustworthiness"* of students' work. This stress-producing situation often tends to influence their judgment and anxiety. However, the participants highlighted that the situation is not really a major concern as they have come out with measures to ensure the trustworthiness of students' work.

In conclusion, the participants in this study have described their lived experiences and recognised the factors contributing to their technostress in engaging ODL during the pandemic. The four themes that emerged from the data analysis; environmental readiness, personal preferences, technical barriers and personal engagements; have enlightened the understanding

of ODL implementation from the perspective of English language lecturers serving Malaysian public universities.

Conclusion

This study has analysed the lived experiences of English language lecturers serving in Malaysian universities pertaining to the technostress faced in engaging ODL during the pandemic using the lens of TPACK perspectives. Interestingly, despite an immediate compulsory ODL deployment, the results have shown that the English language lecturers are acquiescent and receptive to implementing ODL. Due to their TPACK competency, the participants agreed that the technostress experienced was manageable and did not really affect their teaching practices, and indirectly contributed to positive student performance. Furthermore, the participants have shown a great readiness toward ODL implementation with administrative support through a series of professional development courses and webinars, as well as good accessibility to technical support. The participants also demonstrated great motivation to take up the challenges of integrating technology into their teaching practices and felt comfortable teaching virtually. This implies that they showed no issues and were ready to be flexible in their teaching mode. Nevertheless, the implementation of ODL is not without zero hassle. However, the participants considered the issues as external factors beyond their control, such as poor internet connection quality and inadequate infrastructure. In addition, the participants of this study also acknowledged personal engagements as a contributing factor to the technostress. However, even though they admitted that the situation was inevitable due to the law imposed during the pandemic, it was still manageable and did not entirely affect their work performance.

Acknowledgment

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