

## A Study on Social Interaction among University Students During MCO

Noor 'Aina Abdul Razak, Nor Hanim Abd Rahman, Rafizah Kechil

Jabatan Sains Komputer & Matematik (JSKM), Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pulau Pinang Malaysia

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### Abstract

Since the emergence of Covid-19 at the end of 2019, our government had proposed few movements control orders (MCO) with certain standard operational procedures (SOP) to be followed. Due to these MCOs, online distance learning (ODL) has become a new norm among the university students. However, there are numerous issues and challenges which have arisen during the ODL period that have affected all levels of study. One of the issues arose was the implications of ODL on students' social interaction. Thus, this preliminary survey is carried out to look at some consequences of ODL on social interaction among the 191 students. These students were given online questionnaires through Google form, and were analyzed accordingly using SPSS-ANOVA. The results indicate that there is a strong positive relationship between ODL and the social interaction among students with  $R=0.818$ , and  $R^2=0.669$ .

**Keywords:** Social Interaction, Online Distance Learning, ODL, Covid-19, Mco, University Students.

### Introduction

For years, teaching and learning processes had undergone various changes and improvements, from face-to-face to online learning that was introduced few years before the pandemic struck. However, online learning had not been widely implemented by all level of studies until recently. Due to the pandemic, the teaching and learning environment had undergone unexpected transformation. With the implementation of MCOs, the government and the ministry of education have urged schools and universities to conduct online learning. The use of electronic devices and gadgets such as smartphones, laptops and tablets has increased dramatically, instead of the usual chalk-and-board method or whiteboard method. This shift from traditional to online mode of education known as ODL has now become the new normal and challenges to all educators and students, globally.

Inevitably, ODL has become part of our lives especially for those in educational system. Various studies have been carried out since the emergence of the pandemic. One of the areas

that have triggered a concern among researchers is the consequences of ODL on social interaction of university students. Little (2016) wrote in his book by referring 'social interaction' as face-to-face encounters, in which people are physically present with one another for a specified duration.

Lack of face-to-face encounters between two or more individuals, are most likely to create some effects that may disrupt one's social life, positively and negatively. Bernadetha (2020) found that although ODL encouraged the students to be more independent, the physical absence of the lecturers restricted them to monitor their students more closely during the teaching and learning sessions. Cao (2020) stated that the increasing distance among individuals due to the MCOs lead to 24.9% of students experiencing anxiety that affects their daily-life and causes academic delays. Moreover, another study done by Ilonga, Ashipala and Tomas (2020) in Namibia also mentioned the negative effects of students lacking the face-to-face interactions with lecturers. The study concluded that the students felt discriminated and not being treated fairly compared to in-campus students. In addition, there was a very weak positive relationship ( $r=0.281$ ) between the self-directed learning (due to online learning) and the intensity of social interaction. Even though ODL limits the physical interaction among students, studies show concern on the misuses of technology and various social media apps on cheating and plagiarism (Abd. Rahman et al., 2021). Hence, it is important to produce a proper structure and build a relevant interaction for online learning (Lasfeto & Ulfa, 2020).

Mehall (2020) supported that lack of interpersonal interaction due to online environment can be harmful, led to students' dissatisfaction, and create barriers among lecturers and students. Baber (2021) believed that the practice of social distancing as a new norm has greatly diminished the positive impact of social interaction as individuals utilize the online environment more for learning purposes than socializing purposes. Similarly, Elmer (2020) found that interaction and co-studying networks had reduced since more students were studying alone. In addition, a study by Haider and Al-Salman (2020) found that majority of the students agreed that ODL had resulted in social distancing and students' isolation. Besides that, a study done by Abdul Razak et al (2021) found that more than 60% of the respondents agreed that the ODL session gave unfavourable effects on their social interactions such as feeling isolated, laziness, and loneliness. Students also did not recommend continuing with ODL since they believed it led to socially and unhealthy lifestyles (Kechil et al., 2021).

Besides the all the negative effects mentioned, ODL forcibly encouraged students to be independent in determining their own time, when-where-how to participate in their online classes, and this surely be a disadvantage to traditional-learning type of students. The students also need to be more self-dependent and self-motivated, apart from having to depend on the internet speed, extra clarification and lecturers' feedback (Norman, 2020). Due to the above arguments on negative effects that might come from the practices of ODL, hence further study had been done to support the previous results. New samples were taken and analysed in order to further investigate and comprehend the consequences of ODL on social interactions, especially among students in UiTM Pulau Pinang.

## **Methodology**

In this study, the students from various faculties were given questionnaires shared through WhatsApp, Telegram, and Ufuture. The questionnaires were designed in Google form and classified into three categories. The first part contained four demographic questions

related to gender, age, academic background and locations of residential area of the respondents. Whereas on the second part, there are four questions related to the internet accessibility and ODL preferences. While the last part consists of ten research questions (Table 1) targeted on social interactions.

The survey was conducted from the 1st of October 2020 until 28th February 2021 and a total of 191 respondents were collected. The surveys were then analysed using the five-point Likert-scale, representing 'Strongly disagree 1' to 'Strongly agree 5'. The results were then analysed using SPSS 16.

Table 1

*Survey Questions On Social Interaction and Odl*

	<b>Survey questions (SQ)</b>
<b>SQ1</b>	Prolonged use of e-learning tools often leads to boredom, nervousness, and tension.
<b>SQ2</b>	I don't recommend continuing with the online learning model because it is socially and psychologically unhealthy.
<b>SQ3</b>	The distance learning system resulted in social distancing.
<b>SQ4</b>	Staying home for long period of time leads to lethargy and laziness.
<b>SQ5</b>	Distance learning might result in a significant drop in physical activities.
<b>SQ6</b>	The inability to interact with other students may exacerbate feeling of loneliness.
<b>SQ7</b>	Prolonged used of digital tools causes students' isolation.
<b>SQ8</b>	It is easier to collaborate face to face than on distance learning.
<b>SQ9</b>	Lack of social interaction may lead to cyber-harassment.
<b>SQ10</b>	When lecturers are not particularly visible, some aspects of the traditional teacher role were missing.

**Results and Discussions**

Table 2 shows that females contributed 54.5% of the total 191 respondents. It also indicates that 68.1% respondents were below 22 years old. Those between 23-30 years old contributed 26.7% whereas the remaining is 5.2% from the total respondents. 75.4% of them comprised of undergraduate students and majority of them came from almost equally distributed area which were urban (46.6%), suburban (30.4%) and rural (23%).

Table 2

*Demographic Information*

No	Item	Total Sample	
		N	%
1.	Gender:		
	Male	87	45.5
	Female	104	54.5
2.	Age:		
	Below 22 years	130	68.1
	23 – 30 years	51	26.7
	31 – 40 years	5	2.6
	41 – 50 years	5	2.6
3.	Levels of Study:		
	Pre-diploma	7	3.7
	Undergraduate	144	75.4
	Postgraduate	40	20.9
4.	Residential Area:		
	Urban	89	46.6
	Suburban	58	30.4
	Rural	44	23.0

This paper also includes the demographic study on the data plan, internet speed, preferable learning style and satisfaction towards ODL. Table 3 shows that 188 respondents (98.4%) had either limited or unlimited data plan that would facilitate them during the ODL session. 87.41% (167) of the respondents were occupied with fast and medium speed of internet line connection. More than half of the students favoured blended learning (53.4%), whereas another 14.7% preferred total ODL. However, there were still some of them who preferred the traditional way face-to-face session (31.9%). Out of 191 respondents, 58.1% (111) were satisfied with the method of learning but 9.4% (18) felt that ODL did not benefit their understanding of learning.

Table 3

*Information on Internet and ODL*

No	Item	Total Sample	
		N	%
1.	Data Plan Limits:		
	Unlimited data	104	54.4
	Limited data	84	44.0
	No data	3	1.6
2.	Internet Speed:		
	Fast	40	20.9
	Medium	127	66.5
	Slow	23	12.0
	No Internet available	1	0.6
3.	Learning Style Preferable:		
	Face-to-face classes	61	31.9
	Open-distance learning	28	14.7
	Blended-learning	102	53.4
4.	Satisfaction of ODL:		
	Very Poor	5	2.6
	Poor	13	6.8
	Fair	62	32.5
	Good	78	40.8
	Excellent	33	17.3

The results of the ODL on social interaction had been summarized in Table 4 (below). Based on the information gathered, majority of the students (over 50%) agreed to all items that the ODL session affected their social interaction negatively. They agreed that prolonged study at home could lead to tension, socially and psychologically unhealthy and lessen their physical activities. Not to mention the feeling of loneliness, concern for cyber-harassment, and losing the traditional face-to-face session. These results supported the studies done by Mehal (2020), Coa (2020) and Baber (2021) as previously discussed.

Table 4

*Survey Questions on Social Interaction and ODL*

No	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
<b>SQ1</b>	3 (1.6)	7 (3.7)	37 (19.5)	58 (30.5)	85 (44.7)
<b>SQ2</b>	10 (5.3)	13 (6.8)	59 (31.1)	51 (26.8)	57 (30.0)
<b>SQ3</b>	0 (0.0)	2 (1.1)	43 (22.6)	74 (38.9)	71 (37.4)
<b>SQ4</b>	3 (1.6)	8 (4.2)	33 (17.4)	58 (30.5)	88 (46.3)
<b>SQ5</b>	4 (2.1)	8 (4.2)	37 (19.5)	64 (33.7)	77 (40.5)
<b>SQ6</b>	4 (2.1)	9 (4.7)	45 (23.7)	60 (31.6)	72 (37.9)
<b>SQ7</b>	2 (1.1)	5 (2.6)	53 (27.9)	70 (36.8)	60 (31.6)
<b>SQ8</b>	2 (1.1)	5 (2.6)	40 (21.1)	53 (27.9)	90 (47.4)
<b>SQ9</b>	8 (4.2)	15 (7.9)	67 (35.3)	46 (24.2)	54 (28.4)
<b>SQ10</b>	1 (0.5)	4 (2.1)	53 (27.9)	63 (33.2)	69 (36.3)

Table 5

*Model Summary and ANOVA***Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.818 <sup>a</sup>	.669	.667		.40015

a. Predictors: (Constant), ODL\_X

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	60.857	1	60.857	380.063	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	30.103	188	.160		
	Total	90.960	189			

a. Dependent Variable: Social\_Interaction\_Y

b. Predictors: (Constants), ODL\_X

Further analysis was done to convey on how strong is the relationship between the ODL and the social interaction, and the results are as in Table 5, above. From the analysis, the model indicates that the value of R is 0.818, meaning that there is a strong positive relationship between ODL and the social interaction among students. These results support the findings done by Lasfeto and Ulfa (2020) where there are positive relationships between ODL and social interactions. Furthermore,  $R^2=0.669$  indicates that 66.9% of the variation in ODL can be explained by the social interaction. From the ANOVA, it can be seen that the significant value is 0.000, which means that there are negative consequences of ODL on social interaction, since the survey questions were stated negatively.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, even though ODL has become parts of students' life, concerns on their social interaction should not be ignored. This is just a preliminary survey focusing on students in Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pulau Pinang. In future, the study needs to expand to students in other campuses too. More work should be done to investigate in detail the consequences of ODL. Besides social interaction, the survey could also include psychological impact on students due to ODL, and investigate the relationship between social impact and psychological impact.

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**Corresponding Author**

Noor 'Aina Abdul Razak

Jabatan Sains Komputer & Matematik (JSKM), Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.

Email: nooraina@uitm.edu.my

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