

Conference Paper

Investigating E-Learning Readiness During the COVID-19 Pandemic Among Malaysian ESL Teachers: What are the Limitations of Current Scales?

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ORCID:Asmaa AlSaqqaf: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2074-4328>**Abstract**

The quick spread of the COVID-19 pandemic across the globe has seriously affected all aspects of individuals' lives including the educational sector. In response to this pandemic in Malaysia, the government implemented a Movement Control Order (MCO) on 18 March 2020, where the whole country was put on lockdown. Yet, the teaching and learning activities had to continue during this period, a process that was carried out through a full reliance on e-learning. This paper attempted to investigate the level of e-learning technological readiness among English language teachers to utilize e-learning in teaching during the MCO in Malaysia. A total of 68 English language teachers responded to an online cross-sectional survey that measured technological skills readiness based on Chapnick's (2000) e-learning readiness model. Results showed that during the MCO in Malaysia, English language teachers were technologically ready to use e-learning in teaching. However, these findings contradict the latest reports that highlight a number of challenges faced by Malaysian teachers in conducting online classes. This inconsistency could be attributed to the limitations identified in the existing e-learning surveys and questionnaires that deal with extremely limited aspects of technological readiness. Hence, this research stresses the urgent need to develop up-to-date scales that can comprehensively address the various aspects of the advanced technological skills that should be mastered by teachers and educators, especially in this era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR4.0)

Keywords: e-learning technological readiness, ESL teachers, COVID-19 pandemic, Malaysia

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1. Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 (previously known as the *novel coronavirus disease*) a pandemic on 11 March 2020. The pandemic has led to global disruption affecting all aspects of life socially and economically as well as

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educationally. In response to this pandemic in Malaysia, the government implemented a Movement Control Order (MCO) on 18 March 2020, where the whole country was put on lockdown. Nevertheless, the teaching and learning activities had to continue during this period, a process that was carried out through a full reliance on e-learning. Thus, in such a critical and urgent situation, teachers had no option but to conduct their classes using online platforms.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian Ministry of Education has been promoting e-learning at schools for many years now, while the importance of integrating e-learning in the teaching and learning process has been clearly stressed in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013- 2025). Regrettably, however, reports released during the implementation of the MCO revealed that *“teachers are ill-equipped for the shift to remote learning. They lack the skills, training, and tools required for successful online teaching and learning.”* [1]

Thus, it is of paramount importance to investigate e-learning readiness during this exceptional period of time, particularly with ESL teachers in order to assess the interaction process as well as the efficiency level that is urgently needed when using a language other than the mother tongue in virtual classrooms.

On the other hand, following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of studies concerned with the theme of Covid-19 have been conducted in a short period. However, many of these studies are not research-based articles and are not related to the field of education (e.g. [2–5]).

Additionally, there is hardly any research dealing with English teaching and learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly in the context of Malaysia. Therefore, this current research attempts to reduce this gap identified in the relevant literature. Hence, the main research question addressed by the current study is:

What is the level of technological skills readiness to use e-learning among Malaysian ESL teachers during the MCO period caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. E-learning Readiness Model [6]

The E-learning Readiness Model introduced by [6] assesses individuals' readiness towards the use of e-learning within an institution or organization. Though [6] proposes eight constructs in his model, the current paper is concerned with Technological Skills Readiness as it is relevant to the exceptional situation caused by the COVID-19

pandemic since it addresses the ability to solve the technical matters and operate the e-learning devices.

3. Method

This section sheds light on the methodology adopted in the study, the research approach, the respondents, the instruments utilized, as well as data collection and analysis procedures.

3.1. Research Approach

A quantitative approach using a cross-sectional survey design is adopted by the present paper. The survey was randomly distributed to the respondents through an online survey platform during the MCO in Malaysia.

3.2. Respondents

A total of 68 Malaysian ESL teachers responded to the online survey. They are all in-service teachers teaching the English subject in Malaysian government schools.

3.3. Research Instrument

The present paper employed A five-point Likert scale questionnaire that was adapted from [7] to measure the technological silks readiness among Malaysian ESL teachers based on [6] e-learning readiness model. As shown in Figure 1 below, the mean scores of e-learning readiness were calculated based on guidelines proposed by [8] as a measurement of the E-Learning Readiness score (ELR).

As shown in Figure 1 above, the level of e-learning readiness is divided into four levels. While the scores between 1 and 2.6 mean that the respondents are *not ready and need a lot of work*, the range between 2.61 and 3.4 indicates that they are *not ready and need some work*. On the other hand, the level between 3.41 and 4.2 shows that there is some *readiness but it needs a few improvements*. Finally, the scores between 4.21-5 confirm that the respondents are *ready to go ahead*. Thus, a score of 3.41 and above is the minimum index of the expected level of readiness [8].

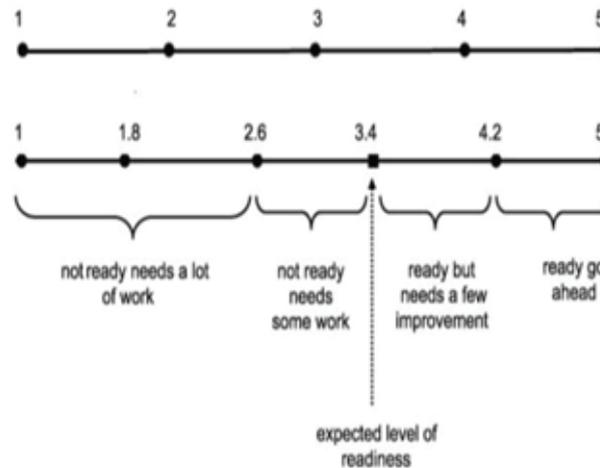


Figure 1: Aydin & Tasci's measurement scale of e-Learning Readiness Index

4. Results

It took nearly one month to collect data from Malaysian ESL teachers during the period of MCO lockdown starting on 18 May 2020 in Malaysia. The collected data were processed through a descriptive statistical analysis using SPSS version 26 to answer the research question proposed in the study as mentioned previously. 53 (78%) of the respondents were females, while 15 (22%) were male teachers.

The reliability analysis for the items employed in the questionnaire was measured using Cronbach's alpha. The minimum accepted value of Cronbach's alpha for educational research is 0.70 [9]. Cronbach's alpha value of the items used in the current research reached 0.81, which indicates that the questionnaire adapted is highly reliable.

Regarding the results of the main question proposed by the current research, Table 1 below shows that the respondents' technological skills readiness was generally found to be ready with a mean score of 3.96. While it is not hard to find that the respondents have essential skills to manipulate a computer, but surprisingly, item 3 pertaining to technological skills construct scored a mean value of 3.35, which is less than the expected readiness level of 3.41.

5. Discussion

Respondents' technological skills readiness is concerned with the mastery level of the technological skills that individuals possess in utilizing learning. In the current research, the technological skills readiness of Malaysian ESL teacher scored a high mean value of 3.96. This result demonstrates that the respondents have mastered the essential

TABLE 1: Results Of Technological Skills Readiness Among Malaysian Esl Teachers

Technological Skills Readiness (overall mean= 3.961, n=68)	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I have the basic skills to operate a computer (e.g. keyboarding, etc.).	4.33	0.66
2. I am good at using Microsoft programs (e.g. Word, etc.) in teaching English.	4.02	0.68
3. I know how to install any software on my computer to support my teaching of English.	3.35	0.83
4. I have the basic skills to use the search engines (e.g. Google, etc.) to find the needed materials and information on English subject.	4.14	0.66
The Overall Mean of Technological Skills Readiness	3.96*	0.71

* Greater than 3.41 suggested by Aydin & Tasci's e-Learning Readiness Index "Ready but needs a few improvements"

technological skills to fulfill the requirements of integrating e-learning in the teaching process. They can work with a computer and are able to find the learning materials online. Surprisingly, the item "I know how to install any software on my computer to support my teaching of English" scored a mean score of 3.35 (<3.41). This reveals that Malaysian ESL teachers tend to face some problems related to installing teaching software to enhance their teaching at this time.

Similarly, according to [10], teachers can manipulate the basic computer tasks, yet they often face difficulties when using computers for more advanced purposes. Among the justifications for this high mean in technological skills readiness is that the adapted questionnaire items do not comprehensively address the actual technological skills that educators in this era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR4.0) should have, particularly when there is a full reliance on e-learning as it has been the case during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As broadly known, the vast majority of individuals nowadays, including children, have the basic technological skills such as operating a computer (e.g. keyboarding, etc.), using Microsoft programs (e.g. Word, etc.), installing any software, and searching engines (e.g. Google, etc.), which are the aspects measured by the current study's based on questionnaires identified in the relevant literature. This reveals that the existing surveys dealing with e-learning should be "updated" to be able to measure situations in reality. Thus, this research calls for developing an up-to-date survey that can address the various aspects of the advanced technological skills that should be mastered by individuals whether teachers and educators, particularly in this era this era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR4.0).

6. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the educational landscape in the world and moved the utilization of e-learning from an integration level to a full reliance one. With such a situation, issues that have arisen concerning the implementation of e-learning should be investigated using comprehensive surveys that address all aspects involved in this unprecedentedly complete dependence on e-learning in education. This is a call to develop scales and questionnaires that can cover the unique side of this matter together with the technological part.

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