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Instructors' perceptions and pedagogical approaches to online teaching in selected Malaysian private universities

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ABSTRACT

Private university instructors in Malaysia faced obstacles in their adaptation to the online learning mode while holding their pre-existing academic duties. This research aimed to explore those obstacles, and observe how the instructors tailored their pedagogical approaches. The research employed a qualitative research design. We used convenience sampling to select eight instructors from three private universities in Malaysia using semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that the main challenges were instructors' own workload and lessened time for professional development, the incompatibility of the provided multimedia with their teaching approaches, as well as the problem with their students' readiness and participation. It was found that the instructors adapted their pedagogical approaches with a main focus on learners' cognitive development, and this was hoped to be achieved through their choices of learning tools and multimedia, instructional strategies of collaborative and reflective learning, and consideration of learning outcomes and objectives. The instructors also incorporated their students' feedback into their content development to increase the engagement. Interestingly, some instructors initiated their own content and approach, while receiving support from their institutes, peers, and other resources. The findings may contribute positively to instructor's efforts in providing and maintaining an interactive, productive and stable learning environment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Technology-enabled online learning revolutionizes education. It involves online learning where students use technology to access resources, chat with peers and teachers, and obtain help. Unlike traditional classrooms, online learning allows teachers and students to collaborate at any time or place [1]. The time difference between synchronous learning-live video conferencing-and asynchronous learning-pre-recorded classes via learning management systems (LMS)-is the real-time interaction versus flexible self-paced study [1]. Student learning styles determine how these strategies operate [2]. The Malaysian Qualification Act of 2007 governs higher education institutions, which generate human capital for a knowledge-based society [3], [4]. Private institutions must balance professional and academic reputation in a globalized academic society, which is difficult [3], [4]. When LMS were launched, Malaysians learned online despite early technical limits. The 2015-2025 Malaysia Education Blueprint promoted technology-driven learning in colleges [5].

Online teachers must combine pedagogy, technology, and subject matter. Due to conflicting teaching and research goals, resource constraints, and international competition, private university instructors burn out. Poor technology and infrastructure cause significant issues for private university lecturers [4]. Online teachers must be ready, but exhaustion may demotivate them [5]. Some instructors are reported to be stressed in handling online class [6]. In some extreme scenarios, some have experienced burnout [7]. Private university academics have inadequate support structures and rely on top management due to a lack of government engagement [8]. Understanding online learning, social media, and community development is essential. Using inappropriate pedagogies affects online learning, delaying content delivery and students' social and communication demands [9]. Considering these complex issues, this study examines the obstacles teachers, particularly those at Malaysia's private colleges, experience when converting to online instruction. This analysis will examine online education concerns and pedagogies [10], [11], aiming to offer practical solutions to help instructors and authorities adjust to Malaysian online education. This contributes to the modernization of higher education as highlighted in the Malaysia Education Blueprint [5]. Therefore, the following research questions were formed: i) what are the perceived challenges of online teaching for instructors in selected Malaysian private universities? and ii) how do instructors in these selected Malaysian private universities adapt to these challenges through their pedagogical approaches?

The study addresses instructor professional development. Online learning instructors are motivated by social, personal, environmental, and economic concerns. Online education programs that promote professional involvement must handle these issues [12]. An online instructional partnership theoretical framework is proposed and educators' solutions for overcoming these challenges are examined. Integrating these variables explains the environment and may affect online education and future advancements.

Effective pedagogy goes beyond knowledge dissemination in online education. These methods encourage deep student engagement and course content exchanges. These methods also help students develop important learning abilities and manage their self-directed study. These methods also encourage student participation in online activities, which fosters a cooperative learning environment and improves curriculum comprehension [13]. Various studies have identified a number of obstacles that instructors have when shifting to online instruction. Rajab *et al*. [14] emphasized the challenges of involving students and evaluating their progress in an online context, which requires innovative teaching methods and a supportive learning atmosphere. Besides, Alemayehu and Chen [15] highlighted the particular difficulties encountered in MOOCs, such as the presence of inexperienced instructors and inadequate course design resulting in diminished student involvement. According to Balicat and Siy [16], special education teachers need distinct platforms and abilities to effectively educate online. Kerr-Sims and Baker [17] observed that the process of preparing online courses requires more time compared to traditional methods, which has a negative effect on faculty satisfaction and increases the demand for more help.

Research by Huang [18] highlighted the significance of technology and proficiency in using educational tools for online instruction, whereas Hoe *et al*. [19] cite technology and prior experience as primary obstacles for teachers. Mukhtar *et al*. [20] proposed the use of interactive technologies such as Kahoot to effectively involve students in the learning process. Additionally, Todd [21] noted that online teaching necessitates specialized pedagogical abilities, which in turn affect time management and course preparation. Johnson *et al.* [22] discovered a positive correlation between teacher satisfaction in online learning and motivation, suggesting a requirement for improved support and resources for educators shifting from in-person to online teaching environments. According to Turugare and Rudhumbu [23], it is essential to note that integrating technology in higher education.

The pedagogical approaches of instructors are influenced by a range of elements, such as learning theory, student backgrounds, and teaching tactics. Kyei-Blankson *et al*. [24] emphasized the significance of the contact between instructors and learners, as well as the influence of instructional presence on student learning. In this study, Chinnathambi *et al*. [25] examined the advantages and disadvantages of remote learning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. They highlight challenges such as the assessment of student participation and the increased workload for teachers. Peytcheva-Forsyth *et al*. [26] investigated the impact of technology in combating plagiarism and upholding academic honesty in online evaluations. Previous studies [27]–[29] emphasized the importance of human connection and instructor presence in online learning. They highlight the necessity of excellent course design, communication, and time management. Additionally, their research indicates that teachers' preparedness for online instruction encompasses not only the adjustment of teaching methods, but also the effective management of teaching control. According to Juhary [30], Malaysian educators and students have a preference for platforms such as WhatsApp and Microsoft Teams due to their convenience in facilitating teaching and communication. Rapanta *et al*. [31] suggested implementing pedagogical approaches such as promoting transparent communication, transitioning to student-centered learning, and employing streamlined techniques to effectively include students. In this study, Kurdadze [32] investigated the strategies employed by community college teachers in Iowa to effectively transition to online teaching. The author emphasizes the significance of professional development,

self-directed learning, and mentoring as crucial factors in overcoming the obstacles associated with online education. This study adheres to Kurdadze's theory, which posits that content, institutional support, learners, and instructors are essential factors that impact the success of online teaching.

2. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative method to thoroughly grasp the social phenomenon. Field workers' personal accounts assist qualitative research add detail. This reinforces the concept that qualitative methods capture human complexity [33]. Comprehensively evaluating findings requires this methodology since it deepens comprehension and boosts study trustworthiness [34]. An open-ended semi-structured interview collected data. Krouwel *et al.* [35] argued free-form answers deepen understanding with this inquiry type. Interviews are an easy approach to discuss online education challenges, a new and growing topic. Interpreting interview data with thematic analysis. It is most viable because it has fewer steps. Thematic analysis is a methodical way to restrict and synthesize key subjects from a large number of diverse and multiplexed perspectives.

2.1. Participants and sampling method

Eight interviewees from Malaysia's three private universities had more than a year of online teaching experience, equal numbers of men and women, and interest in participating. This improves data dependability by requiring field study experience. By restricting the number of genders allowed in the criterion, Marlow *et al*. [36] found that gender views of online instruction cannot affect heterogeneous samples in a homogenous pool of candidates. Live interviews allow participants to communicate their thoughts and feelings clearly and reflectively, improving data accountability. According to Renz *et al*. [37], thematic analysis should include six to ten participants with diverse skills in different case scenarios and three more interviews to cover common issues. Malaysian private university instructors were convenience sampled for data collection. Using convenient sampling, individuals were solicited based on their live interview availability. This study's sampling strategy is practical due to its easy accessibility to participants and ability to overcome time and cost constraints [38].

2.2. Research instrument, data collection, and analysis procedure

The semi-structured interview questions were adopted from Nazari *et al*. [39] study on novice and experienced EFL instructors. Revised questions had 17 items. The first 10 items assessed participants' knowledge, instructional practices, and pedagogical views, and the next three asked about online learning. Participants were also asked about their students' learning behavior in three items. Institutional support was the final question. Synchronous interviews used Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, and Zoom videos. Each interview lasted 30 minutes. Krouwel *et al*. [35] advocate 30-minute in-depth semi-structured interviews for detailed information. Prior to the interview, candidates were emailed a digital consent form to assess availability and willingness. Demographics were examined to select the best interviewers. Transcribing audio sessions facilitated data analysis. Transcripts were interpreted using Braun and Clarke's six theme analysis phases. Content familiarization, code generation, common theme search, review, theme comparison for final refinement, and report production [40].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of a thematic analysis of eight interview transcripts with online instructors of three Malaysian private universities are shown in this section. Table 1 summarizes this research's important findings, including participants' insightful observations. Using the study participants perceptive observations, this table synthesizes the main topics. Every table entry simplifies complex research details into easily understandable ones. This document helps explain the participants' perspectives and the study's findings.

Courses, materials, students, and institutional support were discussed in qualitative interviews. Peer assistance and online educator resources were also found. These topics demonstrate the intricacy of online teaching. Peer support emphasizes professional collaboration, whereas resources for instructors transitioning to online education emphasize the need for sufficient tools and assistance. These complex themes enhance online instruction for educators, institutions, and academics.

Table 1. A major theme emerged from the participants' responses

Major themes emerged	Sub-themes	Major themes emerged	Sub-themes
1. Content	a. Consideration b. Development c. Instructional strategy multimedia	4. Institutional support	a. Instructor's professional development b. Technical and multimedia support
2. Instructor	a. Interest b. Roles c. Teaching styles	5. Resources	a. Resources
3. Learner	a. Participation b. Readiness	6. Peer support	a. Peer support

3.1. The instructors' perceived challenges with online teaching

3.1.1. Instructors' roles and teaching styles

Online educators struggle to balance numerous components of education. Kurdadze findings [32] support their enormous workload and limited time, which hinders content delivery. One instructor said administrative tasks took up too much time for teaching. Most instructors appreciate the value of their pedagogical duties, but some unexpectedly have negative opinions about their technical roles, indicating stress or difficulty with online teaching technology. This contrast shows that online education technology needs assistance and resources.

> P4: "*My administrative workload can sometimes distract me from teaching, as it is not related to teaching. That is why I focus on other things. On instructing, I had little time to pick up this new case.*"
> P7: "*Since we're not IT instructors, we do not have to teach them technology. We teach languages.*"

Research by several researchers [28], [32] stated that online teaching involves ongoing learning for flexibility. Time constraints may prevent teachers from keeping up with online teaching approaches, limiting them to growth-related duties. This tendency to ignore technical factors for perceived vital responsibilities is supported by previous studies [14], [17], [18], [38]. Clearly, multimedia and technologies are crucial for student engagement; therefore, overlooking their importance is worrying [25].

3.1.2. Multimedia integration

When addressing international students' varying technology capabilities and access, educators found it difficult to include multimedia and social media. This showed the difficulties of globalizing educational approaches. Educational institutions taught and required teachers to adopt online delivery technologies. Technical issues created a gap between instructional methods and content distribution, generating major issues. To effectively integrate instructional content, technological resources must match pedagogical aims.

> P1: "*Facebook's best social and effective tricks... But Chinese and international students can't utilize it. The Facebook privacy issue...*"
> P6: "*Once you join an institution, you must use the pattern... LMS platform. I missed stickering. Due to student convenience, collaborative games are better than quizzes.*"

Kurdadze [32] advocates reimagining courses on student involvement, learning outcomes, and technology. For global online classes, Malaysian private university professors must adapt [28], unlike some authors who noted instructors' lack of awareness and understanding, requiring reassessing assessment techniques for technology compatibility [17], [25]. Following previous studies [20], [26] on asynchronous learning assessments, teachers reported that technological inflexibility can increase plagiarism. According to Martin *et al*. [28], technology's inflexibility makes it difficult for teachers to adjust their teaching approaches.

3.1.3. Learner's readiness and participation

Instructors noted pupils' passive learning and lack of initiative in virtual learning. This mismatch shows a dynamic, cooperative online learning environment is difficult. To increase virtual learning, instructors emphasize student motivation and involvement. Due to socio-cognitive difficulties, pupils' digital fluency does not always convert into active learning. Instructors found students' online and collaborative learning engagement low, matching previous studies [10], [19].

> P7: "*In an online platform, they could always claim connectivity issues and not turn on the camera...*"
> P2: "*For example, I asked them to do that activity or answer questions but no one responded.*"

According to a study [38], "lack of social presence" is a problem. Introverted or camera-shy kids only participate when directed. Mukhtar *et al*. [20] proposed that online students' short attention spans may cause inattentiveness. Conflicting learning styles may also reduce collaborative learning engagement. Thus, instructors should seek different ways to engage students [17], [22].

3.2. The pedagogical approaches adapted by instructors of Malaysian private universities

3.2.1. The use of multimedia

All teachers use videos, especially YouTube, for lectures, assignments, and learning exercises. Martin *et al*. [27] found that class videos increase student engagement by offering visual stimulation. Using Kahoot for learning assessments has been shown to replicate classroom participation [19]. Videos make learning more engaging, and Kahoot's favorable feedback shows that interactive and gamified platforms increase online participation and active learning.

> P5: "*If YouTube is new technology, I use it. To play a video in class, you need a speaker and everything. Right now, I can simply obtain and clearly present web information.*"
> P1: "*They want to learn and make sure they're on par with the class, or they're competitive and want to be better.*"

Most participants stipulated a combination of their institute's choice of online delivery method to accomplish their teaching, such as through learning management platforms like Microsoft Teams or Google Meets, as well as applications like WhatsApp, or a real-time chatting application. This finding matched Juhary's investigation of platform preferences shows that Microsoft Teams and WhatsApp were the most favorite platforms because of easy access and effective use for communication [30].

3.2.2. Instructional strategies

For instructional strategies catered to students' autonomous learning, collaborative learning was the overarching approach found in this study, where students were usually divided into groups for discussion sessions and learning activities and shared their discussion findings and opinions with their peers. Some instructors involved reflective activities, which are essential and complementary for meaningful learning purposes [24]. Two instructors stressed the need of periodic feedback to empower students to learn independently. This finding is supported by several studies [24], [27]. Simplification tactics like open-ended questions and collaborative group work improved student engagement and critical thinking.

> P4: "*I'll use case studies to engage pupils. I'll let them view a video, allow them five to 10 minutes to think about it, then write notes and discuss a significant problem in the film.*"
> P3: "*One of my methods is simplification. I alter the level too. I support group work and discussion, especially in tertiary education, where we want students to become critical thinkers.*"

Rapanta *et al*. [31] recommended simplifying to interest students, and evaluating based on learning objectives can improve efficacy [22]. The study also found that simplifying technologies and mimicking teaching methods help teachers adopt technology. It's crucial to consider teachers' demands while introducing new technologies and methods.

3.2.3. Considerations for online teaching

Each teacher prioritized learning objectives and outcomes when creating and implementing instructional strategies. This guided their tool, multimedia, task, and evaluation choices. This shows their dedication to integrating teaching methods with learning objectives to give students meaningful, goal-oriented learning experiences. Most teachers customized their strategies to their subjects, including learning consequences, student involvement, and plagiarism. Previous researchers [27], [32] supported aligning assignments and assessments with learning objectives. Diverse evaluation techniques at different learning stages were stressed.

> P4: "*Professional journalism also shifted to online platforms. The story must be told differently.*"
> P6: "*We* need *multiple assessments. Please enter class for a quiz. A quiz will be given tomorrow at the end of class. You cannot have the same. Because it's boring.*"

This finding is also reported in previous studies [16], [26], [27] and finding as they emphasized that utilizing only a few methods of assessments will not be feasible for different students' learning expectations and individual learning styles. Therefore, multiple and varied formats of assessments are also crucial for supporting students' autonomous learning.

3.2.4. Content and instructional strategies development

Teachers demonstrate a high level of eagerness to evaluate and modify their teaching approaches, aggressively seeking and integrating student feedback to improve the creation of educational material. This method not only highlights their commitment to enhancing teaching but also cultivates a cooperative and learner-focused educational atmosphere. This is consistent with the findings of Kurdadze research [32], which highlights the importance of consistently adapting instructional tactics to match current learning patterns in order to improve the educational experience. Implementing dynamic content adjustments is essential for resolving potential disagreements in the classroom. Teachers also exchanged their methods for tackling plagiarism, highlighting the importance of a cooperative approach to staying updated on educational advancements and discovering inventive resolutions.

> P2: "*If both parties can complete their respective tasks, there will be no issue. We can engage in a discussion and find a resolution to the situation. The user's text is.*"
> P4: "*I would implement measures to increase the difficulty for students to engage in plagiarism. While they may indeed discover information regarding the case, they will not obtain any definitive answers."*

Unlike the technology approach advocated by Peytcheva-Forsyth *et al*. [26], teachers at this institution choose a conventional strategy, depending on attentive staff members to deter plagiarism. The variety of techniques underscores the intricate nature of academic integrity concerns, indicating the necessity for a comprehensive preventative strategy that integrates both technological remedies and human supervision.

3.3. Support for instructors' online teaching development

3.3.1. Instructors' interest and institutional support

The survey revealed a significant interest among educators in online learning, highlighting their willingness to adapt their teaching methods and content to suit this mode of education. This adaptability and enthusiasm are crucial in the face of the diverse educational styles present in online learning environments. It demonstrates the educators' proactive commitment to creating engaging and effective learning experiences. Despite facing challenges, their dedication and sense of responsibility shine through.

> P3: "*Challenges matter most. Don't worry about obstacles. Opportunity, actually.*"
> P2: "*A speaker or practice shouldn't rely on their own structure. Seminar speakers and professors must seek opportunities and stay current.*"

These educators seek professional development beyond teaching by attending conferences and workshops and using online resources. This independent method differs from previous studies that emphasized institutional content development support [14], [17], [39]. Teachers in the survey reported receiving technical and multimedia support, student training, and university-sponsored professional development. P4 stressed the significance of training, "*Trainings are very helpful because we need to know how to operate these things*."

3.3.2. Peer support and other resources

Teamwork and consulting mentors and colleagues are frequently required to equip educators to construct successful online pedagogy [10]. In the study, educators discussed their peer support experiences and the importance of cooperative communities and mentorship in remote instruction. Peer-to-peer exchanges of ideas and strategies develop community, advance educators' careers, and make online learning more reliable and flexible [10].

> P1: "*And I have my own groups like WhatsApp groups…(with) friends in the same line … (for sharing about) problems (and) useful (information) and tool(s)… I find that it is really effective. Sometimes I also ask for students' help with technology*."

In addition to the sources of support from mentors and colleagues, the instructors also mentioned about online peer groups, family members, and even students, mostly for technological knowledge and skills advancement. This new finding may be significant to the implication from Brieger *et al*. [1] that not only do instructors' roles change, but students' roles also change along with the transition of learning. This study has theoretical and practical implications for policymakers, teachers, and students. Online learning communities must be built through social presence, interactions, and instructor-student collaboration [8].

The findings suggested teachers must balance student learning and instructional expectations. This suggests that lawmakers should let teachers use their own teaching and learning method in their policies.

All parties must collaborate for online learning. Institutes should accommodate students and faculty [1]. This would keep teachers motivated and reduce stress. Knowing instructors' issues would also help authorities make regular adjustments to assist their training. This research may help policymakers assess their institutes' online education quality by revealing the barriers preventing instructors from succeeding in online learning mode. While instructors cannot directly influence their schools' policy and decision-making, prepping teaching plans and analyzing contingency plan implementation may minimize in-class anxiety about teaching well [21], [26], [27]. The main teaching plan and backups that meticulously and realistically divide instructors' tasks into achievable steps let online teachers manage the situation with ease, confidence, and fun [25]. Workshops tailored to teachers' requirements may help them change their techniques. Teachers favored clear, cognitive development-focused instruction that promoted students' independent learning [24].

Malaysian private university students may learn better with social interaction. So, online instructors should enhance their influence by promoting social interaction between instructors and students and even stents with peers, such as welcoming videos and ice-breaking [16]. Due to social roles, engagement, cooperation, and participation can save instructors time connecting with students outside of class [15]. Public university instructors may focus more on students' learning attitudes than private university instructors [4]. Students' languages and cultures may cause problems [3]. Future research could integrate this study's findings. Mentorship is not new, but students and other non-teachers should be considered. These findings may expand peer and institutional support, proposing a new role for learners in online teaching and learning cooperation [27]. Online professional development should also emphasize student participation, high expectations, adapting teachers' teaching to the online environment, and effective online teaching approaches [16], [32]. This study intends to raise awareness among higher education institutions to provide enough, relevant, and rational online professional development for teachers to enhance their capacity. The findings can help educators change online learning approaches and stay motivated. This survey only included three Malaysian private universities. Establishing a heterogeneous sample for data validity was affected. In addition to the major conclusion about teachers' heavy workload and limited time, this study did not reveal their content development time management strategies. Private universities need more representation to connect theory and practice. Supplemental research might assess instructors' workload, management, and methods.

4. CONCLUSION

This qualitative study examined Malaysian private university instructors' online teaching challenges and methods. Previous studies on instructors' challenges and approaches in different nations and academic cultures guided the present study's constructivist exploration of online teaching and learning's persistent issues and solutions. The growing needs of online learning challenged teachers in selected Malaysian private universities. The learning mode has left teachers with a tremendous workload and limited time to build technical knowledge and abilities for their multiple duties, which is thought to have badly impacted their teaching approaches. The clash of online distribution methods with teaching methodologies made it harder for teachers to create a collaborative, easy, and transparent learning environment. Pupils' low readiness and participation in learning led to their issues. The teachers suggested rethinking their teaching methods. For online learning, instructors used various learning technologies with their learning management platforms, integrated videos and gamified assessments, and used collaborative and reflective learning to meet learning objectives. Simplifying content, tests, and tool use, and delivering timely feedback were also suggested to foster autonomous learning. Instructors used student comments to improve their expertise and teaching methods. The instructors remained committed to improving their online teaching skills. Instructional support from institutes, personal resources, and peers was equally important for their online transfer during the self-initiated developmental phase. The discrepancy and contradiction in government and department or university directives and manuals made it difficult for some private university teachers to retain or change their teaching methods. This may confuse and strain educators in providing quality instruction.

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