MICROSOFT TEAMS AND ONLINE DISTANCE LEARNING: AN ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *Online Learning (OL) is a current trend in the education system in Malaysia. Most educational institutions in Malaysia shift to online learning in response to the Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia's current requirements. Both public and private educational institutions take part to involve in this new approach. Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Melaka also participates in delivering Online Learning (OL) to the students. The lecturer must serve this purpose to be more flexible in teaching and achieving organisational objectives and accommodate the students' need to acquire knowledge. Many platforms have been identified and tested by the lecturers, such as Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, and Learning Management Systems provided in the educational institution. The lecturers can determine which platform can meet both students and lecturers' requirements and needs by exploring several platforms. Students' readiness and perception of Online Learning derives from a survey before implementing online learning. Hence, this paper aims to discuss an overview of Microsoft Teams and Online Learning from an academic perspective. Moreover, this paper will focus on Microsoft Teams' benefits on online learning among UiTM Cawangan Melaka students.*

Keywords: *Online Distance Learning, Microsoft Teams, Online Platforms*

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Introduction

In March 2020, the education system in Malaysia has changed from face-to-face learning to online learning and online distance learning. This occurs because of the COVID-19 pandemic and due to this current situation, all the educational institutions both public and private are suggested to shift to online learning.

At the early stage, there are difficulties in adapting to online learning. However, the lecturers, the management of the university, and the Ministry of Higher Education must take part to ensure the students adapt to the new trend of the education system. Apart from that, the use of the latest developments of information and communication technologies (ICT) could be a useful tool to enhance distance education (Ortega-Maldonado, Llorens, Acosta, & Coo, 2017).

Many online learning platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, and University Learning Management Systems assist the lecturers and students in teaching and learning. Online learning platforms will replace the physical class. One of the efficient and effective platforms is Microsoft Teams. Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) will let students and lecturers meet virtually. Besides, when using MS Teams, it can be the hub for all Microsoft applications such as Microsoft Forms, Microsoft Stream, SharePoint, One Drive, and many more.

Moreover, MS Teams allows students and lecturers to collaborate and share ideas virtually without any difficulty. In Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Melaka, the management gives lecturers autonomy to choose any online learning platforms suitable for the lecturers. The following section will discuss further details of Microsoft Teams.

Literature Review

There are three point will be discussed in literature review which are online learning, online learning platform, and Microsoft Teams.

Definition of Online Learning

Online learning is a form of distance learning or distance education (Bartley & Golek, 2004). Online classes are courses conducted purely over the Internet (Hoic-Bozic, Mornar, & Boticki, (2009). Another definition of online learning is from Nguyen (2015), providing all courses of distance learning exclusively over the Internet is called online learning.

In UiTM Cawangan Melaka, most of the programs will conduct via online. This approach helps students and lecturers to minimise face-to-face meetings during this pandemic. Besides, online learning has many benefits, such as cost-efficient, time-saving, and users can access all the materials everywhere and anytime. The statement supports by Bowen (2013) there is the hope that online learning will provide a world-class education to anyone, anywhere, and anytime if they have access to the Internet. Online learning also can be more interactive because both lecturers and students can use creativity to express any ideas in accomplishing the task given.

Paul and Jefferson (2019) stated colleges and universities are now touting Web-based education efficiencies and are rapidly implementing online classes to meet student needs. Thus, the lecturers must realise the importance of online learning to students. Students and lecturers choose online education because of time flexibility and can be accessed everywhere. Wladis,

Conway, and Hachey, (2015) stated flexibility and easy access and time efficiency increase distance learning's attractiveness.

Next, online teaching enables students to participate virtually, but some are reluctant to participate in a face-to-face class because of low self-confidence. But with online learning, students who usually do not participate in class may now voice their opinions and concerns (Driscoll, Jicha, Hunt, Tichavsky, and Thompson, 2012).

Online Learning in Malaysia
In the year 2020, Malaysia's education system shifting from face-to-face learning to online and online distance learning. Educational institutions take responsive action after the Government had announced a Movement Control Order due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Chung, Mohamed Noor & Mathew, (2020), students and lecturers in higher education institutions were critically hit by the unprecedented changes because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Hence, the perception of online learning has changed, and the involved party is trying to adapt to the new education system phenomenon.

Online Learning Platform
Online learning platforms must be adapted to a virtual environment's knowledge and practices, promoting usefulness, autonomous learning, and interaction with teachers throughout learning tasks and communication tools (Gharmallah, 2017). Besides, online learning also encourages the flexibility and creativity of the lecturers in delivering the lesson. The lecturers can discover many approaches and platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Microsoft Kaizala, and any related methods. The university also uses its Learning Management Systems, for instance, UFUTURE for Universiti Teknologi MARA. However, the Microsoft Teams platform will be the focal point in this paper.

Microsoft Teams
Microsoft Teams is a cloud app digital hub that brings conversations, meetings, files and apps together in a single Learning Management System (LMS) (Microsoft, 2018). Microsoft Teams also one of the Microsoft products that virtually offers the users and as a hub for all Microsoft applications. Thus, the users, mainly lecturers and students, will be more flexible in delivering and receiving the information, especially teaching and learning. Apart from educational purposes, people in business, manufacturing and other industry also utilise Microsoft Teams.

Analysis
Before decided to use Microsoft Teams as a new approach to accommodate online learning, the teaching lecturers had surveyed students' readiness to use Microsoft Teams. This is supported by Azlina, Wan Anisha, & Rafizah (2020) the survey must be conducted to the students to ask about students' preferences before deciding to use an online platform.

Table 1: Students' Readiness to use Microsoft Teams for OBM155 & CSC134

Course	Yes	No
OBM155 (48)	36	12
CSC134 (56)	42	14

The table shows students' readiness to use Microsoft Teams for students in Diploma in Office Management and Technology (BA118), UiTM Cawangan Melaka, Kampus Alor Gajah. The students are from semester 2 and semester 4 who are taking Interpersonal Communication for Office Professionals (OBM155) and Computer and Information Processing (CSC134). The students' data are derived from Students Information Systems UiTM (SIMS). The results show that most of the students are familiar and ready to use MS Teams as an online learning platform. Moreover, most of them experienced using MS Teams in the previous semester.

Discussion on Microsoft Teams from the Academic Perspective

After the Malaysian Government announced the Movement Control Order (MCO) in March 2020, UiTM Cawangan Melaka takes prompt action. For the course Interpersonal Communication for Office Professionals (OBM155), the students take this subject in semester 2. The students need to accomplish four compulsory assessments, such as interactive mind maps, movie reviews, online quizzes, and final online tests.

The second course is Computer and Information Processing (CSC134). The students need to complete four lab sessions: operating systems, Microsoft Word, Microsoft PowerPoint, and Microsoft Excel. The students must complete these four assessments online. Thus, after several discussions and surveys, the resource person chose to use Microsoft Teams as an online learning platform.

Microsoft Teams and Online Learning

This paper will discuss the features and benefits of Microsoft Teams. Microsoft Teams is compatible with educational purposes, particularly for online learning. Both lecturers and students can access and download MS Teams using desktop apps, web-based, and for those who do not have a personal computer or laptop, the users can access MS Teams through a mobile application.

Additionally, the interface of MS Teams is user friendly, attractive and easy to access. According to Saranya (2020), the key factors influencing online delivery's effectiveness are technology, instructor characteristics, and interface. Therefore, the online platform interface plays an important role to attract students to involve and participate in online learning.

The features of Microsoft Teams are the lecturer can share the documents in real-time. With screen sharing and virtual whiteboard in MS Teams, online learning will be more meaningful to the students. The students can experience *together-mode* in the same way as a face-to-face learning session. The next feature is the lecturer can assign and post any quizzes and assignments in MS Teams. Allison & Hudson (2020), teachers can post work to individuals, small groups, or entire class using the assignment function in Teams. The lecturers also can assign a quiz or assignment to all group, selected group, or selected students.

Furthermore, MS Teams has integrated with a learning management system in several universities. Therefore, the students' data can be automatically derived, including students' numbers and students' full name. In MS Teams Meeting, the live meeting can be recorded and stream to Microsoft Stream. If the students cannot attend any live session, the video recording is available later in MS Stream. Also, in the Meet Now feature, the lecturers plan the meeting in a calendar to join the next class session automatically. The next feature is attendance

tracking. MS Teams provide attendance tracking in MS Teams Meeting. According to Saranya (2020), nobody found it is challenging to extract attendance in MS Teams.

MS Teams also act as a hub for many other Microsoft solution such as Microsoft Form, One Drive, Microsoft Stream, One Note. This suits the main objective of Microsoft Teams which has been developed to act as a collaborative workspace. For marking experience, the checkers can add any unique annotation based on the students submitted documents. This will allow for better feedback giving process and thus a more significant engagement experience. Further, for any theory subject such as Interpersonal Communication for Office Professionals, the lecturers can set *Turnitin* application to detect any similarity or plagiarism for students' work. MS Teams also integrated with Microsoft 365, whereby any documents will be available online.

Hence, Microsoft Teams can be beneficial to users. Many organisations use MS Teams as an online platform, either in manufacturing, education, and business. Tsai (2018) predicts that Microsoft Teams will exist in advance in the future. Ahmad Ridho (2020) stated by the end of 2020, 41% of organisations expect to use Microsoft Teams globally.

Conclusion
In conclusion, the education system now changing from face-to-face to online learning. Educational institutions, both private and the public, must adapt to this new situation in Malaysia's education system. The study also discussed the effectiveness of Microsoft Teams for online learning from an academic perspective. The results from the survey also identify most students using Microsoft Teams in online learning. Hence, after covering the features and benefits of Microsoft Teams, it will help the university breach any academic difficulties and barriers in teaching and learning.

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