

MALAYSIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL ESL TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES ON VIRTUAL TEACHING AND LEARNING

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UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

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**MALAYSIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL ESL TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES AND
CHALLENGES ON VIRTUAL TEACHING AND LEARNING**

KALIAMMA A/P BALAKRISHNAN

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ABSTRACT

This study is aimed at how ESL teachers in Malaysian primary schools perceived and dealt with challenges while conducting virtual teaching and learning during the COVID-19 outbreak. To gain a thorough understanding of the research, this study used a sequential explanatory mixed method design. The sequential explanatory mixed methods design involved quantitative and qualitative approaches. For quantitative data, the response from 130 respondents who answered the questionnaire was used to analyse the data using descriptive analysis. The descriptive analysis involves SPSS statistics analysis of frequency and percentage. As for qualitative data, a semi-structured interview session with five ESL teachers from primary schools in Klang Valley was conducted. The data were analysed using thematic analysis in which prominent themes were identified. The findings showed that the majority of the primary school ESL teachers had neutral positions on virtual teaching and learning. Besides, it revealed that neither the teachers agreed nor disagreed with all of the statements. The teachers prefer physical classroom teaching and learning. At the same time, teachers were encouraged to conduct virtual teaching and learning in future. In addition, the study helps primary school ESL teachers overcome challenges and conduct effective virtual teaching and learning in a fun and engaging way. It also assists learners in engaging themselves in an interesting way to attend virtual classes in a conducive environment. The implication of the study is the majority of teachers had a neutral stance on the advantages of using online learning in ESL classes but mostly concluded that virtual teaching and learning are not advantageous for primary school ESL teachers or students. At the same time, teachers are also encouraging virtual teaching and learning in the future. So, ESL teachers in primary schools prefer traditional classroom teaching and learning as it is more effective and fruitful.

PERSPEKTIF DAN CABARAN GURU ESL SEKOLAH RENDAH MALAYSIA TENTANG PENGAJARAN DAN PEMBELAJARAN MAYA

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan bagaimana guru ESL di sekolah rendah Malaysia melihat dan menangani cabaran semasa menjalankan pengajaran dan pembelajaran talian internet semasa wabak COVID-19. Untuk mendapatkan pemahaman yang menyeluruh tentang penyelidikan, kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk kaedah campuran penerangan berurutan. Reka bentuk kaedah campuran penerangan berurutan melibatkan pendekatan kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Bagi data kuantitatif, jawapan daripada 130 orang responden yang menjawab soal selidik digunakan untuk menganalisis data menggunakan analisis deskriptif. Analisis deskriptif melibatkan analisis statistik SPSS kekerapan dan peratusan. Bagi data kualitatif pula, sesi temu bual separa berstruktur dengan lima orang guru ESL dari sekolah rendah di Lembah Klang telah dijalankan. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik di mana tema-tema yang menonjol dikenal pasti. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa majoriti guru ESL sekolah rendah mempunyai kedudukan neutral dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran secara talian internet. Selain itu, ia mendedahkan bahawa guru-guru tidak bersetuju dengan semua kenyataan tersebut. Guru-guru lebih suka pengajaran dan pembelajaran bilik darjah fizikal. Pada masa yang sama, guru digalakkan untuk menjalankan pengajaran dan pembelajaran secara talian internet pada masa hadapan. Di samping itu, kajian ini membantu guru ESL sekolah rendah mengatasi cabaran dan menjalankan pengajaran dan pembelajaran secara talian internet yang berkesan dengan cara yang menyeronokkan dan menarik. Ia juga membantu pelajar dalam melibatkan diri mereka dengan cara yang menarik untuk menghadiri kelas secara talian internet dalam persekitaran yang kondusif. Implikasi kajian adalah majoriti guru mempunyai pendirian neutral tentang kelebihan menggunakan pembelajaran dalam talian dalam kelas ESL tetapi kebanyakannya membuat kesimpulan bahawa pengajaran dan pembelajaran secara talian internet tidak berfaedah untuk guru atau pelajar ESL sekolah rendah. Pada masa yang sama, guru juga menggalakkan pengajaran dan pembelajaran secara talian internet pada masa hadapan. Jadi, guru ESL di sekolah rendah lebih suka pengajaran dan pembelajaran bilik darjah tradisional kerana ia lebih berkesan dan membuahkan hasil.

**CONTENTS**

	Pages
DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK	iii
DECLARATION OF DISSERTATION	iv
APPRECIATION	v
ABSTRACT	vi
ABSRAK	vii
CONTENT	viii
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xv
APPENDIX LIST	xvi
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Research Background	2
1.2 Problem Statement	6
1.3 Significance of the Research	8
1.4 Purpose of Study	9
1.5 Research Objectives	10
1.6 Research Questions	11
1.7 Limitation of Study	11
1.8 Theoretical Framework	12
1.9 Definition of Terms	14
1.9.1 Virtual Learning	14
1.9.2 ESL Teachers	15
1.9.3 COVID-19	15



1.9.4	Teachers' Perception	16
1.9.5	Teachers' Challenge	17
1.10	Summary	17

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1	Introduction	18
2.2	Theoretical Framework	19
2.3	Conceptual Framework	24
2.4	Past Studies on Virtual Teaching and Learning	26
2.4.1	Virtual Teaching and Learning in Malaysia	27
2.4.2	Factors Governing Effective Virtual Teaching and Learning	29
2.4.3	The Implementation of Virtual Teaching and During the COVID-19 Outbreak	31
2.5	Chapter Summary	44

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1	Introduction	45
3.2	Research Design	45
3.3	Research Site	50
3.4	Populations and Sample	52
3.4.1	Teachers Samples	53
3.5	Instrumentation and Materials	54
3.5.1	Questionnaire	55
3.5.1.1	Questionnaire for Teachers	56
3.6	Interview Protocol	59
3.6.1	Interview Data	59

3.7	Pilot Study	60
3.7.1	Survey Questionnaire for Teachers (SQ)	60
3.7.1.1	Results of Students' Survey Questionnaire (SQ)	61
3.8	Data Collection Procedures	63
3.8.1	Survey Questionnaire	63
3.9	Data Analysis	63
3.9.1	Questionnaire	63
3.9.2	Interview Verbatim Transcript	66
3.10	Ethical Consideration	69
3.10.1	Anonymity and confidentiality	69
3.11	Chapter Summary	70

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1	Introduction	72
4.2	Discussion of Quantitative Findings	73
4.3	Discussion of Qualitative Findings	82
4.3.1	Discussion on the Semi-Structured Interview	82
4.4	Summary	94

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1	Introduction	96
5.2	Research Summary	97
5.2.1	Aims	97
5.2.2	Research Questions	98
5.2.3	Research Methods	98
5.3	Summary and Conclusion of Quantitative Findings	99

5.4	Summary and Conclusions on Qualitative Findings	99
5.5	Implications of the Study	100
5.5.1	Theoretical Implications	101
5.5.2	Implications on Education Community	102
5.5.3	Implications on Public Community	103
5.6	Future Research	104
5.7	Summary	105
	REFERENCE	107
	APPENDIX	112

LISTS OF TABLES

Table No.	Page
2.1 The Comparison of Aspects Governing Online Teaching	33
3.1 Number of Primary Schools in Selangor State	50
3.2 Number of Primary Schools Selected in Selangor District	51
3.3 Questionnaire for Teachers	57
3.4 Sample of the Questionnaire Items	58
3.5 Coe-efficient Alpha Value of SQ	62
3.6 Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis Instruments	64
4.1 Demographic Information	74
4.2 The Advantages of Virtual Teaching and Learning (ATL)	78
4.3 The Feasibility of Virtual Teaching and Learning (FTL)	79
4.4 Teachers Goals on Virtual Teaching and Learning (TGTL)	81

LISTS OF FIGURES

Figures No.	Page
2.1 Conceptual Framework	25
3.1 Data Collection and data analysis Framework	49
3.2 Quantitative Data Analysis	65
3.3 Flow Chart for Analysis of Interview Data	68

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CMCO	Conditional Movement Control Order
EFL	English Language Learning
ESL	English as Second Language
ICT	Information and Technology
LMS	Learning Management System
MCO	Movement Control Order
MOE	Malaysian Ministry of Education
RMCO	Recovering Movement Control Order
SPSS	Statistical Packages for The Social Sciences
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

APPENDIX LIST

- A Sample of the Questionnaire Items
- B Interview Protocol
- C Interview Verbatim
- D Themes and Sub-themes of Interview Transcription
- E The Letter of Member Check

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a general overview of the study. It begins with the background of the study that describes the proposed study, regarding the virtual learning among ESL teachers in primary schools during pandemic COVID-19. Next, the problem statement is presented. This is followed by the significance of the study, the purpose of the study and the objective of the study. Additionally, the research questions, and limitations of the study is discussed. The operational definition is presented to explain the key concepts based on the context of the study and summary.

1.1 Background of the Study

Especially with the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to better aid and support the teaching and learning process, the 21st-century revolution has brought about significant changes in the field of education. Worldwide education changes that will help students acquire meaningful and productive information, skills, and traits are crucial in the drive to improve education quality and close the global achievement gap. There is a great desire for a system that could equip all learners with higher-order thinking abilities and competencies, so the objectives of education are no longer limited to just teaching fundamental literacy skills (Anagün, 2018).

In an effort to transform the teaching and learning process into beneficial and progressive experiences for learners, many nations have begun to incorporate 21st century skills related to the current economic and social developments, such as collaboration, communication, digital literacy, citizenship, problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and productivity, into their curricula and education systems. Learning is now more student-centered than teacher-centered, and students have more possibilities to be independent and in charge of their own learning experiences.

These changes necessitate more opportunities for learners to use ICT; technologies that have no boundaries to knowledge and information, making knowledge and skills in using these technologies a basic necessity rather than a skill to acquire. Despite the vast and varied definitions of 21st century skills by researchers and educators, they generally refer to the skills as what is needed to cope with the current changes, especially in their focus on technology, digital work, and applications of knowledge



(Anagün, 2018). A systematic literature review by Laar, Deursen, Dijk, & Haan (2017) discovered that digital electronic communication technology is the key factor in a 21st-century learning environment and it is necessary to get teachers to use technology in their classrooms. Hence, a few efforts have been made to incorporate the use of technology and implement online teaching and learning, including providing learning management systems (LMS) as platforms to administer and keep track of the instructional process conducted online.

Changes in our society and technological advancement result in changes in our education in which more considerations should be made for online teaching and learning. The fact that it has a lot of advantages is no longer debatable as quite a number of studies have shown significant proof, as discussed by Doghonadze, Aliyev, Halawachy, Knodel & Adedoyin (2020). This type of learning is known to be helpful in autonomous learning, less expensive than traditional education, more flexible in terms of time and location, and the list goes on.

Aside from that, many people around the world consider the English language to be the lingua franca and the most frequently used and spoken language (Yen & Mohamad, 2020). According to the justification provided by Staley (2005) in the article on English Language History, English is widely spoken and recognised by many people over the world, and the English language is the number one or predominant language in several of the international areas. As a result of the English language's importance and necessity in the current global technology, Staley (2005) also stated that adults and young learners travel between nations to study it. According to Kenneally (2007), among the 6,000 languages spoken by people worldwide, English is thought to be the





most dominating and conquest-oriented language. This is supported by the fact that half of the population of the arena speaks ten of these languages.

According to the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, English is considered a second language in Malaysia and the delivery of English language classes is enhanced by categorising learners based on their competence levels and upskilling all English language subject teachers (Ministry of Education, 2013). Listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills are all part of the English curriculum. Writing has long been seen as an important skill in English since it helps to improve vocabulary, grammar, thinking, planning, editing, and revising. The aspects of writing included generation, vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and handwriting. According to Chappell (2011), writing also develops communication and prepares students for future work.



Despite the fact that there are numerous benefits to conducting virtual learning classes, teachers, schools, and other educational institutions have different perspectives and challenges. In fact, teachers in particular are still struggling to juggle between the traditional teaching method and the virtual method. Therefore, it is important to examine teachers about the challenges in the instructional process as the virtual modality is a whole new level in pedagogy and almost different from the traditional classrooms, especially with the additional skills and abilities to master like ICT literacy, technical competence, pedagogical competence, and virtual yet prompt communication.



Due to the unexpected closure of all English academies, universities, and schools due to the epidemic of COVID-19, English language teachers are needed as learners are increasing and have begun to encounter serious difficulties in acquiring and improvising their English language skills (Verawardina et al., 2020). This claim was made by Rahman (2020) to break the COVID-19 chain. According to Yen and Mohamad (2020), the decision to close all schools and discontinue using face-to-face classrooms resulted in a survival situation and acclimating to the "new normal." Even though there are ample studies have been conducted on perception and challenges in virtual learning, the measures to deal with them are missing in the research. This study contributes to filling the research gap by investigating the primary schools' teachers' perceptions and the measures taken to overcome the challenges of virtual teaching and learning among Malaysian ESL primary school teachers during the pandemic COVID-

1.2 Problem Statement

During the COVID-19 outbreak, Under the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act of 1988 and the Police Act of 196, the Malaysian government has imposed a confinement measure called as the Restriction of Movement Order (Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, 2020), also known as the Movement Control Order (MCO). The decree became operative on March 18, 2020, and it will remain in effect until September 20, 2021. The Movement Control Order (MCO), Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO), and Recovery Movement Control Order were the first three stages of implementation (RMCO).



There was to be no official teaching or learning taking place in classrooms during the MCO because all public and private schools, as well as colleges and universities, were to remain closed. As noted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, children were also encouraged to study at home with parental supervision, which could be difficult given the issues that need to be addressed regarding educational resources at home, parental education levels, and parents' proficiency in the language of instruction (OECD). Where there was no regular classroom, many teachers chose remote learning as a substitute. Instead, technological advancements in teaching and learning led to the development of virtual learning as a channel of communication between educators and students.



implementation of virtual teaching and learning, caused little to no time for teachers to adapt to the method (TUAC Secretariat Briefing), especially the public primary school teachers. They have been practising their teaching by using traditional methods. The unexpected changes lead them to difficulties in handling virtual teaching and learning in the most effective way. Lukas, B.A. and Yunus, M.M., (2021) did research on ESL teachers' experiences and challenges in implementing e-learning during COVID-19 among primary school teachers. It showed the results of challenges and experiences of teachers conducting virtual teaching and learning. Meanwhile, currently the number of COVID 19 cases are increased again in the month November 2023 and the number of deaths also increased. Following with that, the country might will face another pandemic if the number of cases is increasing. Therefore, the researcher recommended more studies to highlight teachers' insights regarding the significance of e-learning.



Therefore, it is also important to ascertain the challenges of virtual teaching during the COVID-19 outbreak so that further assistance and facilitation can be provided to them. So, this research is useful and provide great input for teachers to handle the challenges and the measures taken to handle the challenges of virtual teaching and learning among Malaysian ESL primary school teachers during the pandemic COVID-19. This research also will be useful in future for not only COVID-19 but for haze issues and outbreak of new viruses.

1.2 Significance of the Research

As this study aims at the perception and also measures taken to handle the challenges by ESL teachers in Malaysian primary schools while conducting virtual teaching and learning during COVID-19 outbreak, results from the findings would be helpful for the school authorities to be aware of the real scenario of virtual teaching and learning and provide accurate solutions for the teachers in future. The findings also be significant for the teachers to realise their potential and challenges involving distance learning, such as lack of technical skills by teachers, the possibility for the quality of teaching and learning to be worse than the traditional method, and a few distractions due to lack of teacher control over the situation (Doghonadze et al., 2020).

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the virtual teaching and learning among ESL teachers in Malaysian primary schools during the pandemic COVID-19. This would entail the perceptions and measures taken to handle the challenges faced by ESL teachers in Malaysian primary schools to teach their students. The challenges cover a few other areas in the teaching and learning process. Further examination of the phenomenon was done and identified the measures taken to handle the challenges of ESL teachers towards virtual teaching and learning in primary school during pandemic COVID-19. The level of interest and attitudes that teachers have in virtual teaching, as well as their students' learning, are very important in providing a detailed description of the perception and measures taken to handle the challenges in virtual teaching and learning during pandemic COVID-19. This research will help the ESL teachers in primary schools come up with solutions for the problems that are crucial to enable effective virtual teaching and learning during pandemics in the future. By conducting this research, the primary school teachers can overcome the issues that they are facing during virtual teaching and learning, and the school management can prepare better facilities for the teachers.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To examine Malaysian ESL primary school teachers' perceptions towards virtual teaching and learning during pandemic COVID-19.
2. To investigate the measures taken to handle with the challenges of virtual teaching and learning among Malaysian ESL primary school teachers during pandemic COVID-19.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study.

1. What are Malaysian ESL primary school teachers' perceptions towards virtual teaching and learning during the pandemic COVID-19?
2. What are the measures taken by the Malaysian ESL primary school teachers?

1.6 Limitations of the Study

This study centres on Malaysian ESL primary school teachers' perceptions towards virtual teaching and learning during the pandemic COVID-19 outbreak, and only about 130 respondents were participated for analysis due to time constraint. Meanwhile, only five teachers were interviewed to investigate the measures taken to handle the challenges. Therefore, the result is not used to represent the whole population, and a larger sample size have resulted in different findings. The questionnaire also elicits



general information about aspects governing virtual English teaching as a whole (usefulness of online teaching and learning; the ease of using online teaching and learning; teachers' attitude towards online learning). Hence, the findings may not adequately reflect the challenges of any of the four basic English language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

1.7 Theoretical Framework

In this research, there are few general theoretical perspectives that have guided research on this virtual learning and teaching. Each theory gives evidence for supporting the uses of virtual learning and teaching. These theories are behaviourism theory, constructivism theory, engagement theory and theory of connectivism by (Goldie, 2016). Because of the emphasis on producing engaged, active learners through the use of virtual reality, behaviourism, constructivism, and engagement theory of learning are the key foci of this study. According to this theory the behaviour of teachers and students are in deeply involved. According to Yunus (2018), behaviourism focuses on changes in individuals' observable behaviours. The modernization, contextualization, and transformation of activity procedures through the use of new tools is another potential impact on teaching and learning that is highlighted by this activity theory. Additionally, constructivism is a theory that describes how humans learn and gain information. It implies that people create knowledge and meaning based on their experiences. Learning is viewed as an active process in which the learner makes sense of sensory data. Success in this century depends on developing active learning environments.



A foundation for learning in technologically advanced situations is provided by the theory of engagement. The Kearsley and Shneiderman 1998 theory of learning synthesises a number of components from earlier theories of learning. As students seek to learn, there are three fundamental ideas that guide us: relate, create, and give. In addition, teachers and students collaborate to create knowledge in an open and flexible curriculum. The integration of concepts from self-organization, complexity, network, and chaos theories is known as connectivism. According to a connectivism perspective, knowledge is dispersed through connection networks rather than being possessed by any one person. In relation to this study, the applications serve as a medium for communication and virtual teaching and learning between teachers and students. Additionally, it affects how instructors and students behave throughout online instruction and learning.

1.8 Definition of terms

The following section highlights the key terms used to clarify the concepts related to this study. The definitions of virtual learning, ESL teachers, COVID-19, perception and teachers' challenges are provided below:

1.9.1 Virtual Learning

Clark & Mayer in Mayer (2018) define virtual learning as instruction delivered on a digital device to support the learning process. In this study, this term is used

interchangeably with online learning, online lessons, and remote learning in which teachers and pupils are not physically present in a traditional classroom. The instructional process is conducted and assisted with the use of ICT and social media.

A type of learning called virtual learning is one that is improved by the use of computers and/or the internet both inside and outside of the walls of the educational institution. Most of the time, the instruction is done online. Since the learning activities are conducted online, the teacher and students are geographically apart (in terms of place, time, or both). Distance learning takes place in a virtual learning environment with online education and tutoring that can be completed at the student's own leisure (asynchronous) or in real time (synchronous).

1.9.2 ESL Teachers

English as a second language refers to learning English in a certain country where English is the main language and is dominantly spoken. All learners in Malaysia speak English as a second language as well. Their mother tongues are Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil. Therefore, it is quite confusing for second language learners to acquire grammar rules as they tend to scramble with their first languages. Most of them tend to directly translate from their mother tongue.

ESL teachers work with children for whom English is not their first language, also known as English Language Learners (ELLs). ESL instructors work with ELLs to help them develop spoken and written English fluency.

1.9.3 COVID-19

A new coronavirus pandemic known as COVID-19 was initially discovered in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019. The abrupt pandemic outbreak has devastated the global economy and claimed thousands of lives. The SARS-CoV-2 virus is the infectious disease known as coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The majority of virus-infected individuals will experience a mild to severe respiratory disease and will recover without the need for special care. However, some people will get serious illnesses and need to see a doctor. So, schools, colleges, and other educational institutions are also instructed for immediate closure to control the mass infection.

1.9.4 Teachers' Perception

A teacher is a person who aids students in acquiring information, skills, or virtue. They are often referred to as school teachers or educators. According to Oxford dictionary the meaning of perception is the process of becoming aware or conscious of a thing or things in general, the state of being aware, consciousness, and understanding. The process of understanding becomes a mediated experience, as it requires the use of the senses in order to process data. So, here the teachers' perception meaning, the teachers' consciousness and understanding towards virtual teaching and learning.

1.9.5 Teachers' Challenges

A teacher, also called a school teacher or formally an educator, is a person who helps students to acquire knowledge, competence or virtue. Meanwhile, according to the online McMillan Dictionary, challenges can be defined as “to test someone’s skill and abilities”. According to Merriam Webster challenges also can be said the act or process of provoking or testing physiological activity by exposure to a specific substance. Teachers are facing ample challenges in their teaching career. For example, lack of time for planning, load of paperwork performance pressure and so on. In this study, teachers’ challenges mean teachers’ state of being ready to cope with the implementation of virtual learning.

1.10 Summary

This chapter gives a general overview of the study. It provides the background of the study, the statement of the problem, purpose of study, research objectives, and research question. After that, the theoretical and conceptual framework that underpins the study is also presented. The chapter ends with the definition of related terms, limitations of the study, as well as the significance of the research. In the next chapter, the researcher will provide more information about the literature of previous studies related virtual learning among ESL teachers in primary schools during pandemic COVID-19