

Ma'had Al-Zaytun Shifts Towards Online Learning: Are They Satisfied?

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Abstract

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has caused disruptions in the delivery of instruction at all levels of educational institutions, whether those institutions are elementary, secondary, or postsecondary in nature. Due to this pandemic, a group of secondary school international students from Malaysia were unable to conduct face-to-face classes in Ma'had Al-Zaytun International School in Indonesia and were forced to shift towards fully online learning mode. This study aims to explore students' satisfaction and motivation in the online learning interaction at this international school. Based on the transaction distance theory, this study focuses on four modes of interaction, namely (i) interaction between students and teachers, (ii) interaction between students, (iii) interaction between students and learning materials, and (iv) interaction between students and interfaces. A qualitative study was employed to investigate the satisfaction and motivation of students using a semi-structured interview, class observation, and daily class report. Findings indicate that the majority of the students were satisfied with these online learning interactions and teachers were the main factors that motivated them to learn. According to this study as well, parents are also a factor that affects student participation in online learning. Students who receive encouragement and support from their parents are more likely to be satisfied with this online learning, which suggest that future research could be done to further examine.

Keywords: *Students' satisfaction, students' motivation, student interaction, online learning interaction, online classroom, COVID-19 pandemic.*

1. Introduction

Ma'had Al-Zaytun is one of the Islamic boarding school or Pesantren that integrates modernity and Islamic values which is located at Indramayu, West Jawa, Indonesia. This Pesantren was built on an area of 1,200 hectares with the establishment of a foundation called the Indonesian Pesantren Foundation (YPI – *Yayasan Pesantren Indonesia*) in 1993 and then was officially inaugurated by President B. J. Habibie on 27 August 1999 (Fabroni et al., 2021). It is not surprising that the *Washington Times* (2005, August 29)

called it the largest Islamic madrasah in Southeast Asia (Crouch, 2014). The students come from various regions in Indonesia and abroad, such as Malaysia, Singapore, Timor Leste, and South Africa.

In 2020, due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, has resulted in schools being closed around the world. Prevention of COVID-19 is carried out with various strategies and policies had been implemented by the Ma'had Al-Zaytun community, hence enable them to conduct face to face classes as usual following the WHO protocol (Prawoto et al., 2020). Nonetheless, there is still obstacle for new international students to get there as the Indonesian Student Visa was not permitted. In accordance with the verses of the Qur'an (4:9), "Let people fear the day when they leave small children behind them unprovided, and how concerned they would be for them..." Therefore, Ma'had Al-Zaytun collaborates with *Permuafakatan Ibu Bapa Ma'had Al-Zaytun Indonesia* (PERMAI), Malaysia and taking initiative to conduct online classes for these Malaysian students whom were remaining in Malaysia.

2. Literature Review

The main aspects of teaching and learning in a face-to-face classroom may seem different in an online classroom, but one thing that holds constant is the importance for teachers to meet the needs of all students (Beasley & Beck, 2017). In this section, we will briefly outline the online learning, online learning interaction, students' satisfaction, and students' motivation.

2.1 Online Learning

Online learning refers to learning experienced in synchronous or asynchronous environments using the internet, where students interact with instructors and fellow students from anywhere (Singh & Thurman, 2019). Based on this definition, many arguments are given in support of online learning. Among these include being accessible, affordable, and flexible. The learners are able to attend online classes from anywhere. It is economical and the learners can schedule learning as per their convenience (Dhawan, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic is forcing all levels of education institutions to overcome the traditional way of teaching through physical classroom engagement. There is an increasing need for virtual engagement to replace physical interaction. As to meet the global emergency of educational institution closures caused by COVID-19, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) suggested that educational institutions equip themselves with online learning technologies (Crawford et al., 2020).

Many research studies have demonstrated the usefulness of online learning in the classroom (Kassih, 2021). Using educational technologies in teaching and learning in school settings has also been shown to have a number of benefits, including encouraging more inquiry-based learning (Green et al., 2015), improving students' engagement (Borup, 2016), and raising students' motivation (Borup, Walters & Call-Cummings, 2020).

2.2 Online Learning Interaction

Interaction is one of great importance to the success of online learning, but most of the studies examining online interactions were conducted in higher education (Lin, Zheng & Zhang, 2017). However, since COVID-19, online learning has been a necessity for all levels of education, from elementary to tertiary level. Prior to online learning, distance learning was introduced for those who could not be available physically in a traditional classroom (Tschetter, 2014). Distance learning is defined as students and instructors are not in the same place, but the learning process can be carried out to various generations. In line with the development of technology, this distance learning can be better implemented through the use of the Internet, some even define distance learning and online learning are two things in common (Moore et al., 2011).

Moore (1989) addressed the importance of three modes of interaction in distance education: learner-instructor, learner-learner and learner-content interaction. Later, Hillman, Wills and Gunawardena (1994)

remarked that interaction between students and technology that delivers teaching has been missing in the literature as distance education content has evolved in a telecommunication era. As a result, they expanded Moore's model to include a fourth mode of interaction, i.e. learner-interface interaction, which is defined as interaction between a learner and a technical medium in order to interact with content, instructors, and other learners.

Interaction between the instructor and the students is called learner–instructor interaction. It includes advice, assistance, evaluation, and encouragement (Moore, 1989). With or without an instructor, learner–learner interaction involves two-way communication between learners. Through interaction with peers allows students to share ideas and receive feedback. A one-way process of elaborating and reflecting on the subject matter or course content is referred to as learner–content interaction. Learners' interaction with content starts an internal didactic discourse, which occurs when they communicate or reflect about the information, knowledge, or ideas they have learned (Moore, 1986).

2.3 Students' Satisfaction

Students' satisfaction is the result of students' expectations and experiences from students' interactions with the educational environment for a particular subject, course or programme (Stukalina, 2012). Students' satisfaction is considered a key component in determining the quality of a programme in today's market as these students are asset to the institution and can be contributors as alumni (Sanjai K. Parahoo et al., 2016). This statement is also consistent with Prebensen and Xie (2017) who stated that satisfaction has an important role in generating loyalty, positive word of mouth, and sustainable profits for service organisations such as education.

Students' satisfaction reflects their perceptions of their learning experience, which is a critical factor in determining the success of online learning (Alqurashi, 2019). Although numerous researchers have assessed students' satisfaction with online courses and the online learning environment, providing students with the overall reliance on the online learning system in the face of the COVID-19 disaster, it has become more critical to understand the impact of online learning quality on students' satisfaction.

2.4 Students' Motivation

Being motivated helps people to start and keep going on their way to achieve a specific goal. Motivation is crucial to the learning process and achievement in students' careers (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). Motivation can excite, guide and maintain behaviour, helping students to engage, focus, and continue probing. Learning motivation is defined as a consistent pattern of trying to achieve goals, pursuing faith, and maintaining emotions (Yang, 2022).

Self-determination theory suggests that if students are motivated to participate in a course, then they will gain more from that experience than if they are disinterested (Thurber & Trautvetter, 2020). This is because an activity provides the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2002). The ability to remain motivated is a significant aspect in improving learning results. According to the findings of researchers, there is a strong relationship between participants' motivation to learn online as well as their success and engagement in online learning environments (Rahman et al., 2021).

This study aims to determine students' satisfaction and motivation in the online learning interaction in Ma'had Al-Zaytun International School. The main objectives of this research are to:

- i. Identify the students' experiences in four different interactions, namely (a) student-teacher interaction, (b) student-student interaction, (c) student-learning material interaction, and (d) student-interface interaction.
- ii. Explore the students' satisfaction in relation to students' interactions.
- iii. Explore the students' motivation in relation to students' interactions.

3. Research Method

The present study employed qualitative method as an approach to explore the student’s experiences in online learning interaction and student’s satisfaction. It is the goal of qualitative research to better understand how individuals interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what significance they assign to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). The data was gathered through observations during the classes, class reports, and a semi-structured interview.

3.1. Participant and Context

A total of 17 students from Malaysia aged 13-year-old completed the Class 7 of the first-year Madrasah Tsanawiyah or lower secondary school in year 2020/2021 and were involved in this study. Table 1 shows that 11 of the students (64.7 percent) are male and 6 (35.35 percent) are female from five different Malaysian states. The majority of them, 12 (70.59 percent), were from the Klang Valley, Malaysia.

Table 1. Number of Students by State in Malaysia

State	Number of Students	Percentages (%)
Selangor	10	58.8
Kuala Lumpur	2	11.8
Perak	3	17.6
Perlis	1	5.9
Johor	1	5.9
TOTAL	17	100

During the first year of Madrasah Tsanawiyah, all students are required to take seven subjects. The subjects included Indonesian Language, Arabic Language, English Language, History and Social Sciences, Mathematics, Science, and *Tafaqub fi Diin*. During the first semester, classes were held from Thursday to Sunday afternoon; while during the second semester, classes were held from Monday to Thursday afternoon. For this particular group of students, the sessions lasted between one and two hours per day.

4. Findings

The following are the results of individual interviews with each student. The findings are also based on observations made in the classroom by Malaysian teachers, as well as their reflections on those observations.

4.1. Student-Teacher Interaction

Three primary communication platforms were utilised to communicate with teachers: Google Meet (GM) (refer to Figure 1) for online classrooms, Google Classroom (GC) for assignment submission, and WhatsApp, which allows students to message teachers directly. According to the observations made during the online lessons, 83 percent of students communicated with the teachers. Due to the Internet connectivity issues or living in a rural region, the remaining students provided fewer responses. The following were the students’ responses to these concerns:

“I did reply to the teacher’s question, but the teacher did not hear me.”

“...always lag, the Internet line was not okay.”

“I can understand what the teachers teach but sometimes have Internet problem.”



Figure 1. A screenshot of an Online Class in Session

When asked if they contacted their teacher outside of the class, 59 percent of students said they did. They contacted their teacher for a variety of reasons, including:

- “I can understand what the teacher is teaching. If I don’t understand, I will WhatsApp the teacher personally to ask and the teacher will help...”
- “There are difficult subjects such as IPS. I will ask the teacher outside the class ... very satisfied with the teacher’s answer.”
- “I will ask the teacher especially about group assignments.”
- “Sometimes, I just text the teacher to say hello...”

4.2. Student-Student Interaction

More than half of the students who took online courses reported that they had contacted other students to ask for help with their assignments. Those who keep in touch believe that their friends know more and are more intelligent than them. Additionally, there is a student who is regularly contacted since he or she consistently completes the assignments assigned by the teacher on time.

- “I preferred to ask friends first and then teacher, but sometimes I am worried to disturb them...”
- “Notes... I don’t understand very much; if I don’t understand, I will ask friends...text them and see who responds...”
- “If it’s easy to do the task, I will do it myself... If not, I will ask my friends, some of them are smarter.”
- “I do contact my friend but sometimes... just asking about the class.”
- “I do not contact my friends, but they always contact me to ask about assignment...”

4.3. Student-Learning Material Interaction

When asked about learning material such as notes or slides provided by their teachers whether the students read or refer to when they do not understand or as reference to do the assignment, the following were among their comments:

- “I read the notes to better understand, parents told me to read ... easy to understand.”
- “I read the notes... easy to understand.”
- “It’s readable... easy, simple and concise...”
- “...also helps to understand, especially mathematics...”

Some of the students do not prefer to read notes or the given materials by their teachers. One of the students mentioned that he preferred to read books compared to reading the learning materials given. While others only read the notes for examination purposes or if their parents

asked them to do so.

“I don't really like notes... I prefer books.”

“...can understand the notes, but I only read for the exam ...”

“I don't read except during class time, there are a few things that I don't understand... but okay.”

“I read sometimes (if my mom told me), I don't really understand...”

4.4. Student-Interface Interaction

Observations throughout class revealed that students have no difficulty using Google Meet (GM) as a synchronous learning medium. There are a few students that faced Internet connection issues, but it does not impede with their studies. Even when asked, the majority of students said they were comfortable using GM as a learning medium, and some of them, albeit not many, connected with each other using GM.

“GM is used to...”

“GM at first felt difficult, then it's okay.”

“GM is comfortable...”

“I was a GM with some friends...”

For assignment submissions, most teachers use Google Classroom (GC). As the number of students in this group is small, some teachers prefer that their students submit directly through WhatsApp. Only a few students are familiar with GC for assignment submissions. They stated that they are still seeking parental assistance in submitting the assignment.

“GC is easy to use...”

“GC is easy, there is a record, there is a notification and it is organised... it's easy to ask the teacher there.”

“GC, I feel a little difficult... do not understand how to use, my father will help to send assignments.”

“I did ask for help from my parents when using GC...”

“Every time I want to send an assignment; I ask my father or mother for help.”

4.5. Students' Satisfaction and Students' Motivation

Overall, the students were satisfied with Ma'had Al-Zaytun's online learning class, while some students voiced that it would be preferable if they could study face-to-face with the school's teacher. A few students even remarked that they felt more at ease during the morning lesson because the during the afternoon class, they felt a little tired.

“Enjoy, excited to have a class with the teacher there, proud...”

“Enjoy and satisfy, other than studying here (Malaysia).”

“Enjoy and be comfortable, but I prefer the face-to-face class...”

“It's the best, but if I could go there, it would be better...”

“Fun, can add knowledge... satisfied.”

“I like online classes, but I prefer the mornings... afternoons, sleepy.”

“I like online classes. If face-to-face, I feel nervous.”

The students were asked which interactions during this online learning process they were most satisfied with and the majority responded teachers. While they communicate with peers as well, they are more satisfied if they can communicate directly with the teacher. However, some students feel more at ease referring to notes or soliciting assistance from parents.

When asked about what motivated them to learn from these four interactions, the majority said teachers. Here are the students' comments:

- “Because of the school itself, the teacher is good.”
- “Lucky to be able to study with the teacher there... The teacher really teaches, but sometimes lags... The teacher still continues.”
- “... because the teacher always give motivation during class.”
- “The teachers there are kind and don't make us do a lot of school work.”
- “Teachers educate to succeed, not only to pass the exams.”
- “The teacher is the most motivation to learn.”

Additionally, some students stated that friends did encouraged them, and one student stated that he was delighted upon viewing the slides presented by the teacher. There were numerous illustrations, which made it easy to comprehend.

5. Discussion

Although learning may place online, students value interaction with teachers both in and out of the classroom. In addition to questions about the homework, students can inquire regarding how the teacher is doing and how they study in class later. Some students prefer to ask their friends first rather than the teacher for a variety of reasons, including the belief that their friends are smarter or know more than they do. Learning materials also aid student learning, yet many students still require parental supervision to study.

Even though many students are unfamiliar with the interface at first, after a few weeks of instruction, they can utilise it effectively. There are also individuals who require the assistance of their parents to send assignments using Google Classroom. Most students prefer face-to-face lessons if given the option, but they are satisfied with the online classes that are offered. Motivating factors include the teacher's patience and manageable homework assignments.

Due to the fact that online learning differs from face-to-face learning, there was a certain amount of uncertainty that was predicted to be magnified in the crisis situation of COVID-19 (Marshall, Dunstan & Bartik, 2020). The fundamental advantage of online learning is that it overcomes time and space constraints, thus allows students to engage in self-directed learning. However, it lacks the teachers' oversight that traditional schooling provides; consequently, leaving students feeling alone and unconnected. As a result, online learners must be very self-regulated and independent; otherwise, their online learning efficacy may be low. For this age group, support from parents plays an important role in motivating students to learn. Some students also commented that the role of mentors (volunteer teachers from Malaysia who supported their learning) also helps in motivating them to commence learning.

6. Conclusion

Participants in this study were in a unique educational context because they were the only Malaysian international students who completely attended the online classes from Ma'had Al-Zaytun, Indonesia. Through transactional distance theory, this study seeks to determine how students interact with teachers, other students, learning materials, and interface or technology at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the findings, each student has a unique interaction preference based on their level of comfort. The four components investigated, the interaction between students-teachers, students-students, students-learning materials and students-interface, revealed that teachers are the primary contributors to students' motivation and satisfaction. It is also important for students to have the ability to effectively communicate and use technology or interfaces because the online learning environment requires students to be involved in continuous communication and interaction processes with content, teachers, and other students. Based on the findings of this study as well, the involvement of a student's parents is another element that can influence their engagement in online education. Students are more likely to be satisfied with their online learning experience if they receive encouragement and support from their parents. It is recommended that future research investigate additional elements connected to students' motivation and students' satisfaction with their online course experience. Further research is required to investigate the

collaborative aspects of taking a course, as well as students' expectations and perceptions of the teacher. The current study emphasises the importance of interaction in online learning, but more needs to be done to shed more light on how students view online classes.

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