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YIN AND YANG OF OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING: TEACHER TRAINEES' VIEW

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Abstract

Open Distance Learning (ODL) is an instructional method where the student and educator are isolated by reality from their physical interactions. Open Distance Learning is beneficial in developing teachers' language, ICT, and teaching skills. Furthermore, students benefit from ODL by becoming better with their computer and language skills and becoming digitally literate. This study aims to identify the teaching technique used by teacher trainees and the perception of teacher trainees towards ODL. The study applied a survey approach on 44 teacher trainees from three teaching programmes in Universiti Selangor. Findings showed that teacher trainees in UNISEL preferred individual work as their choice of teaching as it was said to be more accessible and had promoted their independent learning ability. In addition, the teacher trainees were mainly neutral to the perceptions of ODL as they were new to this form of teaching approach. The teacher trainees would need more practice exploring the possible strategies for ODL and learning to adapt to students' needs during practical teaching. To sum up, it is in the hope that this study will aid future teacher trainees in their understanding of ODL teaching and exposure to the new norm and reality of education today.

Keywords: Open Distance Learning, perception, teaching technique, instructional method

INTRODUCTION

The *Yin* and *Yang* is a Chinese Philosophical concept that describes how opposite or contrary forces may be complementary, interconnected, and interdependent in the natural world. This ancient Chinese philosophy is also said to give rise to each other as they interrelate. Thus, as the world has embraced digital advances, the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education has grown in importance as its use in teaching, learning, research, and other areas have skyrocketed in information dissemination and are being transformed by research and related activities (Kant, 2020).

Open Distance Learning (ODL) is an instructional method where the student and educator are isolated by reality from their physical interactions. Student and teacher connections in ODL are abetted by ICTs or potentially exceptionally planned study materials. ODL may appear as web-based learning, distance training, electronic learning (e-Learning), mobile learning (m-Learning), or blended learning (b-Learning) (Muyinda et al., 2019). ODL is beneficial because it helps develop teachers' language, ICT, and teaching skills. Furthermore, the students will benefit themselves because they can become better with their computer and language skills and modern technology (Urrutia, 2016; Liu et al., 2014 as cited in Yousef Aljaraideh, 2019).

However, Bonk and Lee (2017) reported several barriers which hinder successful quality learning outcomes. Barriers include time-consuming instructional strategies, bad content quality, and lack of support. For teachers to be suddenly pushed into this new teaching strategy, they are yet to figure out what works best for them and their students. Due to limited Internet connection, technological and economic difficulties, online learning did not produce the anticipated results (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). Response time, the loss of face-to-face contact and the lack of sociability were also mentioned as challenges of online learning by students (Zhong, 2020). These challenges could significantly affect rural areas where internet coverage is not easily met. Students from lower-income families would feel more detached from their peers as they lack the devices to stay connected or to support the online learning content provided.

Hence, to overcome some of the mentioned challenges, this study investigates teaching techniques that teacher trainees used while teaching online and their perceptions of the use of ODL.

Technology Used in Learning

In order to understand more in the perception of teachers in the use of ODL, it is necessary to investigate what other studies have said about using technology as a tool. Ahmadi (2018) explained that it could be used to assist teachers in supporting language acquisition for their students as technology is becoming increasingly crucial. Teachers can also employ technology to personalize classroom activities, which helps the language learning process. However, an individual's decision to accept or reject this technology is based on their perception of the benefits and challenges (Oyetade et al., 2020). A study conducted by Tsai (2014) employed a mixed English research paper writing course that included both inside and outside the Blackboard course management system that specialised learning tools and assignments. It was said to improve the English writing instructions if utilised successfully. In a study by Ahmadi (2018) on the importance of modern technology in studying English as a second or foreign language, technology allows teachers and students to communicate, provides comprehensible input and output, and aids students in developing thinking abilities. It makes learning and instruction more student-centered as it encourages students to learn autonomously and boosts student motivation to learn a foreign language.

Open Distance Learning (ODL)

With the thanks and rapid growth of technology, ODL is now available almost worldwide for students (Chawinga & Zozie, 2016). ODL offers students the flexibility they need in their education by allowing them to learn without attending traditional face-to-face lecture sessions (Ntaba & Jantjies, 2019). Furthermore, online learning has become unavoidable due to its cost-effectiveness, particularly in tertiary education and professional development courses (Bartley & Golek, 2004; OECD, 2018). However, despite the abundance of advantages that ODL brings, teachers still find it challenging to conduct lessons using ODL (Kgabo, 2021). With the lack of

support (Kasani et al., 2020) and training (Kibuku et al., 2020) teachers get before being thrown into the new teaching style, those who do not have the digital skills are lost with minimal guidance. Ag-Ahmad's (2020) research explains that Malaysian educational institutions and students are partially prepared for ODL. Another study shows dual-mode colleges must adopt a new mindset toward their ODL strategy and devote more resources to its growth (Sibande & Morolong, 2018).

Teacher's readiness

As the world evolves, teaching styles will need to be developed in a way that could match the way how society works. However, students are not the only ones facing challenges regarding online learning. As the education sectors are now forced to go online, many teachers face challenges to cope with the new skill they need to teach. Multiple pieces of literature (Paliwal & Singh, 2021; Suryanti et al., 2021; Hosny et al., 2021; Scherer et al., 2021) explained how teachers struggle to teach as they do not have the right equipment, skills, or support. Paliwal and Singh (2021) suggested that to have an optimum learning outcome, and the faculty should show their support by training their teachers on how to utilise the provided learning management system to the best of their capacity. However, Scherer et al. (2021) reported that not all teachers are not ready. It was found that some of them are lacking in only a few factors and should be provided support differently.

Task Technology Fit (TTF)

This paper was guided by Goodhue and Thompson's (1995) task technology fit. They reasoned that task, technology, and individual traits all influence performance directly and that fit influences performance indirectly through antecedents to use and actual use. In other words, it explains how a particular technology or system helps an individual with the task they are facing. If the technology 'fits' the level of productivity, the user would prefer to continue to use said technology. However, if the user does not find the technology satisfactory, they would avoid using it. It was proposed that use and other antecedents are influenced by performance via feedback.

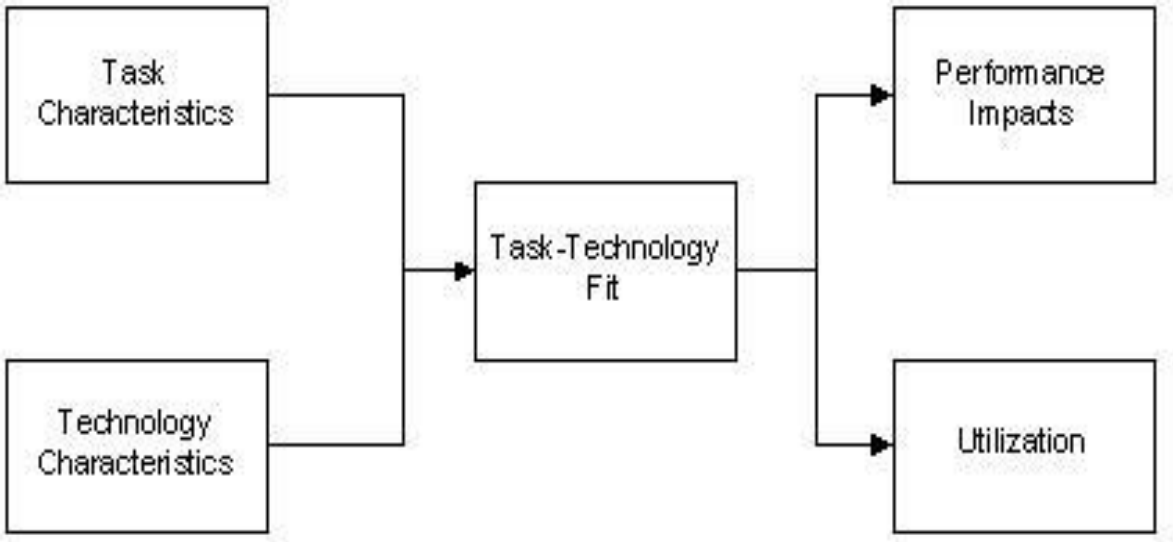

Figure 1: teaching techniques used by teacher trainees

In the context of this study, task technology fit could be found when teacher trainees use the technology for their online teaching. Trainees had already gone through the different platforms provided and have seen suitable ones for their teaching style. Platforms that do not offer satisfactory learning outcomes are not used in their lessons.

METHODOLOGY

Sample Population

The study sample was chosen using simple random sampling with the representation of both sexes in mind. The criterion for the respondents were teacher trainees studying in their bachelor's education in Universiti Selangor that has completed their practicum online. The samples were from three distinct teaching programmes, which are B. Ed. (Hons) TESL, B. Ed. (Hons) Early Childhood Education, and B. Ed. (Hons) Islamic Studies. A total of 44 teacher trainees participated in this study due to a limited number of students who volunteered to participate.

Instrument

This study used a quantitative approach and adopted questionnaires from Ag-Ahmad (2020) to achieve the objectives, where the Cronbach's Alpha reliability is above 0.70. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A identifies the demographic data, Section B identifies the teaching technique used by teacher trainees, and Section C contains Likert-scale questions that determine the perception of teacher trainees towards ODL.

FINDINGS

Figure 2 shows teacher trainees' teaching techniques in their online lessons. The trainees are required to pick the method applied to them and choose more than one. It is shown that 75% of the respondents use individual work as a teaching technique. Group work and small group discussions share 50% each, while large group discussions only have 15.9%. It was also found that 25% of the teacher trainees also used role-play in their lessons.

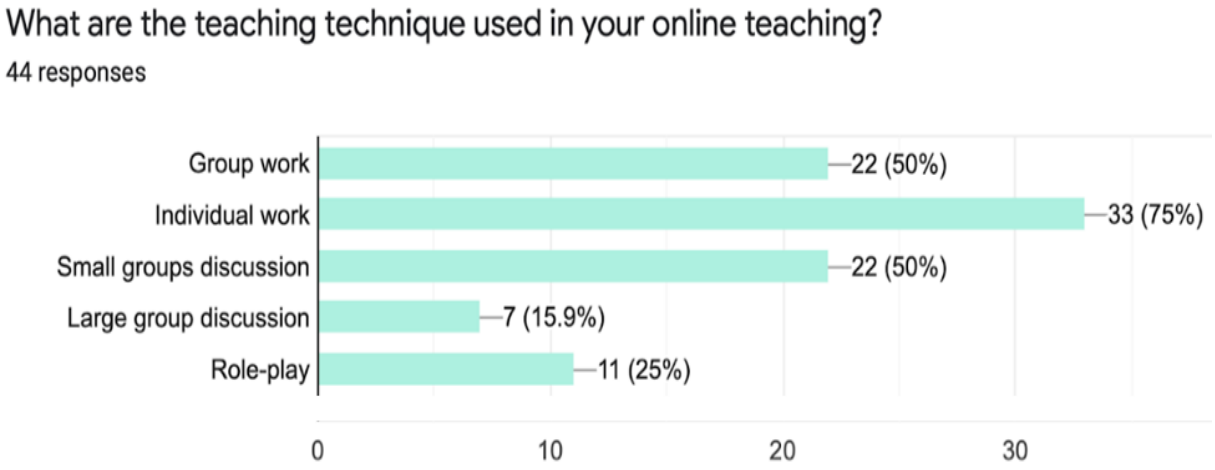

Figure 2: Teaching techniques used by teacher trainees

Table 1 summarizes the respondents' response perception of ODL. The table shows that 31.8% of the respondents strongly agreed that ODL is difficult for them, and 4.5% strongly disagreed with the statement. Next, 43.2% of the respondents were neutral about ODL being convenient, and 9.1% strongly disagreed. After that, for the statement of 'I think ODL is

efficient,' 36.4% of the respondents were neutral, while 6.8% strongly disagreed with the statement.

Table 1: Teacher trainees' perception of ODL

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think ODL is difficult	4.5%	18.2%	27.3%	18.2%	31.8%
I think ODL is convenient	9.1%	9.1%	43.2%	22.7%	15.9%
I think ODL is efficient	6.8%	20.5%	36.4%	22.7%	13.6%
I think ODL is favourable	9.1%	13.6%	43.2%	20.5%	13.6%
I am satisfied with the online class format	11.4%	29.5%	31.4%	13.6%	13.6%
I am satisfied with the evaluation format	11.4%	22.7%	38.6%	13.6%	13.6%
My students can join and participate in my online classes	2.3%	15.9%	29.5%	34.1%	18.2%
My students are able to understand the course assessment	9.1%	13.6%	38.6%	18.2%	20.5%

Whether ODL is favourable, 43.2% of the respondents were neutral. 38.6% were again neutral for the statement of 'I am satisfied with the online class format' and 38.6% for 'I am satisfied with the evaluation format.' 2.3% of respondents strongly disagree that their students can join their online class, while 34.1% of respondents agreed and had no problem with students' participation. Finally, 38.6% were neutral about their students understanding of the course assessment, while 9.1% of respondents strongly disagreed.

DISCUSSION

In correlation with the study, most of the trainees have chosen to provide individual work for their students as they learn. It is common to give individual work or tasks to students during ODL as the technique is used for making sure the students are not idle in group works (Antra & Diana, 2016). Individual work also promotes independent learning where students can take control of their education. Students can make choices and monitor their processes to achieve their learning goals (Livingston, 2012). With the available online resources, students should strategize their learning behaviour to cater to the lack of physical contact or communication with their teacher (Papadakis, 2018).

The results also show that respondents are neutral to the claim of ODL being convenient, efficient, and favourable. 31.8% of respondents strongly agree that ODL is difficult for them to handle. This is due to several factors, such as unstable internet connections. This shows that the ODL platform is good but could not operate smoothly without a stable internet connection (Adnan & Anwar 2020). Since ODL is still new to these teacher trainees, they are not as experienced as the other teachers. They also have not had enough practice in the use of ODL. However, since they are young trainees, it would not be hard to adapt to the new environment since they need more online practice.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that teacher trainees in UNISEL have shown to prefer individual work as their choice of teaching technique as it is easier to conduct and could promote independent learning. This also allows teachers to monitor students better since students in group work would distribute the workload unfairly. Furthermore, trainees are mainly neutral to the perceptions of ODL as they are new to this form of teaching. Trainees would need more practice to explore the possible strategy in conducting ODL and learn to adapt to the need of students. To sum up, it is in the hope that this study will aid future teacher trainees in their understanding of ODL teaching and exposure to the reality of education today.

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