ONLINE DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) AND STUDENTS' SELF-ESTEEM BASED ON DIFFERENT GENDER PERSPECTIVES

Siti Syamira Mohd Ramli[1], Wan Nurashikin Mahmood[2], Hamnah Che Hamzah[3]*, Hasnizawati Hashim[4], Norulhuda Tajuddin[5]

[1] Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Pahang, Malaysia
Email: sitsyamira@uitm.edu.my

[2] Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Pahang, Malaysia
Email: wnurashikin@uitm.edu.my

[3] Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Pahang, Malaysia
Email: hamnah@uitm.edu.my

[4] Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Pahang, Malaysia
Email: hasnizawati@uitm.edu.my

[5] Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Pahang, Malaysia
Email: alhudatajuddin583@uitm.edu.my

* Corresponding Author

Article Info:

Abstract:

Online Distance Learning (ODL) has been implemented in universities for over two years. Despite advancements in technology, ODL has proven to be challenging for students, which indirectly affects their self-esteem, regardless of gender. Thus, the study aims to investigate students' self-esteem and to examine any significant mean difference between gender and students' self-esteem. A survey was conducted on 378 students, and SPSS 26.0 was used to analyse the hypotheses of the study. It was found that students' self-esteem level during ODL is moderate. The findings also revealed no significant difference between gender and student perception on self-esteem. The findings are expected to benefit academicians, policymakers, and university management in enhancing ODL implementation and preparing them for future learning challenges.

Keywords:

Covid-19, Higher Learning Institution, Open Distance Learning, Self-Esteem, Students' Performance

Introduction

Online distance learning (ODL) in Malaysia has become a drastic teaching and learning practice implemented during the Coronavirus outbreak, which started in early 2020. Since, movement control order (MCO) execution, the ODL implementation became a top priority in Malaysia's higher academic institutions. However, distance education is a challenging concept for conventional education institutions to apply, due to a separation in terms of time and space between students and lecturers (Kimotho, 2018). For example, lecturers were forced to explore many online teaching platforms within a short period. They need to master several applications such as such as Google Classroom, iLearn, and Microsoft Team. As well as, social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Telegram, and Twitter, were also used as alternatives to conduct lectures and medium of communications.

Despite various teaching platforms utilized in conducting online classes, students are found to face a lot of obstacles to complete carry out their learning activities. For example, students in Indonesia reported facing difficulties to manage their tight class schedules, assignments, and practice sessions (Rohmani & Andriani 2021). ODL also limits the physical interaction between lecturers and students thus, likely to reduce learning efficiency. In addition, some students cannot access the internet due to limited coverage in certain areas while, some having poor learning environments (Mohamad et al., 2020). Students may experience psychological distress, low self-esteem, and motivation. Thus, this situation will negatively impact students learning process and consequently affect their academic performance.

Despite the importance of ODL, there remains a paucity of evidence on how it affects students' self-esteem after more than two years it has been implemented in Malaysia. It is interesting to find out the level of self-esteem among students due to longer period experiencing distance learning. Either currently students are get used to the ODL system which, likely to increase their confidence and motivation. Or students are still struggling with the computerized learning system thus affecting their self-esteem become low. In addition, past studies also highlight the different between male and female students regarding their level of self-esteem (e.g., Gao et al., 2022; Malik & Saida, 2013). Past studies have revealed that, male students demonstrate high level of self-esteem compared to female students (Arshad et al., 2015). ODL affecting the students' performance however due to gender differences such as male students are more likely to have higher independence level tend to have ability to handle stressful condition compared to female students. Based on the high-level of independence thus, male students are believed to feel confident and high self-worth. Hence, this paper seeks to address the research questions pertaining to self-esteem and gender differences during ODL. Therefore, the objectives of the study:

1. To investigate students' self-esteem during ODL.
2. To examine any significant mean difference between gender and students' self-esteem.

Literature Review

ODL and Students' Self-Esteem

Recently, ODL has become the primary method of teaching and learning regardless of education level. The advancement of technology and the challenging conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic have opened new opportunities for improving its implementation more

competitively. Even though there were difficulties in the early stages of ODL, all parties managed to implement it well. They must be prepared with availability of computer, technology, and internet efficacy in adapting to ODL. ODL has encourages students to self-regulated learning, which can result in independent and self-regulated learners. Many aspects of ODL readiness can determine students' ability to adapt to technology (i.e., e-learning platforms). Students' readiness for online learning has a favourable impact on their academic outcomes and on discussions in the classroom. Self-confidence, acceptance, and self-directed learning are crucial elements that influence students' performance (Khairuddin et al., 2020). ODL has been proven to be one of the best solutions as a teaching method during stressful times (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic) (Dhawan, 2020; Zaman & Nashmena, 2021). However, it is also good to acknowledge that it may not be successful in certain conditions. For example, there is a negative relationship between online education and students' satisfaction due to poor internet facilities (Zaman & Nashmena, 2021).

Previous studies have found that apart from demographic factors (gender, age, learning abilities, family background, and parent's education), psychological factors (perceived social support, self-esteem, and shyness) can also affect students' academic achievement (Safeer et al., 2021). It is important that schools may play significant role to encourage children's self-esteem as consequently will improve their academic achievement. As they have high self-esteem lead them more willing to keep trying even if they fail at first and less likely to let feelings of weakness and self-doubt stop them in their tracks. People with high self-esteem may have the confidence to confront with difficult situations and derive satisfaction from their development and achievement. Past studies have examined the relationship between self-esteem and students' academic performance (e.g., Rosli et al., 2012). It is argued that a positive relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement where high self-esteem is an essential component in predicting academic achievement in students (Rosli et al., 2019).

Numerous studies have discussed the issues of low self-esteem and its effects. For example, Akinleke (2012) tested anxiety and self-esteem effect on academic performance and discover that students with low anxiety had higher GPAs than high anxiety students. However, it was also found that young women's self-esteem levels are lower than men. Similarly, past studies also found there is a positive relationship between self-esteem and attitudes toward e-learning in general and online interaction with the instructor (Kurtz et al., 2009). Psychological well-being is highly essential in developing healthy and good-quality students. Prior research involving university students in Japan found that the relationship between self-esteem, social anxiety, and hopelessness are significant predictors of suicidal ideation. Data were collected from 322 university students (61.8% male) who visited the healthcare for psychiatrics consultation. Based on the findings of structural equation modelling, it was discovered that hopelessness partially mediates the effects of self-esteem and social anxiety on suicidal thoughts. Additionally, a sub-analysis revealed that hopelessness also partially mediates the relationship between self-esteem, social anxiety, and depression (Dat et al., 2021).

Students with high self-esteem are more likely to express positive attitudes toward online learning (e.g., Zheng et al., 2021). Findings show that enhancing self-esteem of an individual is one of the main strategies for improving internet altruistic behaviour. Online social support plays a mediating role between self-esteem and internet altruistic behavior. Based on the literature findings, it is suggested that self-esteem is ultimately an essential element of student achievement. It is believed that self-esteem may influence students' behaviour and academic

performance. Hence, this study attempts to investigate ODL and how it affects students' self-esteem.

Self-Esteem Based on Different Gender Perspectives

Gender differences have played a role in influencing one's behaviour. Previous relates studies have found an association between time and gender on online activities, internet addiction, self-esteem, and academic aspirations (Mo et al. 2020). The finding reveals, time spent on online activities had a positive association with internet addiction which in turn, had a negative association with self-esteem and academic aspiration. Interestingly, time spent on online activities had significant negative association with academic aspiration on female sample only. Meanwhile, the association between time spent on online activities and internet addiction, and between internet addiction and self-esteem were more evident among the male sample (Mo et al., 2020). Empirically, past studies have found that male students may display higher self-esteem than the opposite gender, female students (Gao et al., 2022; Malik & Saida, 2013). This is because male students are likely to have higher independent level than females thus, making them to feel more confident and worthy (Arshad et al., (2015).
 Based on this argument, it is posited that:

H1: There is a significant mean difference between gender and student perception on self-esteem.

Methodology

The data were gathered through online survey administered to students enrolled in the Faculty of Business and Management with full enrolment in ODL at UiTM, Pahang. Using a Google Form, with the link shared among the researcher's colleagues who teach students from semesters 1 to 5 in their classes' WhatsApp groups. The data collection process took about three weeks, and several reminders were sent to encourage more responses. A total of 379 responses were collected, but one response was excluded during the data cleaning process, resulting in 378 responses valid for data analysis.

The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part (Part A) is related to students' self-esteem, and the second part (Part B) is comprised of the students' demographic factors. A scale by Rosenberg (1965) consisting of 10 items was adopted. The respondents were asked to rate the items according to a 5-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree). In addition, two additional statements were also included, relating to the student's perception of their performance during their study at the university. The two statements are "I am confident that I can succeed at UiTM" and "I believe UiTM can groom me to become an outstanding person". All items were translated into *Bahasa Melayu* to suit the students' understanding.

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0 to calculate the frequency and mean score to answer the first study objective. Next, a t-test was conducted to analyze the differences between genders on self-esteem to answer the second study objective.

Research Findings

Table 1.0 shows the demographics of the respondents. A majority of the respondents are female (77%). The highest number of respondents are currently studying in their fourth semester (34.1%), followed by students in their second semester (25.7%). The number of respondents

who are in their third semester (14.3%) and fifth semester (13.5%) is quite balanced. The rest of the respondents consist of students in their first semester (10.3%) and sixth semester or higher (2.1%).

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Demographic		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	87	23.0
	Female	291	77.0
Semester	1	39	10.3
	2	97	25.7
	3	54	14.3
	4	129	34.1
	5	51	13.5
	6 and higher	8	2.1
Program	Diploma in Business	229	60.6
	Diploma in Banking	149	39.4
Targeted GPA	2.51 – 3.00	27	7.1
	3.01 – 3.50	162	42.9
	3.51 – 4.00	189	50.0

Most of the respondents are enrolled in the Diploma in Business program (60.6%), and the rest are enrolled in the Diploma in Banking program (39.4%). The respondents were also asked about their targeted grade point average (GPA). Half of them (50%) target a GPA between 3.51 to 4.00, while 42.9% target a GPA of 3.01 to 3.50. Only 7.1% of the respondents target a GPA of 2.51 to 3.00.

Table 2 indicates the mean score for the items on self-esteem. A total of 12 statements were analyzed. Statement 12 (I believe UiTM can groom me to become an outstanding person) exhibits the highest value with a mean score of 4.22. This is followed by Statement 11 (I am confident that I can succeed at UiTM), with a mean score of 4.10. Statement 7 (I always value myself) displayed the third highest mean score of 3.90, followed by statement 9 (I take a positive attitude toward myself), with a mean score of 3.88. Statement 1 (At times I think that I am fine) indicates a slightly lower mean score of 3.82. Statements 5, 10, 8, 3, and 2 display

almost similar values, with mean scores of 3.66, 3.64, 3.63, 3.60, and 3.58, respectively. Statement 4 exhibits the lowest mean score of 3.23.

Table 2: The Mean Score Value and Standard Deviation for Self-Esteem Statements

No	Self-esteem	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
SE 1	At times I think that I am fine.	378	3.82	.768
SE 2	I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	378	3.58	.831
SE 3	I am able to do things as well as most other people.	378	3.60	.819
SE 4	I feel that I have many things to be proud of.	378	3.23	.891
SE 5	I always feel that my life is very meaningful.	378	3.66	.914
SE 6	I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	378	3.56	.935
SE 7	I always value myself.	378	3.90	.936
SE 8	I tend to feel that I am a successful person.	378	3.63	.876
SE 9	I take a positive attitude toward myself.	378	3.88	.866
SE 10	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	378	3.64	.922
SE 11	I am confident that I can succeed at this university.	378	4.10	.752
SE 12	I believe this university can groom me to become an outstanding person.	378	4.22	.714

Next, the present study analyzes the difference between two groups of male and female respondents on their self-esteem. A t-test and Levene's test were employed for equality variance to determine any differences between the two groups for each self-esteem statement. Based on the result, no significant differences were found between male and female students for their scores in self-esteem. Thus, the hypothesis 1 was rejected. Table 3 shows the details of the analysis.

Table 3: Independent Sample T-Test for Self-Esteem

		Levene's test		T-test	
		F	Sig.	t	df
SE1		1.185	.277	.299	376
				.301	143.034
SE2		.182	.670	1.413	376
				1.401	139.584
SE3		1.080	.299	1.158	376
				1.179	145.436
SE4		.588	.444	1.337	376
				1.327	139.778
SE5		.021	.886	1.806	376
				1.757	135.824
SE6		.089	.766	.479	376
				.463	134.477
SE7		.389	.533	1.475	376

			1.477	141.641
SE8	.573	.450	2.351	376
			2.312	137.938
SE9	.029	.865	1.573	376
			1.518	134.298
SE10	1.277	.259	1.336	376
			1.330	140.445
SE11	.648	.421	-.084	376
			-.079	130.338
SE12	.541	.462	1.049	376
			1.103	153.308

Discussions

The spread of the COVID-19 virus has transformed the university learning environment from physical meetings to online distance learning. Therefore, the study intends to explore the effects of online distance learning and students' self-esteem based on different gender perspectives. The study found that most respondents possess high self-esteem, especially related to their educational institution, UiTM. Based on the analysis, the students believed that UiTM could shape them into becoming remarkable individuals. Higher-level education institutions are essential in helping students build their self-esteem. Thus, colleges and universities should strive to bolster students' self-esteem. It is believed that the learning process in educational institutions could develop high self-esteem among students. Involvement in class activities, how students deal with problems, participation in club and sports activities, and relationship with colleagues and lecturers are associated with student's academic performance (Safeer et al., 2021; Ratanasiripong et al., 2021). Furthermore, self-esteem is considered a crucial determinant of other achievements, such as interpersonal job compatibility and overall satisfaction.

Students also face many issues and difficulties during their ODL classes. They sometimes find online classes boring and unengaging compared to physical classes. They might not receive sufficient attention and interaction from the lecturer or facilitator. Students' self-esteem may not be as positive as it was prior to the pandemic when confronted with challenges in academic tasks, as they have difficulty adjusting to independent learning and experience confusion during online classes. As a result, online distance learning has a negative impact on students' confidence, performance, and self-esteem. Past researchers acknowledged self-esteem as "a person's general feeling of worth" (Zhang et al., 2022). However, the present study indicated that students feel unworthy and are not on equal footing with others. Students would feel insufficient, unacceptable, unworthy, unlovable, or incompetent when they possess low self-esteem. These convictions emerge, resulting in unfavourable, self-deprecating ideas that influence their behavior and life decisions, frequently lowering their self-esteem.

Studies have claimed that gender roles can influence students' self-esteem, where one gender (either male or female) would display higher levels of self-esteem than the opposite gender (Malik & Saida, 2013; Gao et al., 2022). A patriarchal society values males more than females. Males are given more privileges than females, which influences self-esteem. However, the present study found a different discovery where there is no significant difference between

gender perceptions on self-esteem. The result may be due to the extended ODL implementation for all students, which similarly affects their thinking and behavior. Although the results of the present study were in contrast with some previous studies, they contribute to the understanding of how ODL could affect students' self-esteem.

Conclusion And Recommendation

The importance of education for developing human capital is unanimously recognized. Digitalization, which makes educational resources more accessible, is crucial for lifelong learning. During the pandemic, the entire population was affected. People have to embrace online learning, and traditional education methods have been disrupted. In this context, the study addresses the issue of online distance learning and students' self-esteem. The results demonstrated that ODL does not achieve students' expectations. Thus, they lack confidence and feel inadequate. Furthermore, ODL possesses restrictions. Students, regardless of gender, need to overcome the drawbacks of ODL, such as having a conducive learning space, working in batches, constantly communicating with lecturers and classmates, and participating in classes as much as possible (Kimotho, 2018; Gao et al., 2022). The suggestions stated could help students who are learning online to have higher self-esteem and experience less stress or psychological problems. Apart from that, the study shows that the students are confident that a university can develop them into exceptional individuals and provide a platform for success. Universities should be able to support students in developing their self-esteem through effective online instruction, a friendly learning environment, and knowledgeable faculty (Safeer et al., 2021; Ratanasiripong et al., 2021). The study will be useful in assisting lecturers in addressing the challenges of students' self-esteem, particularly in higher education. It would also affect the timeliness and effectiveness of counselling and interventions in higher education institutions.

The study has several limitations. The percentage of students for each semester in the survey could be biased because most of the respondents are currently in their upper semester compared to first-semester students. As a recommendation, the study should include more freshmen to determine the precise results on the level of self-esteem of junior and senior students. This is due to the possibility that students' length of time in university may affect their confidence level (Dat et al., 2021). The study was also conducted only in one university in Malaysia. Hence, future studies could replicate this study in other universities, involving local and international students. Furthermore, the present study only focused on diploma students. It is suggested that future studies should involve undergraduate students at the bachelor's degree level to look at their self-esteem during online distance learning. Other than that, for future research, it is recommended to employ qualitative analysis methods, such as conducting follow-up interviews, to gain deeper insights into the issue of self-esteem ratings.

Acknowledgment

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