OUR ONLINE LEARNING

Experience

KPTMAS' MEMOIRS

OUR ONLINE LEARNING

Experience

KPTMAS' MEMOIRS

Our Online Learning Experience : KPTMAS' Memoirs

TABLE OF CONTENTS

"Teach your children things you did not learn when you were their age, for they have been created for a time that is different from your time."

Ali bin Abu Talib

Quoted by Al-Azhar University. (2005). Children in Islam: Their care, upbringing and protection. UNICEF.

Foreword

Learning in Tertiary Education Institutions is an interesting journey. No two persons experience exactly the same path going through the ups and downs of gaining knowledge and skills. Traditional ways of teaching and learning, lecturing students in classroom, listening to endless jargons and terminology, memorizing countless facts and formulas are all come with their own challenges. Recently, the world was brought to a standstill due to COVID 19 pandemic. We were locked up and isolated in our own homes. Every aspect of our lives was affected. Our movements were restricted. But human race prevails. We managed to maneuver this global crisis by changing the way we do things. Groceries and food were sent to our doorsteps. Festivals and greeting were celebrated online. Even religious rituals like "akad nikah" or weeding solemnization were not spared. Online learning though not a new concept, became the "in thing" or so popular for the desperate attempt to continue the process of teaching and learning.

Reading these memories of Kolej Poly Tech MARA Alor Setar students managing their online classes and life as students during this COVID 19 pandemic, one cannot deny our ability to adapt to new environment and requirements. Nur Aina Maisarah Ahmad Fudzi proved that with positive attitudes we can overcome any shortcomings and become successful as Thomas Fuller said "All things are difficult before they are easy." Nur Amalina Musa, talks about taking actions in order to achieve our goals. She shared her short but meaningful experience studying with friends while staying at the hostel. Ahmad Fudhail Ahmad Kenedi emphasized on the struggle and challenges to stay focused and work effectively as a group in college. This reminds us that ability to work as a team is important and "Knowledge is not free. You have to pay attention." as stated by Richard Feynman.

These memoirs serve a valuable insight of the minds and coping skills of these students when facing new environment and needs of online learning during the pandemic. They did what they can to strive and thrive in their pursuit of an academic diploma. Online learning is here to stay. "Online learning is not the next big thing, it is the now big thing." – Donna J. Abernathy

MUDZIR BIN MOHAMMAD

Preface

It has been two years since COVID-19 impacted us. There were lots of stories, starting from accepting the sudden change that impacted our work and lives to the death of our loved ones. However, stories and experiences appear to be buried deep within our own memories and undocumented. We have forgotten that it was through historical writing and manuscripts written by our ancestors that we learned about past events such as the Spanish Flu, the Black Death, MERS-CoV, and so on.

These memoirs are meant to document the good and bad, the pros and cons, of the pandemic's impact on our learning culture. Prior to COVID, we had never preferred using online platforms as a medium for teaching and learning. Inevitably, during the pandemic, we were forced to apply and use those technologies without proper training. It is like on-the-job training for all of us.

Accepting it may be easy for some, while others may experience anxiety.

From my own experience, I do prefer face-to-face classes for practical subjects and online classes for theoretical subjects. During practical classes, I need to supervise and observe the skills possessed by my students. Teaching typing via online classes for Office Management students is never easy.

Back in the early days of the implementation of online learning, I had nearly 100 students per class per subject, and I could not monitor their typing skills. I asked for a five-minute video recording of themselves typing. But it was just a one-time occurrence since it was impossible to monitor large numbers of students via WhatsApp video.

The total number of students per lecturer back then was 250–300 students per a lecturer. Yes, I believed that was overloaded since we also had our administrative designation and a rotating administrative position for the majority of us. That was the teaching part; I have not told you about the marking part.

Again, when it comes to practical subjects, students need to see their own errors so that they do not repeat them in the next exercise. So, what should we do? Using only a laptop made marking each of the exercises difficult. Assuming it would delay my work, I decided to buy a tab to ease my teaching and learning process.

Still, when the number of students was too high, I sometimes had a panic attack. When work was stressful, I could feel my hands shaking, my heart rate increasing, and I couldn't breathe. I never experienced these physiological changes throughout my teaching years.

It was becoming tolerable when the number of students decreased to 100–150 per lecturer. For me, when conducting online classes, management should also look for the mental health of lecturers and students. With the amount of work given, it is tolerable or not.

Change has been a controversial topic for humans. In learning Organizational behaviour, one of the must-cover topics is change management, and one of the sub-topics is why people resist change. Upon facing COVID-19, the changes that we wanted to make were the most difficult of all, which was the culture change.

We need to change our lifestyle, the way we teach and learn, the way we submit assignments to lecturers, and the way we communicate with classmates. I believed that orientation with new class members was simply done through WhatsApp and other social media for my pupils. In comparison to my diploma years, we met in class from the first day, chit-chatting and getting to know each other through face-to-face duties.

Of course, if I were to compare the differences between generations, this preface would take more than 10 pages. But here we are, two years after the pandemic, living with it and facing it without fear. By Hardy (2018), he quoted Einstein: "The measure of intelligence is the ability to change," which means humans need to expand in order to thrive for life. If we are not changing, it means we are not growing.

Perhaps my own wish is that these memoirs could be helpful for future students in overcoming any sudden pandemic.

Introduction

"In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity."
– Sun Tzu

The emergence and spread of a disease like COVID-19 would have been considered inevitable. Yet, the hit of COVID-19 is indeed an alarming bomb for us to look over the authenticity of work-life balance in Malaysia, especially in the context of education, mental health, and labour laws.

Due to the pandemic, people had been confined to their homes. Everyone was occupied trying to figure out how best to protect ourselves and our loved ones. Meanwhile, many organizations had to rapidly adjust their way of working. It's forcing a digitalization that many companies had spoken about, but had to implement at breakneck speed.

Fortunately, during those days, the technical aspects of remote work were much easier. Everything from Google Meet, Webex, and Zoom for communication, as well as cloud-based tools such as Google Drive and Google Classroom, make life significantly easier. However, there is a difference between being technically ready and being culturally and emotionally ready for this new world.

Nonetheless, in the context of education, this could be a new beginning, but returning to work and study with uncertainty and clear boundaries in so many areas may be too demanding for students and instructors.

This chaotic situation somehow led to some conflict of interest between each of these stakeholders, namely the institution, educators, and students, which triggered an overwhelming individual to counter back in both positive and negative ways. At one point, we forgot that each of these stakeholders was actually a human being, and human beings are always directed by emotion before logic.

Many decisions were made because they needed to be made by institutions and management as a survival method, but the real question was whether we were ready enough to face this fully online learning mode. Student recruitment and retention in higher education institutions became tricky issues as people's priorities shifted and travel and hygiene restrictions were imposed. As a result, most higher education institutions started altering their business model and moving forward with online learning norms in order to stay relevant and competitive in the education sector.

The sudden shift from face-to-face teaching severely disrupted higher education activities and posed many challenges for teaching staff, who were asked to develop online versions of their courses overnight. Lecturers were put under tremendous pressure, as work practises were significantly altered with limited support, resources, and capabilities. Work overload, a lack of training, and work-family conflict increased educators' burden and stress while teaching online.

It cannot be denied that online learning was the best solution to that unprecedented situation. However, it did have some drawbacks related to the lack of teaching and learning (T&L) readiness. The readiness issues made students less active during lessons and increased the amount of stress on the instructors as both parties felt unhappy with the teaching and learning atmosphere.

The instructors briefly lost sight of the reality that, in addition to being students, the pupils were also the sons or daughters of their families. Compared to being isolated from families in their hostel room, they had a lot of responsibilities when they were at home. Some students were forced to look after their younger siblings while their parents worked as front-line employees, assisting them with some schoolwork during lectures; in the worst-case scenario, they had to work part-time because their parents were sacked from their professions. The unpleasant truth is that having a physical classroom forced students to only concentrate on their academic tasks. However, because they had to focus on domestic tasks, online learning made it tougher for them to participate and occasionally led to confrontation with their instructors.

Making it worst, students struggled with loneliness and isolation not only because of disconnections from friends but the abrupt disruption of the semester can cause cessation in their assignments and internships, leading to uncertainty in graduation and job market availability. This situation influenced students in terms of their learning motivation and anxiety, which led to depression and mental health issues among students during this tough period.

On the other hand, their instructors also felt burned out because they had too much work and were worried about their family's health. This was followed by a loss of control over work, the overlap of office work with household tasks, a loss of control over their personal decisions, their schedules being all over the place, and concern about finances.

The relationship between instructors and students turned into a love-hate relationship. The burned-out instructors only talked to their students when they had to, which was probably during the synchronous sessions. This left the teens in a teribble position, as they had no one to talk to or vent to about their troubles or everyday stresses. Lecturers grumbled about their new working hours, which were "standby" 24 hours per day, seven days per week. The fact that online learning is flexible leads to other issues with labour laws, causing employees to work too much and deteriorating their mental and physical well-being. The lecturers faced some sleep disorders and fatigue, which affected their mood and how well they did their jobs. In the end, tonnes of complaints were filed by students who were unhappy with their teaching and learning environments.

In this memoir, readers are presented with various untold stories from students and lecturers. I do believe that engaging with multiple opinions, experiences, and backgrounds could lead to new and valuable perspectives. It's often said that we should put ourselves in another person's shoes in order to better understand their point of view.

Our First Online Class

By
Nur Aina Maisarah Ahmad Fudzi
Diploma in Office Management

Upon completion of SPM in 2019, I started to scout for a job just to get some pocket money. I work in several places, such as food and beverages and teaching kids at childcare centres. Then, I was offered by KPTM Alor Setar to continue my study for the Diploma in Office Management in November 2020. I have passed the critical time during March 2020. I basically had the time to do some preparation before starting my diploma.

A month before I started my online classes, I did proper preparation to make sure it would go smoothly. For example, I ordered a new adjustable study table, a study lamp, and some stationery. Not to forget, I bought an internet plan that specialised in my online classes because I knew that the apps were going to consume a lot of internet data.

Since the internet is a must for our generation, I subscribed to an unlimited internet plan for a month. Next, I also bought a new laptop to make sure I had a device to use to join an online class. If I had to choose between a computer and a laptop, I might say a laptop is more compatible than a computer because I can carry it wherever I go.

As a new student who has entered a new level of study after graduating from high school, things will initially be difficult. I was excited about my first online class, but I was also apprehensive about how my diploma path would go.

When I was in high school, I was a confident individual since I was the weekly emcee of the school assembly. When I joined college, though, I experienced a decline in confidence, particularly in my first online course. I have also imagined that my lecturers will be harsh and rigorous. This notion made me even more terrified to approach the lecturer in my class, who liked asking students questions.

What made me worry more was the assessment given by the lecturers. When I was reminded about the assignments, I began to have conflicting emotions because I had zero knowledge of how the assignment was supposed to be formatted, how the report should be written for the diploma level, and so on.

As I did not know anyone in my class, the thought of them inevitably crossed my mind. A few of my classmates gave me the impression they were arrogant, and they were smarter and confident than me. Again, this was all in the mind of an 18-year-old diploma student who has just begun her new journey through an online course.

What did I do, then, to calm myself down? About ten to fifteen minutes before the start of my online lesson, I would make sure that I had a stable internet connection and that my notebook and other necessary gadgets were prepared. The first thing we did in my very first online class was an "ice-breaking" session with the whole class and the lecturers. All of my first-semester lecturers led this discussion. As a result of this introductory activity, I knew the names and hometowns of my fellow classmates. Several of them are from other states, including Selangor, Pahang, Kelantan, and Penang, but I am the only one from Kedah. This meeting paved the way for smoother subsequent communications in our ongoing online group work and getting to know each other.

My assumptions about my classmates turned out to be incorrect; it turned out that they were kind and encouraging to me. The same may be said regarding my instructor, and I felt grateful for that. When the lecture session started, I realised that all my thoughts were wrong again because the majority of my lecturers were supportive, approachable, kind, and lovely to us. That is why we should not judge a book by its cover, and our first perception is not always true.

My first semester of college consisted of a variety of classes, including Personality Development, Office Administrative 1, Typing Skills 1, Introduction to Information Skills, English Skills 1, and Pengajian Islam. Our lecturers had informed us that these classes were the fundamental and introductory ones and that it should not be too difficult to get good grades in them. I plan to score 4.00 for my first semester.

Due to the fact that we are the internet generation, our first class consists solely of interaction via my own laptop in my own bedroom. My lecturers requested that we turn on the camera for the first class to guarantee that all students were there and could see each other. In the first class, my professors provided an overview of the subject and the study plan for the subsequent fourteen weeks.

From that point on, we were aware of whether the topic required us to take a final examination or whether it was a non-final assessment such as a case study, presentation, or any other required evaluation. When it came to the final examinations, I was always a little anxious, particularly when it was an individual examination.

We had a difficult time getting to know each other. Communicating solely through phones and software was somehow not the same as communicating face-to-face with someone. Even though we barely knew our classmates, we still had to figure out a way to cooperate with them in order to accomplish our group assignments.

My nervousness surfaced once more, and I was terrified when I learned about the final exam, especially if it required group work. Personally, group assignments required everyone's involvement; otherwise, the assignment quality became another issue. The nervousness intensified because we did not know each other, had not even met physically, and did not know how they would commit to the job. Yes, the ice-breaker session aids in getting to know my classmates, but it is insufficient to truly get to know someone. I was referring to their effort, work attitude, and commitment. It was difficult for me to select the ideal groupmates who can be nice, fully commit, and work well together.

Having technical issues such as internet problems, forgetting to turn off the microphone, and so on when attending an online class irritated me most of the time. These were the issues I attempted to avoid when taking an online class, which was why I prepared thoroughly before each lesson. My lecturer said that it was a normal occurrence and they could tolerate it.

At the end of the first semester, our lecturers provided us with feedback on how well we performed in the course, how we did on the final exam, and how we carried ourselves overall. They wanted us to be successful in the new learning environment, and they were eager to help us in any way they could if we ran into any academic trouble. This marked the beginning of my diploma program. To tell you the truth, I think that traditional classroom settings are outdated and that virtual learning environments are far ahead of them.

After years of putting up with it and learning how to use a variety of new devices and apps, I can finally claim that it makes my workdays easier. This realisation came after I put up with it and learned how to use it. As long as I have connectivity to the internet, I am free to move about while still taking an active role in the learning sessions.

Home is'nt a Study Place

By
Nur Amalina Musa
Diploma in Tourism Management

As members of the "internet generation," we are sometimes stereotyped as being a generation that expects everything to be brought to us on a silver platter. Despite this, we do not truly have access to all of the sweets and popcorn. We face our own unique set of challenges and obstacles, which may be different from those faced by previous generations. My hometown is in Batu Kurau, which is in the state of Perak, and you are correct in assuming that it is not an urban area with many homes that have access to the internet. It is challenging for us to study at home because we have trained ourselves to believe that our homes are places to relax and enjoy quality time with family and friends. My own problems, such as the disruptions caused by my younger siblings' squabbling and playing, as well as the noise they create, pissed me off.

When it is raining, one can hear a variety of animal sounds, including birds chirping, roosters crowing, and frogs croaking. In addition to that, I consider the noise pollution caused by vehicles on the road to be another source of distraction for me. That does not take into account the tantalising aromas coming from my mother's cooking! It may appear insignificant to some, but the fact that one must contend with all of these on a daily basis and while taking online exams or examinations makes it more difficult to accept.

As a result of all of these distractions, I was aware that I needed to take action, and the simplest method for me to combat my distraction was to go to the library or the mosque to study when I had an online class or even to complete all of my tests. I came to this conclusion because, in my opinion, a place to study ought to be one that is quiet and free from excessive background noise. I believe that in order for me to get the most out of my studying, I should go to the library.

Furthermore, I believe that if I had to go out in order to study, I would value the time I had and make better preparation than if I had studied at home. This was the only time I was going out, so I needed to put in a lot of effort and spend a lot of time getting ready. For instance, it cost me a few ringgit because the library is very far from my house, and with the effort to dress up to go there, being away from my cosy room helped me concentrate much better.

Being cooped up in my own house and bedroom led to me becoming unproductive and slothful. It was difficult to discipline myself because there was no one to ensure that my work was completed or monitor my work. In contrast to a physical class, where the lecturers could keep their eyes on us and provide direction while we worked independently, we now work on our own.

Despite my result, I actually felt demotivated since my home is my comfort zone. When it came to doing assigned work by my lecturers, I procrastinated a lot and ended up always doing last-minute work for myself. Last-minute work, however, could result in stress due to limited time to complete the task. Students frequently make excuses such as doing housework but end up watching Netflix instead.

As I mentioned earlier, my hometown is in a rural area. So the internet connection was a big trouble for me, and I believed having technical problems was a common thing for our generation, which is still learning to use technology. I always had problems with Google Meet since it was new to me; most of the time, the audio and video are unclear when the lecture session starts. It was common to have buffering problems during the meetings. Sometimes, it is common to have a video stuck on the notes or explanation during an online class. Completion of works online and submitting it online also arose another problem. Luckily, throughout the semester, the lecturers also tolerated the technical problems.

So my solution to overcome the internet and technical problems is to move to my grandparents' house in Alor Setar. It is also near the Kolej Poly-Tech Mara Alor Setar branch, and living in a big city means having good internet coverage. Therefore, during semesters 5 and 6, I lived with my grandparents, while during semester 4, I lived in the hostel provided by the college. I would like to share my experience living in the hostel during semester 4.

Since I was away from my parents, I'm sure all of my readers were wondering if I was experiencing cultural shock, homesickness, or both. To be honest, I began my hostel experience when I was 13 years old. This experience greatly aided my adjustment to hostel life during my graduate studies. When I felt down or missed my family, I would just video call them. It is also a privilege to have had such a supportive family while I was a student.

Living in the hostel during Semester 4 totally taught me how to be independent in the context of finance management and how to survive in the world. This was because I had to pay for my own meals, transportation when I went out when I did not have class (because the college provided free transportation to class), and costs when I hung out with my friends because I could be a bit spendy when I went shopping.

Furthermore, since I had hybrid classes during the semester, I met lots of people coming from different backgrounds, which brought me many benefits and also disadvantages. It also taught me a lot about being more mature, as I was involved in organising many events and programmes for the group I joined.

Here are three crucial points I do want to emphasise for you during your studies. Always contact your lecturer anytime you have a problem with your studies, whether online or offline, because you never know who can help?.

For instance, if you are experiencing problems with the work that you are doing in a group, and if your lecturer were to interfere with the problems that are occurring inside the group, they may change the pupils who are a part of your group. On the other hand, I was conscious of the fact that there were situations in which we ended up working on our group tasks all by ourselves.

The second piece of advice I have is to make sure that you do not take any of your assessments for granted because they will definitely be used to calculate your carrymarks. In conclusion, you should be grateful for all the benefits that your instructor has provided. For instance, if the examination or test will be administered online, you should strive to achieve the highest possible score. As we all know, the vibe and effort required between online and offline tests are totally different, so make sure you use the opportunity wisely.

In my opinion and preference, it is feasible to study anywhere, as long as it is not at my own house. However, that is how I study, and I do not know how others do. If you could create a conducive working space at your home, maybe that would be a better option. But not all of us could afford to have our own study space at all. If you come from a middle-class family or maybe a lower-class family, having your own study space at home is a luxury.

We all have our own study approach and strategy, and I believe you should figure that out first in order to ease your personal learning path easier. My philosophy is "Hard work will never betray you." Let's chase our dreams in our own way!

Study Life Balance

By
Ahmad Fudhail Ahmad Kenedi
Diploma in Office Management

Being a student at a higher education institution is no longer an unusual occurrence; rather, it is something that the majority of today's youth must deal with in order to pursue their goals and compete in a job market that usually requires specific academic qualifications. Currently, I am going through this stage of life in order to achieve my life goals. My journey as a student started at Sekolah Rendah Kebangsaan Iskandar in Alor Setar, Kedah, for my primary education from preschool until standard 6. Honestly, I am not a gifted student, but I always have a strong inner desire to learn and improve myself, which drives me to be better in every aspect of study. I am also known as someone who has a firm stand on any issue and will not hesitate to voice out my opinion without worrying about people's perceptions of me.

After finishing primary school, I continued my secondary education at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Simpang Kuala. This school was the starting point of my awakening and transformation as a well-rounded student in terms of academics, identity, leadership, morals, spirituality, and other areas.

As a Junior Vocation Education student in the area of Furniture Manufacturing Operations, I had gone through the technical education and skills from level 1, and the experience was entirely different from what the mainstream education student underwent. I successfully completed this three year study when I was in Form Three and received a Level 2 Malaysian Skills Certificate.

My education choice, which led me down an entirely different path than most students, always triggers people's interest in me; their interest could be due to my charisma or the stigma towards TVET education in Malaysia.

After I received my TVET certificate, many people questioned my educational background and career choice. My desire to find the best next educational step that would be feasible for me was piqued by this circumstance. It's crucial to make sure I am keeping up with academic standards for students who are enrolled in the mainstream and that I am not falling behind in any way.

I struggled to choose between the academic and skills fields, which required me to finish my studies at a vocational college and obtain a Level 3 Skills Certificate, so that is another reason for this (or continue studies in the mainstream like other students and finish it by getting an SPM certificate.

As a result, I continued my education in Forms 4 and 5 for two years as a mainstream student in order to obtain an excellent SPM certificate that enabled me to move on to a higher level of study. In addition, I held the highest position in the school for the 2019–2020 academic year, serving as both Chief Supervisor and Head of Students.

Over the five years in secondary school, I firmly believed that God had sent me a number of favourable events, developments, and individuals who had helped mould me into a wise person in all areas—academics, abilities, leadership, etc. Finally, in light of the prior narration, it is clear that it offers some insight into the reality of the life of the 19-year-old author, Ahmad Fudhail Bin Ahmad Kenedi, who has chosen to pursue his lifelong dream of success by following a different academic path than most students his age.

The real query, however, is this: How challenging is the COVID-19 pandemic to me as a student in a higher education institution (an academic field) and as a scuba diver (a skill field) at the same time?

During the initial stages of the pandemic's spread, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (KPM) has ordered that all schools in Malaysia be temporarily closed and that the face-to-face teaching and learning process (T&L) be replaced by online learning. My preparation for the SPM, the biggest exam of my life, and the fact that the country was struck by the COVID-19 pandemic, which made face-to-face instruction impossible, caused me intense unease and anxiety after accepting these facts.

For me, this problem does not stand in the way of mastering effective answering strategies or from getting the grade I want in each of the subjects on the SPM exam. Only a few subjects may be impacted by the adoption of this online learning, such as science and mathematics.

When online learning was first implemented, I felt a little uncomfortable using electronic devices like laptops and tablets. This online learning made me feel awkward because my daily routine was so simple; all I needed was a pen, an exercise book, and a teacher who taught in front of me. While this was going on, I was struggling along with a few other students because we were not familiar with the apps and software that were available on laptops and smartphones.

Due to the fact that I was skipping important subtopics that the instructor had covered in the online course, I became very depressed as a result of this problem.

In addition to my lack of software usage experience, the biggest obstacle I faced when trying to enrol in online classes was internet access. This made me realise how essential a stable internet connection is to ensure the class sessions go off without a hitch and without interruption.

My father had set up high-speed UNIFI internet access to address this problem. I no longer rely solely on mobile data, which was expensive, required to be purchased frequently, and had a usage limit.

Another problem I had was not having the tools I needed to deal with online mode. I realised students could attend online classes on their smartphones with internet connectivity in any location. However, the use of laptops and printers was necessary in order to accomplish any job or exercise given by the teacher neatly and precisely. There were situations where the teaching material was given in softcopy and it was not necessary to print it, but most students preferred to print it to make it easier to refer to or read through hardcopy instead of staring at their screen for a long duration. Along with the issues and challenges caused by technological causes, the Movement Control Order (MCO) that had been implemented across the country had other repercussions that had an impact on my capacity to learn. I constantly worry about how well-versed I am in critical subjects like science and math. The teacher must give a thorough explanation in order to guarantee that I can grasp this subject.

The MCO issue has also made it challenging for me to socialize with my friends outside of study groups. I myself miss the vibe of student life before COVID-19, such as face-to-face discussion with teachers and friends, group presentations, hands-on activities during lessons, etc. Furthermore, I frequently faced unpleasant situations while online learning at home, such as television noise, family activities, house chores, etc., which decreased my attention and focus during the lesson. When I finished high school with honours, the COVID-19 epidemic was still ravaging the world, and there didn't seem to be any sign of an end in sight. I persevered through the period so that I could continue my academic journey. While waiting for my diploma enrollment, I took advantage of the long break to work at various jobs temporarily in order to prepare myself with some industrial experience, particularly in the financial area. Although I felt happy with the new routine and my experiences, I needed to be extremely cautious to avoid becoming infected with COVID-19 while working and entertaining customers.

After a few months of working, I began to feel uneasy and bored with my situation because of the numerous government restrictions that must be followed, which prevent me from travelling to different states and countries, visiting relatives, attending social events, and so on. It seemed like after working 5 days, my weekend was only spent at home without any interesting activities and with mostly the same routines, which were sleeping, eating, watching Netflix, etc. I really hoped that the teaching mode during the college years would be face-to-face instead of online.

However, my dream and hope were crushed after the college management informed me that the teaching and learning process for Semester 1 was conducted through an online mode on my first day as an IPT student at Kolej Poly-Tech MARA, Alor Setar. I cannot rule it out, but I had some initial concerns about getting this first semester off to a good start.

For instance, interaction with instructors and peers is somewhat limited, there is not much two-way communication, and it's difficult to meet friends and new lecturers in person. Hence, I discovered my inherent strength and ability to function independently in any circumstance.

The learning system and pattern used in this HEI, however, differ from those used in secondary schools and are also combined with the implementation of online teaching and learning. The type of continuous assessment that is based on tasks that are composed individually and in groups is one of the differences in learning that I found difficult to adapt, as it seemed to keep me busy for the whole fourteen weeks of study.

Group assignments are the problem that we want to focus on, and that is evident in this online teaching and learning scenario. Typically, in a face-to-face environment, this group project would influence a small portion of a student's marks or grade due to some irresponsible students who are careless in carrying out their responsibilities, such as not completing the task, plagiarizing, and other offences that would cause other innocent group members to be punished equally by the lecturer.

However, in this online teaching and learning lesson, things have gotten more chronic as the group members have difficulty reaching the troublesome group members to commit to the group assignments. The troublemakers' simple act of ignoring a message or call from group members during a crucial period of submission causes a big hassle for other people's results.

In addition, culture shock is another issue during online learning as a first-semester student. I had experienced culture shock in the early stages of my student life and struggled to adjust to my campus life, which typically began at 8.30 a.m. and ended at 5.30 p.m. Each lesson took around one to three hours, which required me to focus on my screen without moving anywhere.

Furthermore, the medium of instruction for each of the subjects is English, which is one of my weaknesses as a student. These two examples showed how the teaching approaches used in schools and tertiary education differ. Honestly, this had put some stress on myself, but I refused to surrender and instead pushed myself to work harder in order to catch up with the current situation.

Based on my first-semester experience and observations, a small number of students experienced severe culture shock, which led to some situations among them such as procrastinating their work, delaying their studies, intense mental stress, ongoing anxiety, and some even deciding to quit their studies.

From a different angle, I believed that the self-learning habits of a student also contributed to their culture shock. This is due to the fact that in an online learning environment, students are expected to self-regulate their own learning without waiting for their lecturer to spoon-feed them with the knowledge. Their inability resulted in difficulty balancing their study for final examinations and completing coursework assignments within the time frame provided.

During my third semester, when the college agreed to allow the teaching and learning to be conducted face-to-face, I was really ecstatic and deeply grateful to Allah. In conclusion, from what I have said above, it's clear how hard it is for me to finish the online learning process.