

Concept Paper in Measuring Factors Influencing Students' Stress at UNITEN during the Pandemic

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Abstract

Purpose: The implementation of MCO has had a variety of impacts on the community and all sectors. Compliance orders to stay at home have led to the closure of all forms of activities as well as the education sector. Online learning introduced by the government may have a psychological impact on students as these changes occur in a very short period that might affect students' psychology. The purpose is to study the level of stress among students and find the factors that contribute to student's stress.

Design/methodology/approach: This research will be surveyed the population by using Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS 21) for the level of stress and to measure the factors of stress researcher will use Perception of Academic Stress Scale (PASS).

Findings: This concept paper are aims to investigate the factors and level of stress among students during the Pandemic COVID-19.

Research limitations/implications: The results of this study will suggest some approaches that can be done by management and students themselves to find out the factors that stressing them and enrich research in field of mental health by knowing the level and factors of stress among students.

Paper type: Conceptual paper

Keywords: Stress, Stress factors, Students

Introduction

The coronavirus disease has triggered the global alarm. The COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak was started in Wuhan, China with the rise of coronavirus cases in December 2019 which interrupted many sectors that causing global alarm (Franchi, 2020). This global threat has brought limitations to people around the world to go out as the coronavirus might be transmitted to the community (Stoye, 2020). Hence, individuals are advised to isolate themselves in their own house and to go out when necessarily only. This outbreak has also impacted the education

sector which has resulted to the closure of schools and universities. According to Li and Lalani (2020), this outbreak has shifted the education experience where teaching and learning needs to perform on digital platform. Moreover from the World Bank website, Donnelly, Patrinos and Gresham (2021) mentioned that this global alarm limits the interaction between educator and students.

Southeast Asia has shown a new massive wave of this pandemic in early 2021. This forced universities to continue with online learning for the second year which forced the government to implement work-at-home policy for educators (Yamin, Lamubol, Leung, Wadud & Alwis, 2021). The shutting down of universities due to high risk of the spread of coronavirus not only a challenge for educators to adapt with the new teaching and learning norm. However, students also need to adapt with new learning situation which no physical interactions with classmates and no social life with university friends (Aristovnik, Keržič, Ravšelj, Tomažević & Umek (2020). The same authors also mentioned the transformation on the higher education is giving impact towards student's assessments, workloads and also student might find that communication with lecturers or admin workers as part of challenges in non-face-to-face classes.

This pandemic which more than 4,000,000 people have died has not only affects people with their medical health but also affects the people mental well-being, emotion and also their social life (Yasmin, Khalil & Mazhar, 2020). According to Browning et al. (2021), the coronavirus disease has impacted many peoples' mental health. Moreover, the same study also mentioned that adapting to new era of technology where classes are being conducted online which at the same time doing social isolation has increased the stress levels, anxiety and depressive symptoms. Son et al. (2020) also found that there are many stress factors such as difficulties in focusing, lack of social interaction and sleeping disorder that affects one' mental well-being. A study also reported that during the pandemic of coronavirus outbreak has affected individual with stress and emotional distress (Salari et al., 2020).

Aslan, Ochnik and Çınar (2020) reported, students are observed to face high level of stress and anxiety during pandemic. The stress among students during pandemic mainly were due to experiencing lack of support, the quarantine routine, being alone and feel demotivated (Babicka-Wirkus, Wirkus, Stasiak, & Kozłowski, 2021). In Malaysia due to the pandemic outbreak, a study has found that during the implementation of Movement Control Order (MCO) has seen the rise of stress levels (Mustapha, 2020). Moreover, from the report, it is also mentioned that students in higher education institutions was listed to have stress during MCO in Malaysia. According to Senior Minister of Education, Dr. Radzi Jidin the impact of the COVID-19 on the education sector comprising more than 5 million pupils and students as well as more than 500,000 teachers, lecturers and staff. However, any approach and decision are taken by ministry always gives priority to the safety and health of all students, teachers, lecturers and parties involved (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2020).

Yasmin, Khalil and Mazhar (2020) found that high stress level among student will lead to low academic performance and also student's future employment. Moreover, from the same study also found that the adaptation with class timetable, class credit load, online learning and at the same time to cope with family responsibilities are the main reasons for stress among students. Additionally, Briliannur et al. (2020) found that online learning for students is less effective due to the economic constraints. The study also found that students are not ready because of the technological problems include internet access and lack of information resources on the mobile technology. These issues might affect the stress on students in universities.

According to Bedewy and Gabriel (2015) there are three factors that can lead to students stress which factors related to academic student's expectation, students' academic load and self-perceptions. Ramli, Alavi, Mehrinezhad and Ahmadi (2018) mentioned that most students were

facing high level of stress due to high expectation on them such pressure to compete with colleagues, expecting to have excellent grades and to have better career in the future. The new norm of online learning has force students to give high commitments in fulfilling the academic load. However, the new era of online learning is not only giving the students pressure on adapting with technologies but also the academic load (lectures, tutorial and assessments) that transitioned from traditional learning (Castillo, Mago, Sambile & Francisco, 2021). Furthermore, students who held positive on their self-perceptions by having high motivation and competence would significantly associate with good academic performance (Alemany-Arrebola, Rojas-Ruiz, Granda-Vera & Mingorance-Estrada, 2020). However, during the pandemic, the students are likely have different beliefs in the self-perception such misperception and lack of confidence (Algahtani, Zrieq, Aldhmadi, Atta, Obeidat, & Kadri, 2021).

According to Yunus, Badri, Panatik and Mukhtar (2020), there is a need to investigate the level and factor of stress among students as the sudden shifted to online learning due to COVID-19 outbreak has posed to a new challenge to students. Hence, this study aims to examine the level of stress among UNITEN students. Moreover, this study also will explore the factors of stress among students in UNITEN during pandemic.

Literature Review

According to Buheji, Jahrami, and Dhahi, (2020), the definition of stress is a state of dissonance and is neutralised by a complex variety of physiologic and behavioural responses that affects the new adaptive stress response. Moreover, stress occurs when an individual perceives the demands of environmental stimuli to be higher than their capacity to meet, mitigate, or change those demands. They added there's agreement that stress is an inalienable part of life that's related with a few separately imperative physiological, mental, and behavioural side effects to individual including different emotional and physical disorders such as depression, anxiety, heart attacks, stroke, and hypertension. Subsequently, people who see themselves as having an expansive sum of weight are more inclined to create mental distress and negative feelings due to psychological stress determines from a risk to losing control of resources and lack of gained resources (Huang, Qiu, Alizadeh, & Wu, 2020).

Hasan and Bao (2020) added stress depend on the continuous relationship between individual factors and situational factors. It requiring taking into account specificities of participant when to identify the sources of pressure. Students with higher level of stress will create more symptoms including frequent headaches, sleep disturbance, body pain, dizziness, persistent illness, irritability, excessive worry, muscle tensions, feeling of being overwhelmed and having difficult quieting the mind (Buheji et al., 2020). From the symptoms student tendency to experience poor concentration, forgetfulness, and low energy. Based on Hasan, and Bao (2020) previous research the academic factors were deeply affected during pandemic COVID-19, the implementation of Movement Control Order (MCO) because of massive closure of colleges and universities, all the scheduled activities were postponed or cancelled, campuses and students' accommodations were forced to evacuation, and formal and informal communications were changed to online platforms, leading to a significant change in students' normal life.

Academic stress usually become one of the factors faced by students. Subramani and Venkatachalam (2019) defined academic stress as a mental suffering due to the frustration in academic failure or mindfulness of possibility of such disappointment. In psychology, according to Pajarianto (2020), academic stress can be explained as an emotional or mental state that is normally felt by students in their learning period. The students bear the burden on their shoulder and become part of their life. Subramani et al. (2019) stated that there are various

external expectations including parental attitude and high expectations that can causes stress among students. Parents with high expectation toward their children's education will ensure that the children perform well in all subjects and become topper in the class. Even though involvement by parent can lead to better academic performance, it also can lead to stress of students due to the unrealistic goals set by parents (Subramani et al. 2019). From the previous research, Tus (2020) mentioned that academics stress is negatively correlated with emotional intelligence and academic performance. But the other research found there are no significant relationship with academic performance. Besides that, teaching and learning process or any related matters to learning can become academic stressors because the pressure to understand the topics, length of study, tension in facing exams, the number of assignments to be completed, poor test scores, bureaucracy complicated, decision to make regarding study and time management (Pajarianto, 2020). The anxiety facing examination and stress of students are correlated (Arusha & Biswas, 2020). They added, causes of exam anxiety can be related with social stigma, where students from a rural area could be incompetent compared to those who lived in the urban area. Moreover, it will give negative impact on students' achievement, physical health, and growth of life. Other factor influencing stress among students is student's perceptions toward their academic achievement. Pajarianto (2020) has stated in his study academic stress arises because of student's perceptions of the extent of knowledge they should mastered within the limited time given. It can affect physical, emotional and behaviour as they have a high self-perception.

From the research conducted by Ochnik et al. (2021), during the ongoing pandemic, students are more tendency to experience mental health issues. Due to implementation of MCO, social isolation was applied and resulting a higher experience of insecurity concerning studies and their future. Another study reported that living with parents may result lower rates of severe anxiety among students, while living in rural areas, not having a steady income, and knowing someone infected with COVID-19 increased the risk of severe anxiety (Husky, et al. 2020). Lun et al. (2018) identified that 68.5% of respondents had mild to severe depressive symptoms and 54.4% had mild to severe anxiety symptoms. Various factors contribute including the increasing academic pressure, uncertainties in career prospects due to pandemic and the more frequent use of social media. The mild to severe anxiety symptom usually associated with the increasing level of academic difficulty where it may create greater stress anxiety for students when they are unsatisfied with the test scores. Ochnik et al. (2021) stated that special attention should be paid in research regarding the risk of mental health among students during Pandemic COVID-19.

Methods

In order to examine the factors influencing students stress at UNITEN during the pandemic, this study will be implementing quantitative analysis method. Quantitative analysis method is the process of collecting and analysing numerical data. It can be utilised to find patterns and average, prepare the predictions, examine causal relationships, and generalise results to a wider population (Pritha, 2020). Quantitative analysis permits the isolation of invariant relations in the study of behavior (Nevin, 1984). The population of this study is targeted to all students of UNITEN Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah Campus, Muadzam Shah.

The instruments of the questionnaire will consist of the Perception of Academic Stress Scale (PAS) and Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale (DASS-21). For PAS, the item will be divided into 3. The items are stress related to academic expectation, stress related to faculty work and examination and stress related to student academic self-perception. For DASS the items are related to stress, anxiety and depression. The depression scale assesses dysphoria, hopelessness, devaluation of life, self-deprecation, lack of interest or involvement, anhedonia

and inertia. The anxiety scale assesses autonomic arousal, skeletal muscle effects, situational anxiety, and subjective experience of anxious affect. The DASS-21 was chosen because it appears to be a reliable and easy to administer measure, ideal for both clinical and research purpose (Norton, 2007).

Discussion and Conclusion

Various studies have been done on stress among students at school and university levels. However, this stress related study needs to be further strengthened with a more detailed approach as the issue of the COVID-19 that hit the country has changed the learning system from face to face to home-based learning. A study conducted by Mahlan and Hamat (2020) surveyed the relevance of teaching methods based on students' preparation to receive online learning during the Movement Control Order (MCO). Similarly, the study conducted by Tasir, Harun and Lim (2006) related to the readiness of students with the factors of computer use include attitude, literacy and computer facilities by students. As a result, students are not ready with online learning. Based on this report shows that the unpreparedness of these students will put pressure on them especially if this home-based learning has never been implemented before.

This study is very significant conducted as the issue of COVID-19 is not over and students are still going through the process of online learning. Not only online learning but students also need to deal with the management using online not over the counter as before. The selection of Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS) and Perception of Academic Stress Scale (PASS) questionnaire are very much in line with this study to examine the factors are related to the current situation with students who go through online learning sessions at home.

The impact of the closure of educational institutions are felt by the whole world. According to Onyema et al. (2020) touches on teacher and student constraints. Teachers need technology to continue teaching and negative impacts arise when there is a lack of infrastructure related to internet access. Therefore, a good preparation for students with adequate infrastructure facilities are more important, it is to ensure the home-based learning can runs smoothly. Hence, the results of this research might serve lecturers on students' stress factors and to improve the online learning as to make both teachers and students enjoy the online learning and overcome the stress among them.

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