

International Webinar Forum: Enhancing Collaborations between Students in Malaysia and Indonesia

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Abstract

The Covid-19 situation has certainly created challenges due to the major shift from face-to-face to online learning seminars which are also known as webinars. In order to ensure continuity in collaborations between universities and institutions among students, this study attempts to find out tertiary students' readiness, potential challenges and strategies in implementing international webinar forum during the Covid-19 crisis. A total of 15 students' committee members are involved in conducting the webinar and all of them participated in this study. The data were collected through an online survey and consisted of a five-section questionnaire: demographic profile of the respondents, students' readiness, potential challenges and potential strategies to implement international webinar forum. The findings revealed that the students overall are ready for the project and it could develop their attributes as undergraduates. Despite their readiness, this study also generally indicated potential challenges which are difficulty to focus due to distractions, lack of motivation due to absence of face-to-face contact and internet connectivity. Several potential strategies to overcome challenges have been proposed which include internet connectivity, motivation and technical skills. Hence, this study provides a platform for awareness and improvements to the success of online collaboration project specifically international webinar forum conducted by tertiary students between two countries.

Keywords: Covid-19, International Webinar Forum, Collaborations.

Introduction

Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, UiTM Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Rembau and Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Palangka Raya, Indonesia. As part of the MoU's activities, an international webinar forum among the students between the two higher education institutes has been proposed. A team consisting of Students' Committee Members for the webinar has been set up and the approved forum title suggested by the students is "Online Learning Versus Physical Learning: Current Perspectives from Undergraduates in Malaysia and Indonesia". The main objective of this international webinar forum is to discuss and share perspectives on online and physical learning experienced by undergraduates in Malaysia and Indonesia. This is the first international collaboration for students from UiTM Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Rembau and Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Palangka Raya, Indonesia after the signing of the memorandum.

Webinars have been found essential during the Covid-19 crisis. Despite the uncertainty of the Covid-19 situation, this challenging situation has provided a unique opportunity in the field of education (Roslim et al., 2021). Webinars become an easy way to reach out to a greater number of participants who are geographically dispersed and in different time zones (Ramos and Soliven, 2020). Active students' participants can help to boost self-confidence and can give the opportunity to develop social skills (Segal and Robinson, 2019), to be equipped with relevant graduate attributes (Cassidy, 2006; Damoah, Peprah, & Brefo, 2021; Kivunja, 2014a and Kivunja, 2014b) and to enhance soft skills of students in institutions of higher education (Harun & Salamuddin, 2013). It is also an opportunity to learn essential technology platforms in managing online activities and updates for instance through social media (Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp, Telegram) and live video conferences (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Webex) as highlighted in Kamal, Shaipullah, Truna, Sabri, & Junaini, (2020).

Several international collaborations have shown that students are very enthusiastic in conducting the events online. Achakulvisut, Ruangrong, Bilgin, Van Den Bossche, Wyble, Goodman, & Kording, (2020) found that having an online international collaboration is more cost-efficient and it is considered as a good start for a person to venture into international conferences without having to physically travel to another place. Positive feedbacks on the perceptions of readiness of online learning between Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia and Telkom Universiti Bandung Indonesia students have reinforced the students' readiness in online activities (Shahlan et al., 2021).

Despite the success of the international collaboration with regards to conducting events online, there are still challenges that surfaced. Online learning and international collaborations has its own bright side and this has been recognised by the multiple sectors of education (Barrot, 2021), However, evidence on students' readiness in the implementation of online learning or any educational activities involving the use of internet is scarce (Rasheed, Kamsin & Abdullah, 2020). Pedaste & Kasemets (2021) found in their study that the biggest hurdle in organising online conference involving participants from different countries is getting an online tool that would make it possible for everyone to be provided with all the services of a regular conference. Besides, having a stable internet connection is vital when conducting online activities such as webinars. Ramos and Soliven (2020) have identified problems encountered in webinars include technical, environmental and resources factors.

Hidayati et al (2021) added such drawbacks generate learning anxiety. Hence it is recommended if the webinar organizer considers a participant friendly platform that uses less data consumption (Ramos and Soliven, 2020).

To fully support the MoU between Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, UiTM Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Rembau and Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Palangka Raya, Indonesia, full commitment will be given to further enhance this event to happen. Hence, it is essential to study the readiness of students' committee members who will be conducting the webinar and identify the potential challenges and strategies as an effort to make the event a success.

Problem Statement

International collaborations need to be continued despite the challenges due to Covid-19. Therefore, webinars become one of the ways to ensure its continuity. Several studies have focused on students' readiness, challenges and strategies factors when using webinars (Nur Najwa et al., 2021; Rasheed et al., 2020; Pedaste & Kasemets, 2021; Ramos and Soliven, 2020; Hidayati et al., 2021). However, as to date, no studies found that describe these factors from the perspectives of tertiary students' committee members conducting international webinar forum.

Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To find out the perceptions of students' committee members on their readiness to implement an international webinar forum.
2. To identify the potential challenges for students' committee members to implement an international webinar forum.
3. To identify the potential strategies for students' committee members to overcome challenges to implement an international webinar forum.

Methodology

This study aims to find out tertiary students' readiness, potential challenges and strategies in implementing an international webinar forum. In order to achieve the objectives, questionnaires were distributed to students' committee members from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Rembau, as well as the students from Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Palangka Raya, Indonesia before the online international webinar forum takes place. These are the students who will be conducting the proposed international webinar forum. A set of questionnaires adopted and adapted from Chung, Subramaniam & Dass (2020); Clinton & Thomas (2011) was prepared. There were four parts and the questionnaires were in English. The first part was the demographic profile of the respondents (10 items), the second part was the students' readiness (10 items, 5-point Likert Scale questionnaire), the third part was the potential challenges (1 item, open-ended) and the fourth part was the potential strategies (1 item, open-ended) in implementing international webinar forum. The data were collected online through Google Forms and the quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed descriptively using SPSS (Version 25).

Results and Discussion

Reliability Statistics Results

The internal reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Table 1 shows the value for Cronbach's alpha exceeds 0.9 for statements on students' readiness. This indicates high internal consistency of the items in the scale (George & Mallery, 2019).

Table 1. *Reliability results*

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Students' Readiness	.985	10

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The demographic information of the participants is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: *Demographic Profile of the Respondents*

Variables		Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	2 (13.3%)
	Female	13 (86.7%)
Program level	Diploma	5 (33.3%)
	Degree	10 (66.7%)
Geographical location	Malaysia	7 (46.7%)
	Indonesia	8 (53.3%)
Online location	Home in city/town area	10 (66.7%)
	Home in rural area	5 (33.3%)
Internet connectivity	Very good	2 (13.3%)
	Good	13 (86.7%)
Students' project experience	Yes	11 (73.3%)
	No	4 (26.7%)
Positions held in previous students' project	Project leader	3 (20%)
	Secretary	3 (20%)
	Members	8 (53.3%)
	Emcee	1 (6.7%)
Participation in at least one webinar	Yes	15 (100%)
Organizing at least one webinar	Yes	10 (66.7%)
	No	5 (33.3%)
The most preferred webinar platform	Zoom	10 (66.7%)
	Google Meet	5 (33.3%)

A total of 15 students took part in the study. The distribution of respondents according to gender were 86.7% of the respondents were female and 13.3% were male. Majority of the respondents (66.7%) were in the Degree Programme and 33.3% of the respondents were in

the Diploma Programme. 46.7% of the respondents were from Malaysia and 53.3% were from Indonesia. The online location of the respondents showed 66.7% were online at home in city or town area and 33.3% were online at home in rural area. The internet connectivity of the respondents displayed only 13.3% of the respondents received a very good internet connection and the majority of the respondents (86.7%) received a good internet connection. None of them had a poor internet connection.

From the 15 respondents, 73.3% had the experience in students' project and the other 26.7% never had the experience. The majority of the respondents with positions held in previous students' project were the members (53.3%), the secretary (20%), the project leader (20%) and the emcee (6.7%). All 15 respondents had the experience of participating in at least one webinar and 66.7% had organized at least one webinar whereas the other 33.3% never had the experience in organizing a webinar. The majority of the respondents (66.7%) preferred Zoom and 33.3% preferred Google Meet as their most preferred platform for webinar.

Students' Readiness

The perceptions of university students on their readiness to implement an international webinar forum is presented in Table 2 and Figure 1. The number of students who indicated a positive response for their readiness in implementing an international webinar forum was acceptably high with 40% strongly agreed and 40% agreed for 'Item 1: I am very excited about conducting international webinar forum.' and 33.3% strongly agreed and 53.3% agreed for 'Item 2: I cannot wait to begin this project'. The students also think this project will be carried out successfully with 40% strongly agreed and 40% agreed for 'Item 3: I think this international webinar forum will be carried out successfully.' More than half of the students hope that this project will instil positive values as in 'Item 4: I hope this project will instil positive values within me'.

In relation to the graduate attributes, the analysis has strongly indicated that they are aware of the importance of broadening their perspectives with the outside world with a total of 73.3% strongly agreed and agreed on two items, 'Item 5: I want to broaden my perspectives with the outside world.' and 'Item 6: I want to share my knowledge and experience through international collaboration.' The majority of the students with 46.7% strongly agreed and 33.3% agreed with 'Item 7: I want to improve my leadership skills.' and 80% both strongly agreed and agreed with 'Item 8: I want to improve my communication skills.' Both 'Item 9: I want to improve my teamwork skills.' and 'Item 10: I want to increase my confidence level.' received 86.7% and 73.3% for strongly agreed and agreed which indicated acceptably high positive responses. Hence, with this in mind, each student plays important roles in the team to foster graduate attributes. If the students could develop over 20 per cent for these skills and attributes through this program, it is considered as a good indication (Clinton & Thomas, 2011).

Table 2. Students' Readiness in Implementing International Webinar Forum (n=15)

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
1. I am very excited about conducting international webinar forum.	2	0	1	6	6
2. I cannot wait to begin this project.	2	0	0	8	5
3. I think this international webinar forum will be carried out successfully.	1	1	1	4	5
4. I hope this project will instil positive values within me.	2	0	1	2	10
5. I want to broaden my perspectives with the outside world.	1	1	2	6	5
6. I want to share my knowledge and experience through international collaboration.	1	2	1	5	6
7. I want to improve my leadership skills.	2	0	1	5	7
8. I want to improve my communication skills.	2	0	1	4	8
9. I want to improve my teamwork skills.	2	0	0	7	6
10. I want to increase my confidence level.	2	0	2	5	6

SD strongly disagree, D disagree, N neutral, A agree, SA strongly agree

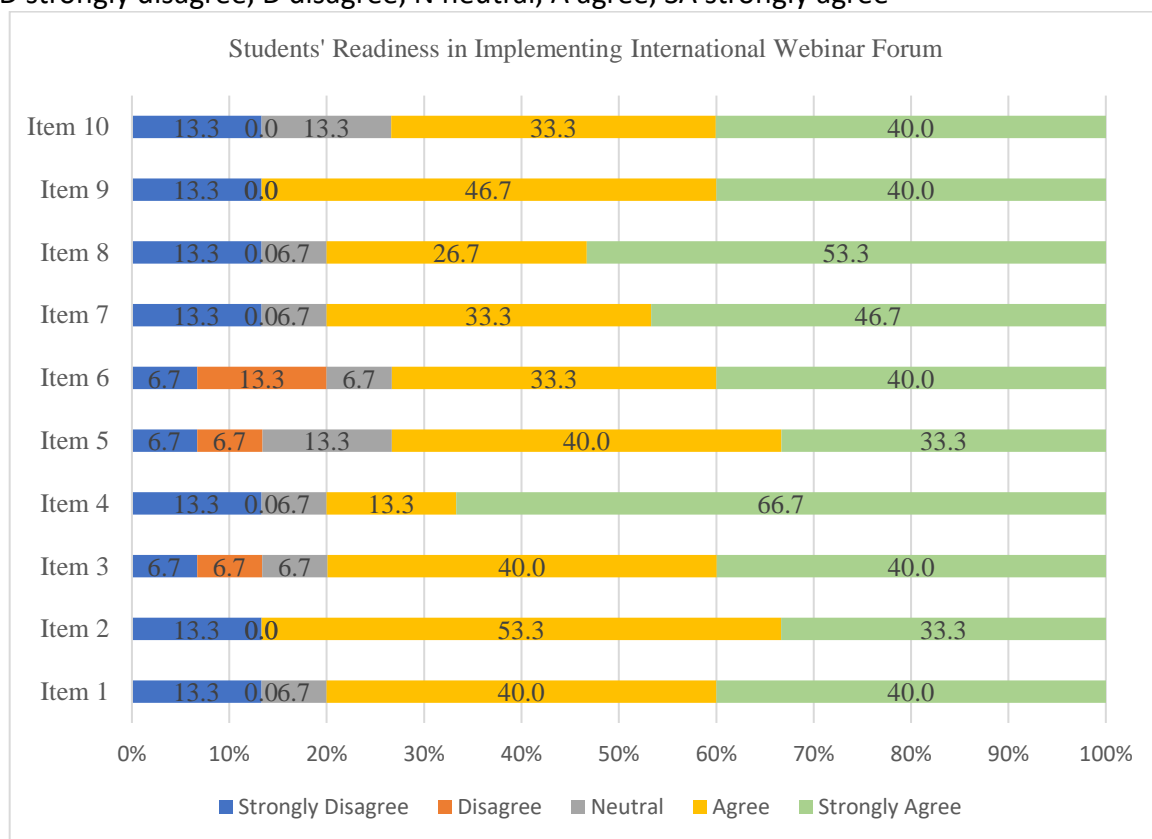


Figure 1. Students' Readiness in Implementing International Webinar Forum (n=15)

Descriptive Statistics on Students' Readiness in Implementing International Webinar Forum

Overall, the mean is more than 3.87 for all the ten statements. In other words, responses were more positive rather than negative. Hence, it can be concluded that these students reported positive responses in their readiness in implementing international webinar forum.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics on Students' Readiness in Implementing International Webinar Forum (n=15)*

Items	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I am very excited about conducting international webinar forum.	1	5	3.93	1.335
2. I cannot wait to begin this project.	1	5	3.93	1.280
3. I think this international webinar forum will be carried out successfully.	1	5	4.00	1.195
4. I hope this project will instil positive values within me.	1	5	4.20	1.424
5. I want to broaden my perspectives with the outside world.	1	5	3.87	1.187
6. I want to share my knowledge and experience through international collaboration.	1	5	3.87	1.302
7. I want to improve my leadership skills.	1	5	4.00	1.363
8. I want to improve my communication skills.	1	5	4.07	1.387
9. I want to improve my teamwork skills.	1	5	4.00	1.309
10. I want to increase my confidence level.	1	5	3.87	1.356

Students' Potential Challenges

A list of potential challenges related to implementing international webinar forum was posed in the questionnaire for respondents to choose from and they were allowed to choose more than one challenge. There were also provisions for additional challenges that respondents could write down. These challenges were calculated then ranked based on the percentage. The list of challenges was ranked based on the percentage of responses. The potential challenges were difficulty to focus due to distractions (80.00%), lack of motivation due to absence of face-to-face contact (40.00%), internet connectivity (40.00%), slow personal laptop and devices (33.33%), lack of technical skills (33.33%) and limited broadband data (26.67%). Another potential challenge was written by the respondent (6.67%). It is important to note that internet connectivity is not the biggest challenge for the respondents unlike in Chung, Subramaniam & Dass's (2020) study. However, the problem with distractions is rather similar to Ramos and Soliven (2020) findings on environmental factor. This is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. *Potential challenges related to international webinar forum (n=15)*

Potential Challenges	n	%	Rank
Difficulty to focus due to distractions	12	80.00	1
Lack of motivation due to absence of face-to-face contact	6	40.00	2
Internet connectivity	6	40.00	2
Slow personal laptop and devices	5	33.33	3
Lack of technical skills	5	33.33	3
Limited broadband data	4	26.67	4
Additional challenge	1	6.67	5

The respondents provided reasons for the potential challenges that they had chosen. Direct responses were retrieved from the responses, (*sic*) is used to show the text was quoted verbatim, and the mistake it marks appears in the source. The responses are as follows:

Difficulty to Focus Due to Distractions

S1: my siblings voice like opera singer (*sic*)

S7: I have to find some specific quite place or special place that is focused to run a webinar. (*sic*)

S13: Yes, Yes, because I don't like to be disturbed when I'm on an important (*sic*)

S14: Yes, because i might be panic (*sic*)

S15: Yes.

Lack of Motivation due to Absence of Face-to-face Contact

S6: Online events only make it feels less nerve-wracking like face to face does. (*sic*)

S10: Maybe because I cannot deal with my friends face to face. (*sic*)

S11: Face to face learning is more fun than online. Gathering with friends, discussing together, etc. will make the class atmosphere more fun (*sic*)

S13: Agreed, because it can increase interest (*sic*)

Internet Connectivity

S2: Sometimes the connection lost (*sic*)

S3: It is depends on the situation especially weather condition (*sic*)

S5: Good but also depends on weather. On rainy days, it'll become slow (*sic*)

S11: Internet connectivity is not stable here (*sic*)

Slow Personal Laptop and Devices

S6: Sudden turned off of the devices. (*sic*)

S7: My personal laptop is kind of slow respond sometimes, but it can be used well. (*sic*)

S11: My personal laptop so far it is been pretty good, although sometimes it is slow but still acceptable. (*sic*)

S12: Yes my personal laptop kind of slow sometimes (*sic*)

S13: Yes, Because it's below standard (*sic*)

S14: Sometimes it is slow when open link zoom (*sic*)

Lack of Technical Skills

S1: Im not a pro at IT (*sic*)

S10: Yes, because I did not take extra class for it. (*sic*)

S14: I will shut down the laptop or out from the app (*sic*)

Limited Broadband Data

S7: yes, it is limited. (*sic*)

S10: Yes, because I am using prepaid data. (*sic*)

S11: In one meeting via zoom, google meet, etc., I can consume 500 mb of data. Moreover, in one day you can meet 2-3 times. So, a lot of data to buy (*sic*)

Additional Challenge

S13: Lack of encouragement from some agencies (*sic*)

Students' Potential Strategies

Several potential strategies to overcome challenges for conducting international webinar forum have been proposed by respondents. Their main concerns were the internet connectivity, technical skills and motivation factor due to absence of face-to face contact. Direct responses were retrieved from the responses, (*sic*) is used to show the text was quoted verbatim, and the mistake it marks appears in the source. The responses are as follows:

Internet Connectivity

S2: Good weather (*sic*)

S3: Trying to spare another internet connection on data as back-up (*sic*)

S5: Find the place with the strongest connection. Be in a room or closed area. Be punctual and get ready 10 minutes before the event. (*sic*)

S15: If the connection is unstable, I will close all useless apps and use other available connection in my place. Or if it doesn't work, i will turn off my cam. (*sic*)

Lack of Technical Skills

S9: Several participant may get any trouble when they attend the webinar. Maybe we need to stream it on YouTube to ease people to rewatch the webinar. (*sic*)

S10: Maybe provide computer and technical skills before event happen. (*sic*)

Lack of Motivation Due to Absence of Face-to-face Contact

S4: make a two way communication with the audience (*sic*)

S7: Make it conventional (face to face) in one place (malaysia/indonesia) and invite some famous speakers as the special guest to gain more attention and of course "branding". (*sic*)

S13: Committee coordination and collaboration must be mixed (*sic*)

Additional Strategies

S6: We will have a backup plan to cover the program if anything goes wrong. We will have twice to thrice rehearsal to make sure everything is perfectly prepared (*sic*)

S11: Better time management. Especially in doing college assignments, it is hoped that they can be done faster. Don't procrastinate, because most students, including myself, often procrastinate in doing college assignments. (*sic*)

Conclusion

In line with the objectives of this study, several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, it was found that the respondents in this study generally indicated that they are ready to implement international online webinar forum. Besides, this project could increase their graduate attributes or skills. Secondly, potential challenges that these respondents might face would be difficulty to focus due to distractions, lack of motivation due to absence of face-to-face contact and internet connectivity. Internet connectivity is not their potential challenge which usually becomes the hindrance in online activity. Apart from the potential challenges the students might face, they are also aware of potential strategies that might help them to tackle the challenges of internet connectivity, motivation and technical skills. Hence, the students' committee members should be able to have structured suitable plans to have a smooth running of international webinar forum.

This study is not without its limitations. The respondents for this study both from Malaysia and Indonesia are relatively small as these were the respondents who would implement international webinar forum. Findings from this study hopefully could provide a platform for any international webinar forum that will be conducted to ensure the students' committee members are aware of their roles and challenges they might face throughout. As such, effective strategies could be recognized earlier to meet the objectives of any online projects particularly international webinar forum. Further research needs to be conducted in order to find out other factors that contribute to students' readiness as well as the potential challenges and strategies.

Finally, this study concludes its contributions towards its significant role to the existing knowledge theoretically and contextually. Essentially, enhancing students' collaborations between countries need a proper planning as well as adequate preparations to achieve the objectives of each project. In doing so, students need to prepare themselves with the kind of environment that could lower their affective filter. Their readiness to implement international webinar forum adds to the body of knowledge as an effort to identify potential challenges and strategies to make the project a success. This significantly will tackle the conditions that could generate anxiety among students as highlighted in Hidayati, Ramalia & Abdullah (2021). Consequently, this encourages students' motivation to foster their graduate attributes through such international program which are important skills for students to gain at the tertiary level.

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