



Students' Learning Experiences in Introduction to Drama Theatre Classes During COVID -19

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ABSTRACT

The pandemic has caused the closure of educational institutions, which halted face-to-face teaching and learning. The unprecedented situation has left the institutions with no other choice other than implementing online learning to ensure the educational process's continuity. This study examines students' perceptions in Introduction to Drama and Theatre online classes. Three components of perceptions were investigated: the experience in learning the subject online, students' participation in the class, and the materials used in online classes. The quantitative data were collected from 38 first-year students enrolling in the Drama and Theatre programme at UNIMAS. The questionnaire was distributed online using Google Form. The findings showed a positive perception of learning Introduction to Drama and Theatre online, while moderate perception was identified in students' participation in the class. A positive perception was also seen in the materials and platforms used in online classes. Most of the students enjoyed the learning process due to the support from the lecturer. Moving forward, better infrastructure is needed in order to ensure the ability to conduct online learning without any obstacles. All stakeholders are responsible for playing their role to contribute to the online learning environment.

Keywords: COVID-19, online learning drama and theatre, perception

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1 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the shutdown of different sectors, leading to the education sector's closure. Since the implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia, most educational institutions now opted to conduct online classes through various online platforms as instructed by the Ministry of Education. Adjusting to the sudden shift in teaching and learning has undoubtedly impacted the students, instructors, and the educational organization. The unprecedented change from conventional learning to digital or virtual education could not happen overnight (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). Despite this, the academic fraternity was trying their very best to provide lessons online with technological tools such as Google Class, Zoom, Microsoft Team, and forth. Online learning is undeniably helpful in assisting students without the need for face-to-face interaction. Students, on the hand, have their own opinions on having this type of learning. Chung et al. (2020) conducted a study on online learning readiness among 399 UiTM students, where they discovered that some of the students were not ready for online learning. The students preferred to have conventional classes compared to online learning due to internet connectivity difficulties whenever the lectures were conducted via live-streaming platforms. Apart from that, Omar et al. (2020) discovered that students need more interaction with their instructor and support in completing their online classes tasks. The students are still unfamiliar with online practices, thus leading to uncertainties among students.

In practical learning, Thomas et al. (2021) studied medical students' perception of online teaching and learning. The study found that online learning would not improve their clinical skills due to the absence of practical learning, which was not a case when face-to-face lectures were conducted. It is also the case for those who majored in Drama and Theatre courses where practical learning is needed. Learning theatre has always been a face-to-face situation, and moving to online platforms restrict students and lecturers' ability to have a complete experience of hands-on learning. The institutions have to keep adapting to the needs of online instructions despite the various challenges that arise due to the unprecedented change in teaching and learning. It has also led to the developing of a new curriculum and instructional methods, which raises panic among administrators and students (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Omar et al., 2020). Students' achievements rely on their self-study, online attendances, assignments submission, and online examinations (Broadbent & Poon, 2015). Some students are indeed overwhelmed by the amount of work that needs to be done in a class. The situation worsened when the students enrolled in more than four classes. Also, the nature of theatre cannot be learned entirely through theories and concepts. Both lecturers and students are affected by these new online learning challenges and fill the new normal gap. All things considered, this study aims to examine students' perceptions in learning Introduction to Drama and Theatre (GKD 1023) online. The recorded perceptions are in terms of the conducted class, students' participation and material used in the class.

2 METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study explored students' learning experience in Introduction to Drama and Theatre classes (GKD 1023) that were conducted online. It is known that the quantitative approach deals with the numerical data in obtaining the results. A descriptive research design was used to analyze the variables in this study. This design was utilized in this study since the researcher

attempts to study students' perception of online learning. The data was collected using a questionnaire adapted from previous research and distributed online using Google Form.

This study's key participants were the first-year undergraduate students enrolling in Introduction to Drama and Theatre class in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). Purposive sampling was done in order to gather the data on students enrolling in the class. A total of 38 participants from the classes were involved in this study. All of the participants are in their first year. The gender distribution of the participants was 68.4% female and 31.6%, male. Of 38 participants, 10.5% were aged 20 years, while 73.4% were aged 21 years. 10.5% and 5.3% of them were aged 22 years and 23 years, respectively. Their academic qualification was STPM and Diploma with a percentage of 89.5% and 10.5% respectively. Most of the participants enrolled in more than six classes (84.2%), followed by four to six classes (13.2%) and one to three classes (2.6%). The majority of them resided in the rural area (52.6%), where most of them lived at their own home (92.1%).

A questionnaire adapted from Agung, Surtikanti and Quinones (2020) was utilized to gather the data about students' learning experience in Introduction to Drama and Theatre online classes. The 38-item questionnaire consisted of four sections, including the demographic background, Introduction to Drama and Theatre class, student's participation and online learning resources. Most of the questions were designed using a five-point Likert scale with a combination of open and close-ended questions. The questionnaire was then distributed using Google Form.

Table 1. Demographic Background

		N	%
Gender	Male	12	31.6%
	Female	26	68.4%
Age	20	4	10.5%
	21	28	73.7%
	22	4	10.5%
	24	2	5.3%
Qualification	STPM	34	89.5%
	Diploma	4	10.5%
Classes	1-3 classes	1	2.6%
	4-6 classes	5	13.2%
	More than 6 classes	32	84.2%
Residential Area	Urban	18	47.4%
	Rural	20	52.6%
Place of Stay	Home	36	94.7%
	Hostel	1	2.6%
	Rental	1	2.6%

The questionnaire's content was established based on a past study questionnaire (Agung, Surtikanti & Quinones, 2020). This questionnaire was created online using Google Form to reduce the cost and time needed to collect it. The questionnaire was distributed among undergraduate students enrolling in the Introduction to Drama and Theatre class in UNIMAS. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 26.0 version. Descriptive analysis was done using percentage, mean and standard deviation. Composite scores were also calculated in order to investigate the overall perception of online learning. Responses were classified using the five-point Likert scale to analyze the student's perception. However, when explaining, the findings were collapsed into three categories (disagree, neutral, agree) to simplify the reporting and discussion of data.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Overall Perceptions of Online Learning

In this study, the students' perception towards online learning is measured based on three components as classified by Agung, Surtikanti and Quinones (2020); learning the Introduction to Drama and Theatre online, participation in online class and materials used in an online class. The components in the questionnaire are determined based on the mean score, as shown in Table 2. The overall perceptions of the components were analyzed using the level of perception done by Greenhow and Lewin (2015), as seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Level of Perception adapted from Greenhow and Lewin (2015)

Level of Perception	Mean score range
Negative	1-2.33
Moderate	2.34-3.67
Positive	3.68-5.00

This study has examined the level of student's perception of each component. Table 3 shows the overall perception of the components. The mean score for students' experience in an online class is 3.79, which can be categorized into the positive perception category. The component that falls into the moderate perception category is student's participation, with a mean score of 3.18. Meanwhile, materials and platforms used in online class fall into the positive perception category with a mean score of 4.07.

Table 3. Overall Perceptions based on Components

Component	No of items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Introduction to Theatre Classes	6	3.79	.58469
Students' Participation	3	3.18	.90609
Materials and Platforms Used	7	4.07	.56731

3.2 Perception of Students on Introduction to Drama and Theatre Class

Table 4 shows the findings on student's perception of Introduction to Drama and Theatre online classes. This component consists of six items that probe the perception of students in learning the subject. This class was conducted online throughout the 14 weeks, and the Zoom application was used as a platform to conduct the live-streaming lectures. When it comes to learning the subject through an online platform, 23.7% agree, and 39.5% are neutral to Statement 1. Meanwhile, 21% of the students disagree with Statement 1. The statement (Statement 2) regarding their ability to explain the subject sees a higher level of agreement (55.2%) with only 5.3% of disagreement. It indicates that they can understand the class despite the changes in the mode of learning.

About Statement 3 on lecturer explanation, 89.5% of the students agree that the lecturer can clearly explain the online class sessions. In terms of the lecturer's understanding of students, many (76.3%) agree with this statement. Meanwhile, 63.2 % agreed on the need for synchronous class in understanding specific topics, and only 2.6% of the students disagree with the statement. To compare between asynchronous and synchronous class, 42.1% of the students agree that asynchronous class is better than synchronous class.

Despite the positive perceptions of learning the subject online, some students are frustrated with online learning implementation. Most of the students resided in rural areas, where most of them stated that they experienced poor internet connectivity, which affected their classes. For example, a student wrote, "*The network service at my place very poor and sometime I have to go somewhere else to get a good connection.*" The phenomenon is similarly described in Simamora's study (2020), where he found that internet access is an essential factor in online learning continuity. Apart from Simamora (2020), Ilias et al. (2020), in their study, concluded that the lack of internet connection had become a challenge for the students to cope with the classes. The students also feel the need for synchronous classes, which Ward et al. (2010) discovered that students perceived synchronous classes to be better than asynchronous classes. However, asynchronous classes may be adopted to help those who experienced poor internet connectivity. The same perspective can be reflected in Chung et al. (2020) findings where most of the students with a lack of connectivity preferred asynchronous classes to synchronous classes.

Table 4. Perception of Students on Introduction to Drama and Theatre Class

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1. Learning Drama and Theatre classes through an online platform works very well.	2.6%	18.4%	39.5%	23.7%	15.8%
2. I can explain the beginning of theatre history up to modern theatre.	0.0%	5.3%	39.5%	44.7%	10.5%
3. Lecturer explained world theatre history clearly.	0.0%	0.0%	10.5%	42.1%	47.4%
4. My lecturers are being cooperative and more understanding in online classes.	0.0%	0.0%	23.7%	36.8%	39.5%
5. I need a more synchronous class to understand certain topics in Introduction to Drama and Theatre Class.	2.6%	0.0%	34.2%	39.5%	23.7%
6. Asynchronous class is better than synchronous session.	2.6%	5.3%	50.0%	26.3%	15.8%

3.3 Perception of Students of Their Participation in Class

Table 5 shows the findings on students' perception of their participation in the online class. The shift of traditional methods to online teaching and learning may impact student's participation in the class. With regard to student's ability to follow the class, 34.3% agree with the statement while 26.3% disagree. Meanwhile, 34.2% of the students feel comfortable communicating electronically using various online learning platforms. However, 23.7% disagree with Statement 8, where it can be implied that the students are not accustomed to the 'new normal'. 39.4% of the students agree with Statement 9 regarding the interaction with their lecturer has become more accessible in an online class, while 23.7% disagree with the statement.

Based on the findings, some students find it difficult to follow and understand the classes. Ilias et al. (2020) also found that student's participation is greatly affected by their ability to understand the classes. In this case, lecturers need to play their part in ensuring students can understand by providing the necessary clarification to the student (Bhuasiri et al., 2012). In terms of communication and interaction between the students and lecturers, most students agree on the ease of communication in online classes. Though Obeidat (2020) study has revealed the low level of interaction between the students and lecturers, it differs from one lecturer to another. In this case, Omar et al. (2020) state that supportive lecturers will improve the quality of teaching and learning on online platforms. A student expressed that *"I like the atmosphere of the lecture, its well balance between serious and fun. Sir is very approachable and lenient on us."* Another student also stated that *"I like the lecturer's spontaneous way of teaching."* From this, the lecturer's ability in creating a fun environment to learn will lead to a better understanding of the subject.

Table 5. Perception of Students of Their Participation in Class

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
7. I find it easier to understand and follow online classes.	7.9%	18.4%	39.5%	21.1%	13.2%
8. I am comfortable communicating electronically.	2.6%	21.1%	42.1%	23.7%	10.5%
9. Interacting with my lecturer has become easier in online classes.	2.6%	21.1%	36.8%	28.9%	10.5%

3.4 Perception of Students on the Materials and Platforms Used in Introduction to Drama and Theatre Class

The findings on the materials and platforms used in the online classes are presented below. This component has seven items that investigate the materials and platforms utilized in the online class. When asked regarding the lecturer's explanation technique, many students agree (92.1%) with Statement 10. It indicates that the lecturer utilized various materials while teaching the online class. Regarding the use of video in learning, 89.4% agree that they can learn theatre history through the videos provided by the lecturer. The statement (Statement 11) regarding the given lecture notes helped them understand that the class has a high number (86.9%) of agreement. The students further agree (79%) that the given materials are easy to comprehend. In terms of the lecturer's assignments, 89.5% agree that the assignment is relevant to the notes and materials.

Meanwhile, 52.6% of the students agree that they can understand the assignment instructions better in online classes. Only 18.4% of the students disagree with Statement 15. Regarding the quizzes and tests given, 60.6% agree that quizzes and tests are easier to be completed in online classes, while 13.2% disagree with the statement.

The use of diversified tools in online learning may help and attract students to learn. Martin and Bolliger (2018) found that the use of various materials in online learning is indeed beneficial for the students. Ko and Rossen (2010) also supported this and recommended using different instructional materials such as multimedia resources, web resources, videos and more in online classes. In terms of the assessments, many students agree on the ease of instructions and completion. However, there is a little anxiety in completing every assessment online (Omar et al., 2020), which may be due to the current practices' unfamiliarity. Despite so, Omar et al. (2020) reported that the students did not have any difficulties doing every assessment online. The student's overall performance is equal in both online and classroom learning (Nennig et al., 2020), thus reflect the ability of online assessment.

Table 6. Perception of Students on the Materials and Platforms Used in Introduction to Drama and Theatre Class

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
10. My lecturer has a diversified explanation technique, such as the usage of educational videos.	0.0%	0.0%	7.9%	39.5%	52.6%
11. I learned theatre history from a video provided by the lecturer in eLEAP.	0.0%	0.0%	10.5%	52.6%	36.8%
12. Lecture notes help me understand world theatre history chronologically.	0.0%	0.0%	13.2%	39.5%	47.4%
13. The given materials were easy to comprehend.	0.0%	0.0%	21.1%	39.5%	39.5%
14. Assignments were relevant to the materials beforehand.	0.0%	0.0%	10.5%	57.9%	31.6%
15. I am able to understand the assignment instructions better in online classes.	0.0%	18.4%	28.9%	42.1%	10.5%

16. Quizzes and tests were easier to be completed in online classes compared to classroom classes.	7.9%	5.3%	26.3%	39.5%	21.1%
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4 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings above, it was found that there was a moderate to a positive perception of online learning. The implementation of online learning has positively and negatively impacted our lives. Several conclusions can be made based on the objective of this study. Firstly, it was found that the classes conducted online have a positive perception among the students though some may find it hard to join the class due to connectivity issues. In terms of their class participation, they neither agree nor disagree in interacting and communicating in online classes. Thirdly, the students expressed a positive perception towards the usage of online tools and materials. Most of the students found it interesting in the way the lecturer conducted the classes. The lecturer's diversification of methods of teaching has certainly attracted student's attention in online classes. The findings of this study will benefit various stakeholders in dealing with online classes. Instructors may use the findings in this study to improve their strategies in conducting online classes. Apart from that, the academic administrator will be able to create a comprehensive online courses design that caters to the students' needs. This study will also bring some benefit where policymakers should provide the infrastructure needed in achieving digital literacy. Also, this study will help other researchers to create diversified engagement strategies for online learning.

Every study has its limitations while doing the research. Since this study focuses on the students from a public university course, the findings are restricted to the sample. They cannot be generalized to a more significant population. Future study should be done on either a more extensive sample from a course or various institutions. Online learning satisfaction in drama and theatre needs to be researched further using a more focused instrument. A future study could investigate the readiness of students in learning drama and theatre online. Another area of study worth pursuing would be students' academic performance in the course.

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