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UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON GOOD QUALITIES OF AN EDUCATOR AND ONLINE LEARNING

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Abstract:

Educators' competence and teaching quality have positive correlations with students' academic performance. Nonetheless, the ideal educators' personal and teaching qualities within the landscape of Malaysian tertiary education setting remains elusive. Effective characteristics of online teaching also warrant exploration given the future widespread use of online and distance learning (ODL). This study aimed to (1) determine university students' perceptions on good qualities of an educator and (2) explore ideal traits of an educator while implementing ODL during the COVID-19 pandemic. A cross-sectional study using pre-validated questionnaire was conducted virtually using Google form between May and August 2022 among students attending Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pulau Pinang. A total of 126 respondents completed the survey. Findings revealed unanimous agreement among students on educators needing to be credible, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, considerate, unbiased, and equipped with a systematic lesson plan. Overall, 64.3% of respondents (n = 81) were satisfied with the ODL implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. The most likely contributing cause to students' satisfaction was due to the flexibility of ODL. In contrast, poor internet connection and overwhelming assignments which compromised

students' well-being were the major contributing causes of dissatisfaction in ODL. Furthermore, most students valued the educators' interpersonal characteristics namely compassion and empathetic as well as approaches such as providing continuous motivation and moral support essential in encouraging their online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study had successfully revealed university students perceived good personal and teaching qualities of an educator. The findings also shed light on educators' ideal interpersonal characteristics that were deemed essential in helping students to cruise through the ebb and flow of virtual learning during a pandemic. Additionally, the study highlighted both positive and negative perspectives on ODL implementation, providing valuable insights for educators to enhance both physical and virtual learning experiences.

Introduction

Educators are important members of the society who transmit knowledge and pass on wisdom to others. Competent educators had shown to have four times the influence on students' performance compared to the least potent educators (Marzano & Marzano, 2003). As educators can have substantial impact on the students' performance, understanding the characteristics of an ideal educator perceived by students are essential. This will help us comprehend who the teachers of tomorrow are, what determines their behaviours and the characteristics that students perceived to be of important influence towards their academic performance.

The onset of Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has unprecedented disruption to education systems worldwide, affecting approximately 1.6 billion students in over 200 countries (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Physical distancing measures and lockdowns had forced academic activities to be performed remotely or virtually. Whilst a variety of teaching and learning methods were employed by educators around the world to catch up with the students' academic progress, yet many students struggled with online learning particularly those economically disadvantaged students as they cannot afford e-learning gadgets (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Furthermore, educators also reported to be technophobic and urged for appropriate training to match themselves with their pupils' needs during online learning (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). The best teaching and learning methods during the pandemic are yet to be determined. Furthermore, it is unclear if students perceived additional educator's attributes are required for ODL during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature Review

Educators' Ideal Characteristics and Qualities

Whilst educators are preservers and presenters of knowledge, their ideal characteristics may differ in different regions of the world due to a divergent of contextual learning environment, students' judgement, and personal thoughts towards the educators. In East-Asia, the figure of an educator should embody fundamental traits such as the ability to communicate, empathy, tolerance and flexible in educational process (Ilaltdinova et al., 2018). Specifically, sense of empathy is deemed as the top quality of Japanese educators. Similarly, being an empathetic educator is also the most essential characteristic in Ireland's educational system as the country policy emphasises learner's academic interests (Ilaltdinova et al., 2018). In contrast, face-to-

face interviews of 16 master students and 17 doctoral students from six different universities in Turkeye collectively reported that a lecturer should first master his/her subject to indicate the educator's proficiency (orakcı, 2020).

Students perceived good qualities of an educator may also vary according to study disciplines. For instance, an Australian study of 1495 health science undergraduate students revealed that ideal educator's characteristics included respectful, inspirational, supportive and good teaching skills. Besides, the health science students highly valued educators who are encouraging, appropriately challenging students' skills, resourceful and ensuring students' preparedness as helpful attributes contributing to their development (Perram et al., 2016). Another study in Singapore surveyed 917 year 1 to 5 medical students, reported that ideal medical educators should have characteristics such as good communication skills (n = 773; 84.4%), knowledge of subject (n = 758; 82.7%), enthusiasm (n = 718; 78.4%), and providing effective explanations (n = 682; 74.4%) (Low et al., 2020). Similarly, an earlier cross-sectional survey from 57 medical and dental faculty members of Melaka Manipal Medical College also reported similar ideal characteristics of a medical educator which consisted of knowledge of the subject (4.70 ± 0.53), enthusiasm to teach (4.69 ± 0.54) and communication skills (4.68 ± 0.54) (Singh et al., 2013).

To date, there has been limited study investigating university students in Malaysia regarding their perceptions on the qualities of a good educator. Of note, most of the previous studies had explored the perspectives of students from foreign countries. To our knowledge, only one Malaysian study investigated medical and dental faculty members' perspectives on ideal characteristics of an effective medical teacher (Singh et al., 2013). These previous findings cannot be generalised to Malaysian university students at large given different educational system and curriculum requirements, cultural context and beliefs. This study is therefore warranted to fill the knowledge gaps on how students from a variety of disciplines perceived the ideal characteristics of an educator.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Students' Learning
The COVID-19 had impacted negatively on education systems globally, with more than 94% of the student population affected by the closure of schools and learning institutions (Mishra et al., 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). During the COVID-19, many social and working activities including teaching and learning were restricted after the physical distancing measure was enforced to the public thus e-learning via virtual platforms were implemented (Varvara et al., 2021). The sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 had engendered students and educators unprepared for the situation. Substantial educators were not able to deliver effective teaching and most students have suffered long-lasting detrimental effects on learning (Di Pietro, 2023).

Recent studies revealed that majority of the students were not satisfied with the online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic as most of them have problems coping with their studies (Hammerstein et al., 2021). This could be due to a lack of technical facilities and problems with the internet (Hammerstein et al., 2021), particularly for those who live in remote areas as well as financially disadvantaged students who had limited access to devices such as smartphones, laptops or software for online learning (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020). Students also reported to have an inadequate number of learning sessions during the pandemic. For instance, in the United Kingdom, 71% of school pupils received fewer than one daily online lesson, whilst in Germany, only 6% of kids received daily

online lessons (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020). Besides, some students had developed mental health issues such as anxiety and depression which badly affected their learning outcomes and academic achievement (Di Pietro, 2023).

In view of that, educators play essential role in helping student's learning during the pandemic (Jones & Kessler, 2020). Professionalism, maintaining a self-identity, educators' availability and communication skills were reported essential in helping students during the COVID-19 pandemic (Jones & Kessler, 2020). Nonetheless, in Malaysia, it remains unclear if additional requirement of educator's personality in effectively delivering ODL are needed among the university students. This aspect warrants urgent exploration considering future widespread use of ODL.

Methods

Study Design

A cross-sectional study was conducted from May 2022 to August 2022 among students of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Pulau Pinang with active status. Convenience sampling method was used whereby students who were willing to participate in the study were invited to fill up pre-validated questionnaire *via* Google form. The study had received ethics approval from the Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pulau Pinang ethics committee [BERC/05/2022(UG/MR/53)].

Data Collection Tool

The questionnaire comprised of three sections: (1) Demographic characteristics; (2) Educator qualities – adapted and modified from previous studies (Jensen & Fischer, 2006; Low et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2013; Sutkin et al., 2008) and (3) Open-ended questions to capture student's perspectives on ideal traits of an educator for online classes implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. The English version of the questionnaire was semantically translated to Bahasa Malaysia with the aid of a linguistic lecturer. The final questionnaire was made available in both English and Bahasa Malaysia.

In section two, a total of 25 statements related to qualities of good educators were included in the questionnaire. Each statement was elaborated to provide contextual understanding to the respondents. Participants were asked to mark their evaluation whether they agree or disagree with each stated quality of an educator. In section three, there was a close-ended question where the respondents first evaluated their satisfaction with regards to academic experience during the pandemic. Students were then required to elaborate factors contributing to their selected satisfaction level. This was then followed by three open-ended questions whereby respondents stated the ideal traits that an educator should have when conducting online classes during the pandemic and approaches employed by educators that motivated or demotivated their learning during the pandemic.

Data Management and Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was performed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics were used to present categorical data. The students' comments (i.e. qualitative data) obtained from section three of the questionnaire were analysed using content analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2013) with the aid of Microsoft Excel. Accordingly, similar respondents' comments were categorised according to themes. The classifications were

performed independently by two investigators and cross-checked by the project supervisor. The number of comments that fell into the same theme were counted as frequency. The highest frequencies denoted the factors contributed to students' satisfaction on ODL, ideal attributes of an educator, helpful or not helpful approaches employed by educators when conducting online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results

Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

A total of 126 students with a median age (interquartile range) of 21.5 (IQR=1) years completed the questionnaire (Table 1). Majority of the respondents were female (73%) and pursuing diploma degree (88.9%). Of all the respondents, part 6 and pharmacy students had shown greater participations in this study with 38.1% and 57.1%, respectively.

Table 1: Respondents' Demographic Characteristics (N = 126)

Age, median (1QR)	21.5 (1)	
Gender, n (%)	Male	34 (27)
	Female	92 (73)
Level of education, n (%)	Diploma	112 (88.9)
	Degree	14 (11.1)
Part Semester, n (%)	Part 1	2 (1.6)
	Part 2	21 (16.7)
	Part 3	3 (2.4)
	Part 4	42 (33.3)
	Part 5	6 (4.8)
	Part 6	48 (38.1)
	Part 7	1 (0.8)
	Part 8	3 (2.4)
Course of study, n (%)	Chemical Engineering (Environmental)	3 (2.4)
	Civil Engineering	1 (0.8)
	Civil Engineering (Infrastructure)	1 (0.8)
	Electrical Engineering (Electronics)	2 (1.6)
	Environmental Health	2 (1.6)
	Food Service Management	1 (0.8)
	Hotel Management	2 (1.6)
	Manufacturing Engineering Technology	1 (0.8)
	Mechanical Engineering	1 (0.8)
	Mechanical Engineering (Manufacturing)	3 (2.4)
	Medical Laboratory Technology	21 (16.7)
	Nursing	5 (4)
	Occupational Therapy	2 (1.6)

Pastry Art	2 (1.6)	
Pharmacy	72 (57.1)	
Physiotherapy	7 (5.6)	

Students' Perceived Good Qualities of an Educator

All the respondents unanimously agreed that an educator should be credible (S1), enthusiastic in teaching (S2), knowledgeable (S10), considerate (S11), unbiased (S20), and have a systematic lesson plan in helping the students prepare for the next lesson (S22) (Table 2). Interestingly, some of the respondents (n = 13, 10.3%) perceived that an educator does not necessarily need to master non-verbal communication methods (S4). Of the 126 respondents, 11 respondents (8.7%) felt that a good educator does not need to make his/her contact information readily available for ease of communication (S14) whilst nine students (7.1%) felt that good educator is not necessary to set up personal goals for the students (S18).

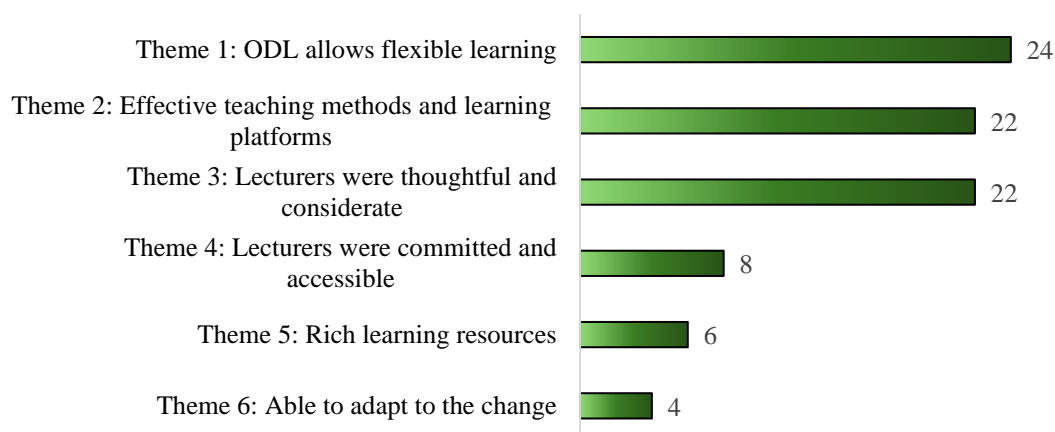**Table 2: Students' Perceived Good Qualities of an Educator**

Item No.	Item (Question)	Agree n (%)	Disagree n (%)
S1	In teaching, an educator must have credibility, which involves honesty and integrity.	126 (100%)	-
S2	An educator must demonstrate enthusiasm, a stimulating classroom environment, and the use of challenging questions to elicit critical thinking skills.	126 (100%)	-
S3	An educator must use a variety of speaking tones while also incorporating experiential learning and hands-on activities to encourage students and increase their participation.	125 (99.2%)	1 (0.8%)
S4	A teacher must employ non-verbal communication techniques such as gestures, paralinguistic, proxemics, and physical appearance.	113 (89.7%)	13 (10.3%)
S5	An educator must be confident in their teaching by speaking clearly with few pauses, making eye contact, and answering questions with certainty.	125 (99.2%)	1 (0.8%)
S6	An educator must be capable of clearly communicating ideas and knowledge, as well as presenting discussions in a clear, understandable, organized manner with logical explanations.	125 (99.2%)	1 (0.8%)
S7	An educator must ask each of their students if they understand what he/she has taught and assist them if they have any questions.	125 (99.2%)	1 (0.8%)
S8	An educator must be able to create conceptual frameworks using illustrations (e.g. mind maps like bubble map, tree map, and flow chart) and	122 (96.8%)	4 (3.2%)

	anecdotes (convey learning in the form of storytelling).		
S9	Educators must offer or give their students resources that relate to the subject they teach to make students' self-learning at home much better.	122 (96.8%)	4 (3.2%)
S10	An educator must be knowledgeable, in the sense that he or she understands what they are teaching.	126 (100%)	-
S11	An educator should be considerate, such as accepting valid excuses for absences and being patient with students' varying paces	126 (100%)	-
S12	An educator must consider what platform to be use before making a class to ensure that all of the students can attend it without any technical problem.	124 (98.4%)	2 (1.6%)
S13	An educator should be flexible and adaptive, able to change event dates as needed and to accommodate the needs of students.	122 (96.8%)	4 (3.2%)
S14	An educator should be attainable/available, for example, by mobile number and/or e - mail during and after office hours.	115 (91.3%)	11 (8.7%)
S15	An educator must be punctual and adhere to the lesson period by arriving on time and dismissing class on time.	125 (99.2%)	1 (0.8%)
S16	An educator must be creative and innovative in integrating contemporary technologies as learning tools (Google Drive, Blackboard, or other venues).	124 (98.4%)	2 (1.6%)
S17	An educator should assist students in improving their grades after each test such as focusing more on the topics that they less master.	124 (98.4%)	2 (1.6%)
S18	An educator should assist students in developing personal goals and strategies to achieve those goals.	117 (92.9%)	9 (7.1%)
S19	An educator should be technologically competent, such as knowing how to use a computer, communicating with students via email, and utilising current advancements to disseminate information to students.	125 (99.2%)	1 (0.8%)
S20	In order to be fair in testing, an educator must be extremely unbiased toward each student.	126 (100%)	-
S21	An educator should teach topics to be tested in examination and generate relevant test questions.	121 (96%)	5 (4%)

S22	An educator must have a systemically well-constructed lesson plan to help students prepare for the next lesson.	126 (100%)	-
S23	An educator should provide constructive feedback to student, such as comments on submitted tasks, responses to students' questions, and test-taking tips.	125 (99.2%)	1 (0.8%)
S24	An educator should be able to fully direct class time by presenting relevant topics in class and providing a question-and-answer session.	124 (98.4%)	2 (1.6%)
S25	It is necessary for an educator to demonstrate procedures to the students before handing out a practical task.	124 (98.4%)	2 (1.6%)

Students' Satisfaction on ODL and Its Associated Factors

Of 126 respondents, 81 students (64.3%) claimed that they were satisfied with ODL implemented during the COVID-19. Six themes were identified as contributing factors to students' satisfaction (Figure 1). The most likely contributing factors to students' satisfaction on ODL was since such learning mode allows flexible learning and time saving (n = 24) as students do not need to spend time preparing or travelling to the lecture hall. In addition, some students perceived that the lecturers had used effective teaching methods and appropriate learning platforms in engaging them (n = 22). Next, thoughtful and considerate lecturers (n = 22) was also the contributing factor towards students' satisfaction level.
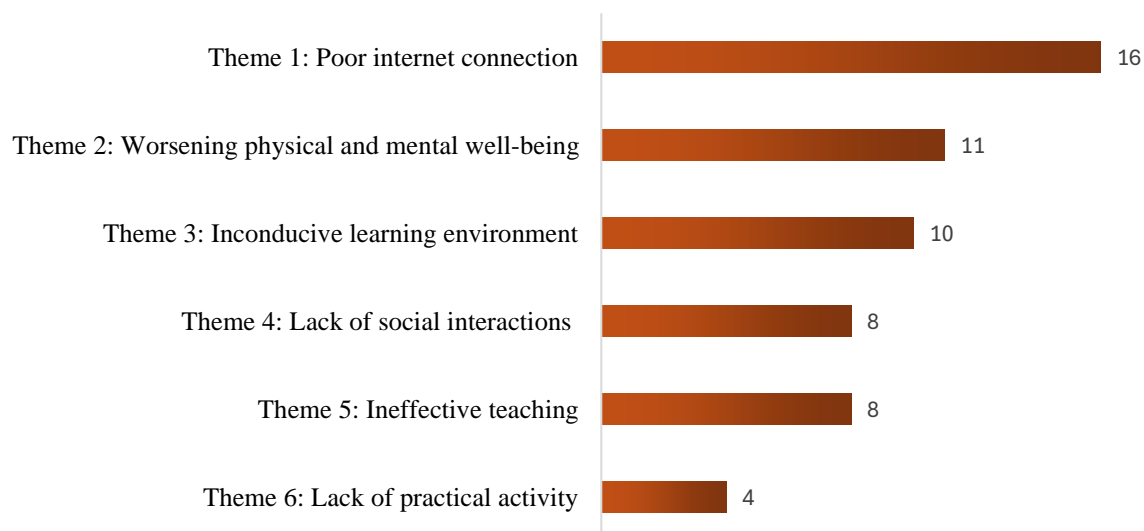
Theme	Value
Theme 1: ODL allows flexible learning	24
Theme 2: Effective teaching methods and learning platforms	22
Theme 3: Lecturers were thoughtful and considerate	22
Theme 4: Lecturers were committed and accessible	8
Theme 5: Rich learning resources	6
Theme 6: Able to adapt to the change	4

Major Themes (Frequency of Students' Comments)	Selected Students' Quotes
Theme 1 (n = 24)	*"Recording of the class is provided. Therefore, we can refer to the recording if we have some misunderstanding or issues about the topic."* *"Because the time is more flexible."*
Theme 2 (n = 22)	*"Most of the lecturers explain the topics related to the subjects efficiently using online platform such as google meet and many more."*

	"Effective and good learning methodologies from educators/lecturers in delivering knowledge to students as well as the flexibility of time to learn and study."
Theme 3 (n = 22)	*"Lecturers were very accommodating, providing resources to students and conducted classes in a way that helped to improve students' learning despite the distance."* *"Lecturers and educators are well versed in the subject. They're very helpful and understanding."*
Theme 4 (n = 8)	*"Lecturer gave full commitment to teach their students."* *"All the lecturers are very thoughtful and easy to communicate with if I have problems."*
Theme 5 (n = 6)	*"Because the lecturer provided the best reference and teach us ways of finding varieties of authorised source of knowledge. They tried their best as well making sure students understood well about the topics."* *"The lecturers did provide all the necessary learning materials."*
Theme 6 (n = 4)	*"I can adapt to the change easily and comfortable with online classes."* *"I have no problem attending all online classes"*

Figure 1: Content Analysis of Students' Comments on Satisfaction Towards ODL

In contrast, another six identified themes revealed students' dissatisfaction on ODL (Figure 2). Poor internet connection (n = 16) was the primary cause of dissatisfaction in which students reported frequent disconnection from the communication platform was distracting and had interrupted their learning. Some students felt that ODL mode had worsened both their physical and mental well-being due to the overwhelming assignments and long duration of screen-time (n = 11). Furthermore, inconducive home environment (n = 10), lack of social interactions (n = 8), ineffective teaching methods (n = 8) and lack of hand-on practical activity (n = 4) were other contributing causes of students' dissatisfaction on ODL.

Theme 1: Poor internet connection — 16
Theme 2: Worsening physical and mental well-being — 11
Theme 3: Inconducive learning environment — 10
Theme 4: Lack of social interactions — 8
Theme 5: Ineffective teaching — 8
Theme 6: Lack of practical activity — 4

Major Themes (Frequency of Students' Comments)	Selected Students' Quotes
Theme 1 (n = 16)	*"Internet connection not stable, not able to concentrate due to the environment that not conducive."* *"Due to unstable line network that make it hard for me to join whole lecture without disconnecting from the platform"*
Theme 2 (n = 11)	*"I need to stay in front of laptop for a long time which is unhealthy for my backbone."* *"I was having multiple mental breakdowns because load of assignments."*
Theme 3 (n = 10)	*"My environment is not good for study. (a lot of distraction)."* *"Di rumah terdapat banyak kekacauan dan komitmen lain yang perlu diberi perhatian. Di kolej, saya boleh menumpukan sepenuh perhatian pada pelajaran dengan aman."*
Theme 4 (n = 8)	*"Kurang komunikasi dua arah."* *"I don't understand and I don't know who to ask as it was quite hard to message the lecturers and my friends sometimes don't understand what I have asked."*
Theme 5 (n = 8)	*"Some lecturers tend to READ the slides without explaining the contents. And then gave us tutorials that are not related to the lecture."* *"Tidak semua pensyarah mengamalkan pengajaran yang efektif kerana ada segelintir yang hanya membaca slide serta tidak mengamalkan komunikasi dua hala."*
Theme 6 (n = 4)	*"Limited resources on hands on sessions."* *"Pembelajaran secara atas talian merupakan satu pengalaman yang menyeronokkan namun bagi saya ia mempunyai kekurangan tersendiri kerana tidak berpeluang untuk melakukan kerja-kerja amali."*

Figure 2: Content Analysis of Students' Comments on Dissatisfaction Towards ODL

Students' Perceived Ideal Educators' Attributes when Teaching Online during COVID-19
A total of 13 students perceived ideal educators' attributes when delivering online classes during COVID-19 were identified (Figure 3). Interestingly, most of the students perceived that the most important attribute that an educator should have in online teaching during the COVID-19 was compassionate and empathetic (n = 63) rather than being technologically competent (n = 16) nor employed engaging teaching skills (n =15). Most students felt that lecturers should pay more attention to understand students' problems and be considerate while teaching during the pandemic as students may encounter different difficulties at home.
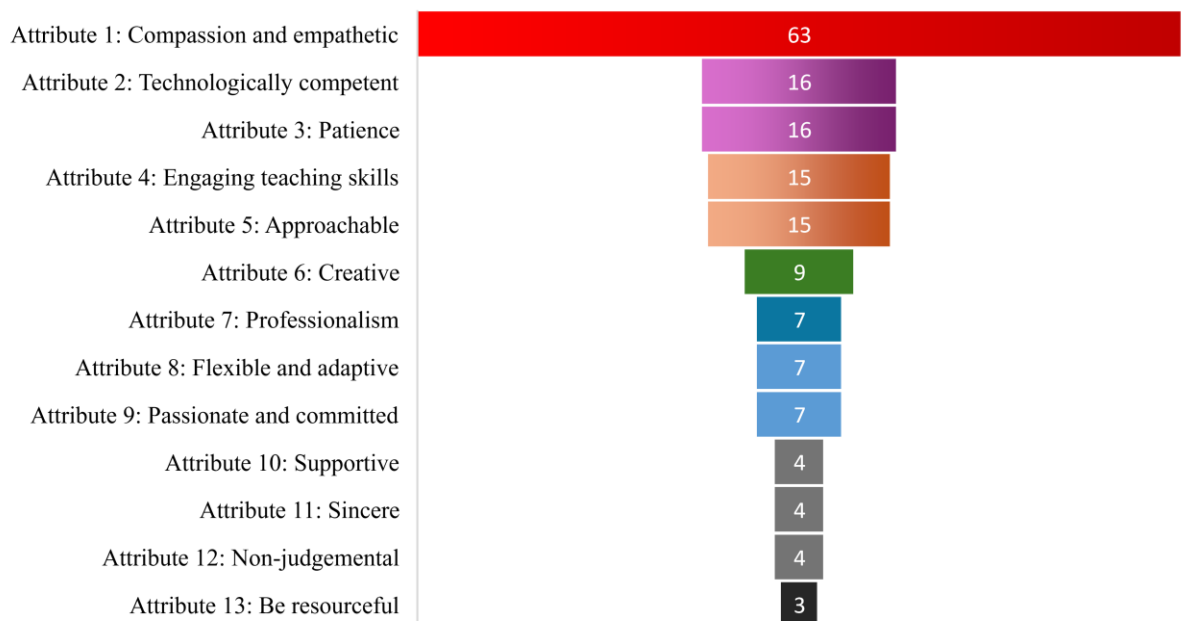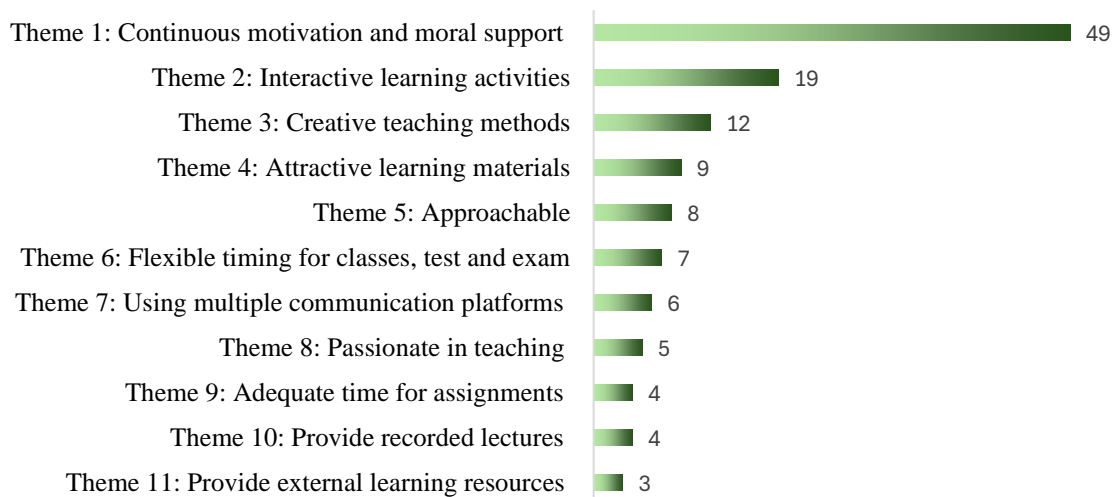
Figure 3: Students' Perceived Ideal Educators' Attributes when Teaching Online during COVID-19

Students' Perceived Educators' Motivating Approaches

A total of 11 themes were identified from 126 students' comments (Figure 4). The most helpful approach that educators employed in encouraging students' learning during the pandemic was continuous motivation and moral support (n = 49). Of note, the consistent findings in this and previous sections on ideal educator's attributes in delivering online classes suggested that students valued the interpersonal characteristics that educators should have in teaching and supporting them during the COVID-19 pandemic.
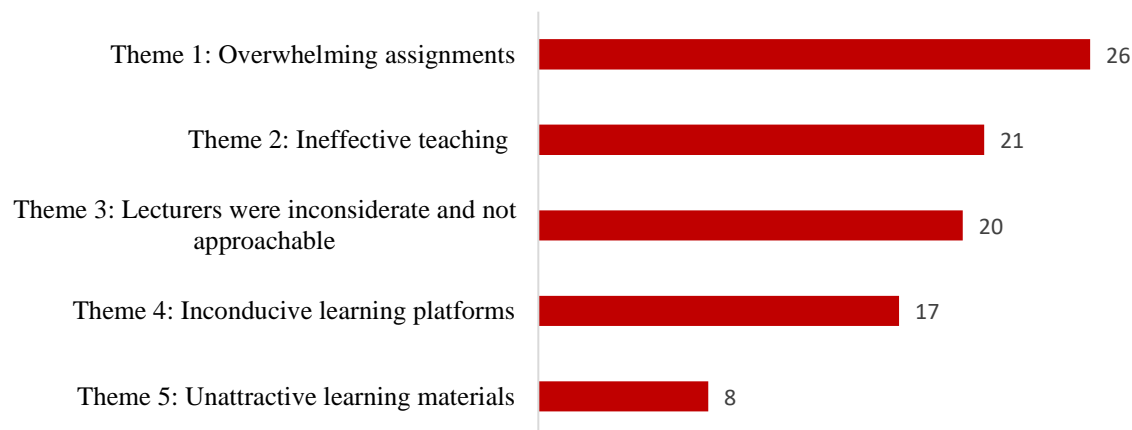
Major Themes (Frequency of Students' Comments)	Selected Students' Quotes
Theme 1 (n = 49)	*"They encourage us and understand some technical issues that occur during online class. They never fine us if we fail to join the online class because of technical issues or emergency. "* *"They always try to understand us from our perspective as a student and a child since most of us were at home during ODL."*
Theme 2 (n = 19)	*"Make activities during class."* *"They try their best to teach until we understand, having a Q & A session at the end of the class, some of them doing a revision class each time before our test."*
Theme 3 (n = 12)	*"Creative ways of teaching."* *"For me, I liked the delivery of some lecturers to include some humours when teaching so the class didn't feel that boring. When you are learning something for 2 hours straight, your brain needs some joy to maintain your attention span."*
Theme 4 (n = 9)	*"Memasukkan elemen video-video pengajaran yang menarik dan mudah difahami."* *"When the lecturers' note is attractive with sort of mind maps, pictures and illustrations."*
Theme 5 (n = 8)	*"They are approachable and show willingness to assist students in particular things that students need more clarification and explanation in the subjects."* *"Lecturer making time to have a one-to-one session with each student to check up on their given assignment and giving the students notes or points to tackle the problems they might be facing in completing the assignment."*
Theme 6 (n = 7)	*"They offered a pretty flexible time for us to answer tests or quizzes according to our comfortable time to answer that."* *"Pensyarah memberikan masa rehat seketika ketika waktu syarahan dan memberi kata-kata semangat."*
Theme 7 (n = 6)	*"Approach the student using any platform that can reach between them."* *"Use variety of online platform that used minimum internet connection."*
Theme 8 (n = 5)	*"Pensyarah yang bersemangat dan sentiasa on time."* *"Sentiasa jawab pertanyaan dengan info yg meluas."*
Theme 9 (n = 4)	*"Provide sufficient amount of time to complete the assignment given."* *"My lecturers always give an ample time, meaning not too rushing about the works such as assignment or test."*
Theme 10 (n = 4)	*"Straightforward slide, recording lecture, games, quizzes."* *"Recording the lecture and make a simple ppt to their students."*
Theme 11 (n = 3)	*"The provision of external resources aside from lecture notes to help students learn were really motivating."* *"They provide me with sufficient resources to aid for my better understanding of the topics."*

Figure 4: Content Analysis of Students' Comments on Educators' Approaches which Motivated Their Learning during COVID-19

Students' Perceived Educators' Demotivating Approaches

In contrast, five themes were identified as approaches that demotivated students' learning during the pandemic (Figure 5). Notably, most students expressed that the overwhelming assignments given by lecturers (n = 26) and ineffective teaching (n = 21) were the two most common approaches that had discouraged their learning during the pandemic.

Major Themes (Frequency of Students' Comments)	Selected Students' Quotes
Theme 1 (n = 26)	*"Too many workloads that sometimes I don't have enough time to study."* *"Giving many assessments such as summarizing journals and articles."*
Theme 2 (n = 21)	*"Teaching by reading slides without explanations."* *"Lecturers did not use the appropriate platforms for ODL sessions, and the lectures were too long and bland (no interactive videos or photos and etc.) to make the lecture more interesting and easier to digest."*
Theme 3 (n = 20)	*"Being sarcastic during lectures and talking about things that are out of topic and sometimes inappropriate."* *"Tidak memahami situasi dialami pelajar. berkeras ingin pelajar menyertai kelas live session, menyindir pelajar yang masih menggunakan pen dan kertas untuk mnjawab soalan tutorial dan lain-lain."*
Theme 4 (n = 17)	*"Only use recorded video and YouTube for lecture."* *"MTeams, that required a lot of data."*
Theme 5 (n = 8)	*"Lecture notes with too many words and sentences with a big font size."* *"Self-learning with incomplete materials."*

Figure 5: Content Analysis of Students' Comments on Educators' Approaches which Demotivated Their Learning during COVID-19

Discussions

This study had successfully explored university attending students perceived ideal qualities of an educator as well as additional educator's attributes for the online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings revealed that good educator should be credible, enthusiastic in teaching, knowledgeable, considerate, unbiased, and have a systematic lesson plan in helping the students. Based on our study findings, we found similarity in two previous studies carried out in Singapore (Low et al., 2020) and Malaysia (Singh et al., 2013) which could possible due to the use of similar questionnaire in theirs as well as our study. Enthusiasm had been one of the most important educator's characteristics in Low et. al. (2020) (78.4%) and Singh et. al. (2013) (73.6%) studies. In addition, knowledgeable is also another highly rated educator's quality in both the previous studies whilst 'considerate' was rated by 47.2% respondents as one of the ideal medical educator's qualities in Singh and colleagues' study. Our study further adds on findings that university students from various disciplines rated credible, unbiased and has a systematic lesson plan as equally important qualities of a good educator.

A credible educator is viewed as an individual who is 'reliable and trustworthy' could earn students' affirmation during the lessons. Educators who are credible and trustworthy could better inspire and motivate students' engagement in learning (Takase et al., 2019). Likewise, an enthusiastic educator is also more likely to motivate students in classroom engagement (Su & Wood, 2012) as students may rely on to the lecturers' stimulation as extrinsic motivation for their learning (Elizabeth & Ena, 2019). Unbiased in term of fairness during marking test papers or assignments suggest that students find it intolerable if their lecturers played favouritism in the classroom and graded certain students with leniency. Effective lecturers must therefore, exercise neutral sentiment without offending other students' trust (Chireshe, 2011). In addition, a lecturer who shows consideration is also highly valued by 61.7% respondents from preclinical and clinical students of a previous study (Low et al., 2020).

Given the fact that educators are individuals responsible to provide knowledge and information to the students, no doubt that students would expect the educators to be clear of what they are teaching to the learners and have systematic plans to help students' learning. Our finding therefore mirrored previous studies which also highlighted that educator's knowledge of subject matter should go beyond content-expert (Irby, 2014; Low et al., 2020; orakcı, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the global education system of physical face-to-face classes to ODL. Similarly, ODL had been implemented in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Penang campus since the movement control order in year 2020. Our study results revealed that 81 out of 126 students (64.3%) were satisfied with ODL implemented during the lockdowns. The primary reason contributing to students' satisfaction was because ODL offers flexible learning hours. Students claimed that ODL saved their time from travelling to the lecture hall and offers flexibility for reviewing the lecture contents at their convenience time. This finding congruent with the previous studies in pharmacy students that online learning provides time flexibility (Lean et al., 2020; Othman et al., 2023). Likewise, another Indonesian study also reported that 59% of the 98 students were happy with the media utilised during the online learning with only a mere 2% of students were not satisfied with the online learning mode (Tandyonomanu et al., 2021). Notably, both students in this and previous studies

favoured both the synchronous and asynchronous medias as they could learn new information frequently at various times (Tandyonomanu et al., 2021).

In our study, the principal reason of respondents' dissatisfaction in ODL was poor internet connection. Students find engaging with learning materials, lecturers and peers challenging during the ODL with frequent internet interruptions as reflected by students' comments in this study as well as in a previous study (Matarirano et al., 2021). Similar issues happen not only in our setting but also seen in other studies. For instance, a study in Jordan with 538 medical students, 69.1% (n=372) students lamented the poor internet coverage during online learning (Abbasi et al., 2020). Another study at the University of Sharjah's Medical and Health Sciences Colleges, most of the students experienced technical difficulties and support during the online learning (Elshami et al., 2021). Similar challenge was also reported by Malaysian university students while taking online assessments during the pandemic (Othman et al., 2023). To move forward with online learning, the internet coverage and infrastructure should be improved in the country.

Furthermore, it is essential for the educators to take note on not overwhelming the students with assignments during ODL as these could have impacted students with worsening physical and mental well-being as commented by students in this study. Similar phenomena had also been observed in other study in Malaysia which involved 486 students from different universities that over two-thirds (69.5%) of the respondents felt overburdened with information and workload and that students struggled to keep up with their courses online (Al-Kumaim et al., 2021).

Our findings revealed that majority of students value educators who are compassionate and considerate while teaching during the pandemic. These results are consistent with the study from Jordan that most students appreciated their professors' understanding and being considerate to the challenges that students encountered (Alawamleh et al., 2022). Besides, 91% of students in the Hong Kong university also stated that they favoured lecturers who are caring, able to interact with them with positive feedback and encouragement (Zhu et al., 2021). Likewise, continuous motivation and moral support were the top theme for students perceived motivating strategies employed by educators for the self-directed online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. While online learning allows students to access course materials at their own pace, it requires strong motivation to boost students' involvement and engagement with the learning process (Tandyonomanu et al., 2021). Lack of motivation may therefore cause dissatisfaction with online learning. This is reflected in a study which involved 69 students from the University of Malaya that 16% of the students lack motivation for online learning possibly due to low moral support from their educators (Zakariah et al., 2016). This finding underscored that educator should proactively provide on-going moral support despite self-paced ODL mode.

The study findings encompassed students' perspectives from a variety of study disciplines on the qualities of an educator; however, the interpretation of the results should take into consideration several limitations. First, the limited answer options (either agree or disagree) for the educator's qualities may lead to an inaccuracy of students' evaluation. In addition, targeted study sample with convenience sampling method used within a single tertiary institution (UiTM Pulau Pinang) as of this study may inherently contributed to selection bias that limit generalisability of findings to different tertiary institutions. Next, despite two rounds of

reminders, the low response rate and small sample size of this study could have underpowered the study findings. Furthermore, students' evaluations could be influenced by social desirability bias and hence, the results could not hold responsible for whole population of Malaysian university students. Future multicentred study is required to further validate the study findings.

Conclusion

The study findings revealed the perception of good qualities of an educator among students of various academic disciplines. University students perceived a good educator should be credible, enthusiastic in teaching, knowledgeable, considerate, unbiased, and have a systematic lesson plan. More than half of the respondents in this study were satisfied with ODL implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic due to flexibility of learning. Lecturers' compassion and empathetic, providing continuous motivation and moral support were the most highly rated attributes and approaches for motivating students' online learning during the pandemic. Notably, poor internet connection and overwhelming assignments could potentially deter students from online learning. The findings from this study could contribute to the step up of tertiary education in making sure that future educators embody the good qualities that may enhance students' learning experience. The identified educators' attributes and useful approaches in implementing ODL offer practical strategies for policymakers of higher education institutions to improve e-learning system in Malaysia.

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