Challenges in Technology Integration for Online Teaching and Learning for English Sessional Academics

Priscilla Shak (pshak@ums.edu.my)
Center for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia

Wendy Hiew (wenhiew@ums.edu.my)
Center for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia

Bernadette Tobi (bernadette@ums.edu.my)
Center for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia

Abstract

The new norm, post-COVID-19, is characterized by the worldwide espousal of the virtual classroom. While full-time university academics are typically provided with continuous training support for their technology integration in online teaching, this is not so for sessional academics, who are inadvertently deprived of such opportunities. This would subsequently threaten the quality of online lessons, which could potentially affect students' learning. The main aim of this study was to identify the problems sessional academics faced when conducting online lessons. In addition, it also sought to identify their training needs so that the necessary training support could be provided to them. Twenty-one sessional academics from the English language unit of a public university in Malaysia participated in this study while under the movement control order period. Qualitative data was collected through individual interviews designed to obtain feedback regarding their online teaching experience, problems with online teaching, and training needs. Findings revealed that despite their readiness for online teaching and learning, there were context-specific issues related to the lack of training that affected this group of academics' efficacies in conducting online language lessons.

Keywords: Online teaching and learning challenges, sessional academics, technology integration, training needs.

Introduction and Literature Review

In times of crisis, such as amid the Movement Control Order (MCO) due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the availability of critical online teaching training and support is pivotal to contain the disruption to regular teaching. While one public university in Malaysia was alert to the needs of online training and support to its now off-campus academic staff, a group of essential sessional academics has been side-lined. The term
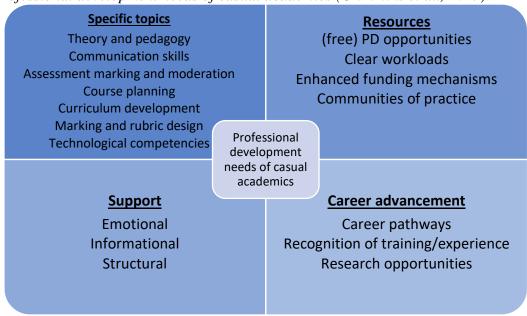
"sessional" has been used to refer to casual or part-time academic staff that are appointed on short-term contracts. These are typically "ad hoc" (Crimmins, 2017; Heffernan, 2018; Ryan et al., 2013), and appointments are performed for each session of study, or on a 'course-by-course' basis (Dean et al., 2015; Percy et al., 2008). They include staff working from a university campus, as well as those who work off-campus or from home (Higgins & Harreveld, 2013). Other terms that are used internationally to refer to this group of academics include 'contract', 'adjunct', 'teaching associate', or 'teaching assistant' (Baik et al., 2018; Harvey, 2017). This study adopts the definition of sessional academics of Richardson et al. (2019) "as those engaged in temporary work contracts and paid according to completion of a specific teaching assignment" (p. 626). The roles of the sessional academics in this study include teaching English language subjects, tutoring groups of students, facilitating student discussions, grading tests and assessments as well as doing basic course-related administration work such as recording students' marks and attendance in the university's student management system.

According to Bryson (2013), "massification", or the surge in the student enrolment in higher education, has given rise to the employment of sessional academic staff (p. 1). Additionally, there are various benefits of engaging sessional academics. One of the most obvious benefits of employing a higher number of teaching staff is that it brings down the teacher-student ratio and subsequently allows for more individualized instruction for students (Knott et al., 2015). Previous studies that Bryson had conducted since the early twenties indicated that this group of academics was prone to experience a lack of professional development and unequal opportunity in comparison to their full-time counterparts (Bryson, 2013). Dean et al. (2015) voiced the same thought and postulated that sessional staff has "historically been overlooked in terms of ongoing support, knowledge building, or practice sharing" (p. 166). They have been excluded from professional development opportunities and often given very limited, or no ongoing training. In many instances, training and support for sessional academics have not received the attention they deserve, and this has left this group of professionals marginalized in terms of chances to obtain training equivalent to their full-time counterparts, especially when they also have to migrate to online teaching. Most crucially, if not corrected, the absence or the inadequacy of university-initiated training could potentially threaten the quality of teaching and learning, leading to ineffective instructions during this critical period.

The motivation behind this study is to identify the problems faced, and the online training needs of a group of sessional academics who missed the chance of attending training courses typically offered to full-time academics. This study is imperative in that the lack of proper training could potentially lead to ineffective online lessons that affect students' learning and subsequently their performance. This study is part of a larger-scale study set within the Language Center of a public university in Malaysia in efforts to innovate an online 'Tech Up' Program to extend online training and support to sessional academics to ease the transition into the online teaching mode. The overarching aim was to offer immediate support to sessional academics to enable them to work more efficiently during and post-pandemic. Studies on online support communities suggested that the provision of such platforms could enhance the sense of belonging (Dean et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2014), transform teaching practice (Dean et al., 2015), and increase a sessional staff's confidence in teaching (Dean et al., 2017). According to Crimmins et al. (2017), sessional academics are concerned with the four areas of professional

development as presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Professional development needs of casual academics (Crimmins et al., 2017)

As illustrated, the needs of sessional academics include specific training to improve their technological competence, informational support, and resource sharing through a community of practice. These will be further discussed in the discussion section.

WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic on 11 March 2020. Organizations, businesses, schools, and higher education institutions were closed to curb the chain of transmission (Sahu, 2020; Ross, 2021). The pandemic has inevitably forced a transition from face-to-face physical classes to remote learning. Learning institutions strived to provide continued learning to their students and the responsibility fell on the academic staff to repurpose and redevelop resources to support online platforms (UNESCO, 2020; OECD, 2020; Pather et al., 2020). The sudden transition from conventional teaching to online teaching — upgrading their technological skills, revamping familiar knowledge transmitting methods and delivery strategies — is strenuous to every academic staff (Erikson, 2020; Khalili, 2020; LeBlanc, 2020; Lim et al., 2021). The remarkable mass exodus and mobilization to remote teaching involve sessional academics, too. At such short notice, adjusting a syllabus designed for face-to-face teaching to remote teaching can be a Herculean task for every academic, especially sessional academics who have limited access to training and whose needs are usually overlooked.

Recent literature review reveals that on top of the pressure to adapt to the new norm, the pandemic has affected the financial growth of higher learning institutions which lead to a lack of funding and budget reviews by private and public institutions in Malaysia; this leads to uncertain continued recruitment for contractual employees such as sessional and untenured staff (Choong, 2020). The same issue is reported by Littleton and Stanford (2021), where the pandemic disrupted foreign students' enrolment, caused financial constraint in the education industry in Australia and created uncertainty in-sessional staff recruitment. Sessional staff members are vulnerable to imminent

unemployment as universities' financial status becomes less viable (Filho et al., 2021). However, with all these challenges, there are still sessional academics who are currently recruited to teach online courses.

To ensure the continuity of teaching and learning amidst the pandemic, the Ministry of Education in China has introduced a program known as 'Ensuring learning undisrupted when classes are disrupted' (Huang et al., 2020, p. 1) to combat the effects of the pandemic and promote online learning. Globally, it has been accepted that learning should not be compromised (Zhang et al., 2020). Education needs to continue to avoid disruptions of teaching and learning. The Malaysian government has also mandated online classes be conducted (Al-Kumaim et al., 2021). However, the emergency shift to online classes to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning is not a panacea. Connectivity remains an issue in many Asian countries (Caldwell, 2020; Gufron & Rosli, 2021; Karalis & Raikou, 2020; Lansangan, 2020; Talidong, 2020) and the geographical location of this study is known for unstable internet connection. East Malaysia states are noted to be facing greater challenges due to the pressing issue of internet connectivity (Chung & Mathew, 2020; Johari, 2020; Tawie, 2020). A study by Sia and Adamu (2020) highlighted the challenges teachers and students were facing; the infrastructure gap between West Malaysia and East Malaysia and the inadequate academic support that led to emotional distress. Thus, there is a need for more teaching support for these sessional academics.

Studies revealed that sessional staff is often neglected and left out when it comes to opportunities for professional development offered by institutions that recruited them (Crawford & Germov, 2015; McComb et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2013). Sessional staff are often exempted from attending meetings or professional development activities offered by the institutions; they are remunerated for the class sessions assigned to them and not obligated to engage in any other activities conducted by the institutions (Byers & Tani, 2014). It is unfortunate that often, sessional staff do not receive adequate professional support and are left alone to cope with courses designated to them (Harvey, 2017; Higgins et al., 2013; Ryan et al., 2013). It is undeniable that sessional staff members are experienced and knowledgeable in their respective fields however, engaging in new technology can be daunting (Banks, 2016). Literature has revealed that institutional professional development opportunities helped to ensure that knowledge is imparted effectively to students (Baik et al., 2018; Crimmins et al., 2017; Heffernan, 2018; Higgins et al., 2013; Richardson et al., 2019).

Knott et al. (2015) concluded that providing training and support to sessional staff promoted teaching and learning qualities at the university level. In another study, Peacock and DePlacido (2018) launched the 'Network' to support tutors' scaffolding of the pedagogical shift from physical classes to online learning and found that it promoted engagement and awareness of adjustments needed to effective learning. Institutions should also establish a system to handle sessional staff's needs and context-specific issues (Lekkas & Winning, 2017). In addition, Wevill and Savage (2020) found that their strategy to peer-pairing sessional staff benefited classroom management, student interaction and at the same time provided teaching development and support to the sessional staff. It was also found in Shen and Slater's (2021) study that providing coping strategies through staff development opportunities, strengthened job productivity. According to McComb et al. (2021), academic development support provided by institutions could also help sessional staff cope with the teaching demands, especially in

the new post-pandemic norm.

Apart from that, Luzia et al.'s (2013) research on Benchmarking Leadership and Advancement of Standards for Sessional Teaching (BLASST) framework found that participants appreciated the opportunities to share instruments to work towards quality learning and teaching experience. A study conducted by Khor and Bharucha (2019) among academic staff in a Malaysian academic institution, indicated that professional development opportunities enhanced staff work performance on job satisfaction. The concurrence of research findings towards improved job satisfaction with the institution's professional support denoted the importance of a support system for staff (Cowin & Moroney, 2018; Gulbahar, 2020; Heffernan, 2018; Jameel & Ahmad, 2020; Richardson et al., 2019; Thevanes & Saranraj, 2018).

There are 20 local public universities in Malaysia. In 2020, the number of student enrolments totaled 584,576 versus 31,508 full-time academic staff including 1,105 full-time language teachers (Ministry of Higher Education, 2020a, 2020b). This pronounced imbalance between the student and language teacher ratio requires public universities to employ a large number of sessional teaching staff to teach English Language courses. Data from the Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education (2020a, 2020b) did not specify the number of English language lecturers. Meanwhile, at the Language Center where this study was conducted, 5,318 students were taking English Language courses and were allocated into 177 classes, with 30 students per class. This included students who scored Band 3 and below in the Malaysia University English Test (MUET) and also students from the International Relations and Engineering programs regardless of their MUET results. A Band 3 MUET is equivalent to a CEFR Level B1. Meanwhile, there are 25 full-time English language staff and 34 sessional staff at the Center. Full-time instructors teach between three to six classes while sessional academics teach between two to four classes. This means an instructor teaches an average of three classes.

When the MCO started, staying connected with students became a paramount concern. Ditching the traditional face-to-face classrooms, teachers had to rely on WhatsApp and Telegram group chats to connect and engage with students in their lessons. Online platforms were also essential to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning during the extended MCO period. This had caused anxiety to both teachers and students as almost all sessional staff members and students had little to no experience in online teaching and learning. The sudden switch to online platforms hindered teacher-student relationships and communication on top of the struggle to acquire ICT knowledge affecting student learning (Al-Kumaim et al., 2021; Philippe et al., 2020). This, understandably, raised much concern as students' retention rate is found to be better when education is student-centered, enabling active learning and two-way communication, instead of students just receiving instructions from teachers (Lillejord et al., 2018).

Krashen (1982) mentioned that affective factors are a major influence on language learning. Affective factors include students' emotions and reactions during class sessions (Marzban & Sadighi, 2013; Rashidi et al., 2011). Martin et al. (2018) proposed that students' motivation to learn and attain a higher level of learning is achieved by timely feedback from teachers. These indicate that teachers and students need to be well-connected during class sessions. Hence, a good internet connection is paramount in ensuring that lessons are delivered effectively. However, in Sabah (Borneo) where this study is conducted, and in Malaysia in general, unstable internet connections become the main cause of class disruptions where teachers and students are unable to have effective

digital 'face-to-face' class sessions (Lee, 2021; Mu, 2021; Omar et al., 2021; Zalat et al., 2021). There is also the issue of digital poverty and the digital divide in Malaysia which is a great concern in giving equal learning opportunities to students (Malay Mail, 2020; NST, 2021). Poor internet coverage affects connectivity, and the absence of visuals prevents teachers from gauging valuable clues in assessing students' comprehension and concentration on what was being taught. This lack of students' non-verbal feedback, the affective factor which is important in language learning, through facial expressions or gestures such as nods, also prevented teachers from assessing the effectiveness of the instructions given. Apart from that, the lack of teacher immediacy caused by poor internet connection obstructs teaching and learning (LeFebvre & Allen, 2014). These obstacles pose major challenges for teachers to provide students with a seamless learning experience.

As presented in this section, a review of previous studies has indicated a lack of focus on training for sessional academics on technology integration in their online classrooms. Hence, this study is significant in that it seeks to address this gap by identifying the problems faced by sessional academics in online teaching and finding out their training needs to ease technology integration to improve language teaching and learning experience. Taking into consideration the constraints affecting language teaching and learning during the pandemic, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the problems faced by sessional academics when conducting online teaching and learning?
2. What are the training needs of sessional academics to enhance students' online learning experience?

Method

This qualitative study was undertaken at the Language Center of a public university in Malaysia. The participants were 21 English sessional academics who were employed to teach eight English courses offered by the Center. When the study was conducted, the nation was under the MCO period. While the instructor participants were all in Sabah (Borneo), Malaysia, their students were distributed across the different states in Malaysia and internationally. It was also the second semester when the English courses were conducted fully online. This qualitative study adopted open-ended individual interviews as its method of data collection as it allowed more in-depth and richer data collection, which was necessary to understand the participants' online teaching and learning experience (Patton, 2002).

Participants

In line with the objective of this study, a purposive sampling method was applied in participant recruitment. The participants were recruited through the Center's English courses' Chairpersons, who oversaw appointing sessional academics for their respective

courses. In total, 21 English sessional academics took part in the interviews. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study and their participation was voluntary. Their agreement to participate was obtained through a consent form distributed through Google Forms. To assure anonymity, alphanumeric codes were used to represent the participants. The extracts of the interviews were labeled as P1 to P21 in the Results section of this paper. Table 1 provides a summary of the instructors' profiles.

Table 1
Instructors' profile (n=21)

Demographic Feature	Description and Details
Age	30 – 65 years old
Gender	8 Males 13 Females
Academic Qualification	1 with PhD 11 with Master's Degree 8 with Bachelor's Degree 1 with Postgraduate Diploma
Employment status	14 employed in a public learning institution/school 5 free-lance 2 retired
English teaching experience	3 with more than 5 years 18 with more than 10 years

Data collection instruments

For the interviews, a set of semi-structured questions were utilized. As the main concern of the study was to investigate the problems faced by the instructors in teaching online and identify the specific training that could help them to teach their language classes more effectively, the questions focused on gathering more detailed responses regarding these. The interview questions were trialed in a pilot study conducted the semester before the current study. Only minor changes to the wordings were made and the amended questions are as presented in Appendix A.

Study Design and Procedures

To collect the qualitative data, in-depth interviews were conducted with all the participants. The interview method provides an avenue for researchers to explore and discuss the topic under study with their interviewees. Through this, the researchers will be able to explore the thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors of the interviewees on a certain issue or topic (Cohen et al., 2018; Patton, 2002). All 21 interview sessions were conducted through the Google Meet video conference platform. The interviews were conducted by four interviewers within two weeks. Before the interview, a briefing was conducted to ensure that the interviewers were clear about the objective of the study and the interview questions and procedures. Each interviewer then contacted their assigned interviewees and scheduled their respective interview sessions. Table 2 shows the list of interviewers and the participants they interviewed.

Table 2
List of interviewers and participants interviewed

Interviewer	Participants (interviewees)
Interviewer 1	PT6, 7, 9, 10, 11 & 12
Interviewer 2	PT2, 3, 14, 15, & 16
Interviewer 3	PT4, 8, 17, 18, 19, 20
Interviewer 4	PT1, 5, 13 & 21

Data Analysis

Approximately 456 minutes of recorded data was obtained from all the interview sessions. Each interview was transcribed verbatim into Microsoft Word files and then imported to the latest NVivo (release 1.5, 2020), which is used for systematic analysis of qualitative data. The 21 individual transcripts were then coded thematically, according to the conventions of Braun and Clarke (2006), involving the six stages of, i) familiarizing self with data ii) generating initial codes, iii) identifying themes, iv) reviewing themes, v) defining and naming themes and vi) reporting. The interview data were coded by the main author of this paper. To ensure the reliability of the codes, a research meeting with the research team members was held to check that the data were coded according to themes correctly. Where there was disagreement with the coded data, further discussion on the items was performed until a unanimous agreement was reached to ensure accurate coding of the themes. The data are presented according to themes in the Results section of this paper.

Results

This section presents the recurring themes emphasized by the respondents. They are presented based on three main themes: i. Teaching experience during the pandemic, ii. problems with online teaching, and iii. training needs of sessional academics, with sub-themes under each category. Table 3 presents the NVivo codes, cases, and references based on the themes and sub-themes derived from the interview data.

Table 3
NVivo Codes descriptions, cases, and references

Code description	Cases	References
Teaching experience during the pandemic	21	285
● Bad Experiences	17	32
● Communication during pandemic	19	43
● Deciding factor when choosing e-learning platform	20	50
● First impression of online teaching	18	30
● Good experience	15	27
● Platforms and applications utilized	20	44
Experience using the university's LMS	13	39
Other platform(s) used at respective workplaces	4	5
Problems with online teaching	19	101

Suggestion to improve basic training	7	14
Teaching style and lesson format	14	19
Training required/needed	17	62
Types of training received	21	98
● Training provided by the course Chairperson	12	22
● Self-learned	15	23
● Learn from others (family/friends/colleagues)	9	32
● Other workplace training received	10	17
TOTAL		**623**

As presented in the table a total of 623 references were coded under the three main themes. It must be pointed out that the codes and frequency of occurrences were not quantified in this study as the focus was placed on qualitatively analyzing the experiences of the sessional academic involved rather than demonstrating the prevalence of any single phenomenon. In presenting the findings, the interview responses were labeled with alphanumerical representatives in the extracts presented here to ensure confidentiality.

Teaching Experience During the Pandemic

Most sessional academics were worried when they first had to shift to online platforms when the pandemic struck. Whilst the content of the courses taught were provided by the course chairpersons, the sessional academics were concerned about their limited technical knowledge and ability to stay connected with the students. However, as classes began, the advantages of having online classes emerged.

Improves Knowledge

The alteration from physical classes to digital platforms motivated teachers to explore, learn more, become more creative, and be less dependent on e-textbooks. PT9 mentioned gaining new technology knowledge by going online, "I can gain knowledge about using computers. Very good for me...". This was also a critical learning experience, as PT 9 put it, "… it is inevitable. It's either sink or swim… no choice you have to embrace this technology...". The use of digital gadgets and platforms could be extended even after the pandemic especially when classroom space is a constraint. Similarly, PT10, PT12, PT13, and PT14 also mentioned that remote teaching improved their IT knowledge.

Among the comments of sessional academics during data collection were, going online helped them to explore, identify other platforms and organize lessons better. In addition, assistance was received from colleagues, family members, and a network of friends that supported each other. Students also adopted more independent learning.

Provides Flexible Platform

PT14, PT11, PT12, and PT18 mentioned that teaching online also afforded the flexibility of using various platforms both synchronously and asynchronously according to their preferences. Data collected indicated that all of the 21 instructor participants utilized multiple platforms simultaneously to conduct their online lessons.

Allows Easy Sharing of Material (Environmentally Friendly)

One of the main advantages to online teaching is the instant sharing of class notes in the class chat groups such as lesson materials and research articles. PT15 who had difficulties projecting materials during classes before the pandemic found that sharing the materials online was much easier and more effective. This method was also environmentally friendly as it reduced the printing of handouts and other materials. For students, this was a value-added aspect of online learning as they were able to have quick and easy access to course materials and resources. Hence, easing the learning process.

Improves Teacher-Students Interactions (Use of Emoticons)

PT7 found that WhatsApp groups had somehow reduced the status barrier between teachers and students as they were able to use emoticons to make the conversation fun and less intimidating. PT9 said that students could be in their comfort zone and were willing to chat with the instructors via Google Meet. He attributed this to the reason that the students were digital natives and were well-versed with various platforms. Going digital seemed to give students more freedom and generally, more responsible for their learning.

Reduces Commuting (Increases Preparation Time)

Although online learning might not be good for the overall teaching experience, PT3 and PT9 felt that conducting classes online was very convenient as it reduced traveling time, increased lesson preparation time, and eliminated rushing from one class or location to another. PT6, PT9, and PT11 mentioned that in general, teaching online had more positive than negative elements. As PT8 put it, it "saves time (and) energy".

Problems with Online Teaching

This section presents problems that the sessional academic experienced during online teaching about the poor internet connection, technical issues, teaching and learning impediments, assessment, and challenges in managing students.

Poor internet connection

Poor internet connection was one of the major frustrations during online teaching, which can be attributed to heavy rain during the monsoon seasons that occur between May and September, and between November and March in Southeast Asia. PT4 described her students' difficulty in joining the online class and "they'd be waiting to get into Google Meet." This usually happened at the beginning or in the middle of the lesson. In the case of PT18, who lives in a rural area, heavy rain and poor internet connection forced her to travel to the nearest town in search of a location with a strong internet connection where "I parked my car at the roadside, and I taught the students."

Students with poor internet connections opted to switch off their video cameras during online lessons. PT3 supported his students on this matter and instructed them to turn off their video camera "to improve the latency". However, PT13 was disappointed

at not being able to see all her students because "some of them just refuse to switch on their video camera". Nevertheless, to compensate for this, the more responsive and active students would type their responses or ask questions in the chatbox of the video conference platform.

Technical issues

Google Classroom, Google Meet, Webex, Microsoft Team, and Zoom are some of the common video conferencing services used by the sessional academics to conduct online lessons. They reported some technical issues while conducting their lessons, which usually pertained to their internet connection. Sometimes in the middle of a lesson, PT18 said her students "were not able to hear me". PT9 explained he was removed from the meeting room without him realizing it, "My screen looked like I was still talking. I got a WhatsApp from my students, and they said, "Sir, you left the meeting." For technical issues unrelated to the internet connectivity, PT21 learned that inserting too many animations in her PowerPoint slides would regularly result in her students "not seeing anything when I display in full screen." As can be gathered, these led to disruption in lessons quality and learning time.

Teaching and Learning Impediments

The sessional academics reported that the need to simplify their teaching, difficulty in giving and understanding instructions, and a lack of authentic learning were the impediments they encountered during online teaching.

Simplified teaching

PT3 had to modify his online lessons due to the lack of response and participation from the students particularly when they switched off their video cameras. PT5 redesigned his lesson to explain certain grammar rules and to make the lesson more interactive.

Difficulty in giving and comprehending instructions

Poor internet connection and problems with technology devices impeded instructor-student communication during online lessons. PT21 felt rather stressed that her students were struggling with their internet and "very often they don't answer me because they either can't hear me, or they can't answer me...sometimes they can't even switch on their camera or microphone."

PT4 described repeatedly getting requests from her students to re-send instructions, materials, and links to the WhatsApp group even though "I've given them so many times" and some of the notes were already available in the PowerPoint slides.

Lack of authentic learning

PT15 raised an important concern about the lack of authentic learning during online lessons, particularly with the student's presentation skills. She noted the differences between presenting on an online platform and to a live audience where "you don't feel

nervous facing an audience because you're in front of your computer." In addition, students were reading from slides and "there were no hand gestures." Without the opportunity to practice presenting in front of a live audience, PT15 felt that "presentation skill development is something students didn't achieve to a large extent" in her course.

Implementing Assessment

Online teaching also had an impact on assessment duration and assessment validity. A face-to-face assessment that usually takes one week to complete ended up being extended up to three weeks. According to PT11, this was due to a few students who "cannot attend some of the assessments at the specified time due to poor internet connection." PT6 had to extend her student's job interview assessment from three to six hours due to a similar reason. Some of the group assessments were rescheduled to after midnight at the students' requests because "they were willing to have the assessments at that hour when they could get better access to the internet." Despite telcos' claim to provide 4G internet connectivity, some students were only able to receive 2G or 3G connections at their rural locations. This hindered their ability to attend online assessments particularly during the day due to high internet usage among other users in their residential areas.

Two sessional academics also raised their concerns regarding the validity of online assessments. For the online reading assessment, PT9 was concerned about students copying their answers because "we can't be monitoring them all the time". Students were required to switch on their video cameras but not all students did due to poor internet connection or to avoid higher data consumption. Meanwhile, PT7 questioned the validity and relevance of the 'confidence' rubric in assessing students' presentations during the online assessments, as they were only presenting to the instructor instead of an audience. PT7 also proposed renaming the interview component of an English course to 'online interview' to reflect a more accurate representation of the assessment.

Challenges in Managing Interaction with Students

The challenges that the sessional academics experienced in managing interaction with students mainly pertained to a lack of response from students and low attendance.

Lack of response from students

The sessional academic generally agreed about the lack of response from students during online lessons. PT4 claimed her students were "not very interactive because they wouldn't answer your questions." She kept encouraging her students to answer but without much success. PT19 estimated about 30 percent of her students were active during online lessons while the remaining student "just kept quiet, very passive and afraid to talk." PT12 persuaded his students to participate by typing their responses in the chatbox if they had issues with their video camera or microphone.

Among the reasons that students did not participate in online interactions were due to noisy surroundings at home where there were younger siblings, siblings who were also attending online classes, or ongoing constructions in the neighborhood. Another common reason was microphone malfunction in the students' laptops. Therefore, students

resorted to typing in the chatbox to interact with their instructor and other students. However, doing this would not help them to effectively develop their verbal communication skills, particularly if the course and assessments pertain to oral communication.

Irregular attendance

Poor internet connection was one of the common reasons given by students for not attending online classes. Although the sessional academics were initially understanding about the students' predicament, when they repeatedly used the same excuse to be exempted from class, the sessional academics started doubting their students. PT18 described her frustration with her students' low attendance and expressed that typically "attendance was quite good… but after the first one hour, the students kept going out and coming in [to Google Meet] and in the end, there were only like 17 students out of 30 students."

PT16 stated that doubting her students was "a conflict for me (her)" because although they did not attend online classes, they submitted their work. PT10 tried using a soft approach to persuade his students by consulting and reminding them to take their studies seriously. Meanwhile, PT1 described the students' lack of courtesy about not informing him of their absence, "some of them are just very quiet and didn't tell me if they couldn't participate …so I think this shows the students' attitude."

Due to the students' problem with attending online lessons, they are dependent on lecture notes and video recordings of the lessons. Self-learning is not as effective as learning with an instructor who can provide the students with direct feedback and suggestions. In addition, shy students are usually hesitant to contact their instructor and would have to explore the contents of the lessons on their own if they are highly motivated.

Training Needs of Sessional Academics

Whilst the sessional academics were previously given the freedom to utilize any method or platform in their lessons, it was no longer the case during the semester when this study was conducted. The university management had made it compulsory for all academic staff, including the sessional academics to utilize the university's in-house Learning Management System (LMS). For almost all the sessional academics, this posed a challenge as they were not familiar with the e-learning platform, much less the blended learning (BL) concept adopted by the university.

Considering the threats of COVID-19, the move to a compulsory BL environment was apt during the pandemic. Nevertheless, there might have been some oversight on the part of the university management when making such a move just as the semester commenced. Not unexpectedly, not all transitions to adopt the in-house LMS were trouble-free. As PT2 pointed out, there should be time allocated for the sessional academics to be exposed to the e-learning platform "so that at least we have some ideas… before we start teaching… because we didn't expect it like this before (laughs)… everybody was caught". The same sentiment was also shared by PT17 when she expressed that "I'm not very familiar with (LMS) okay, … I was told to use that… to give info to the students". The sessional academics were also aware of their duties to support the university's BL efforts by utilizing the university's LMS because "as a part-timer… I

need to know how to (use the platform) because … we have to" (PT10).

Despite the sudden pressure to adopt the university's LMS, many of the respondents saw the advantage of the platform for their e-teaching use. PT2 described the LMS as "quite interesting" as it allows easy posting and access to materials. A chat function also allowed online interaction. However, there were some functions that she was still exploring. "How am I supposed to do a quiz? I don't know…. there are still other functions that I wish uh some of us will be able to look at as well."

Although most of the course chairpersons provided basic instructions on how to upload documents and add contents to the platform through written instruction or short recordings, these were not enough for the sessional academics to fully explore the potentials of the platform nor to fully capitalize on the platform. PT13 stated that the course chairperson "has been showing us… been giving us the step-by-step on what to do, but still, I have to figure it out". This indicated that despite the detailed instructions given to them, there were still various functionalities that the sessional academics had to explore themselves. With training, it was more likely that "everybody won't feel intimidated" (PT2). For many of the sessional academics, they had to prioritize learning only the functions they needed to use to fulfill the BL requirements.

Although the use of the in-house LMS has been made compulsory, there were still a few sessional academics who had to complement their online teaching with other available platforms such as Google Classroom or resort to using mobile applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram due to their unfamiliarity with the assigned platform. To some of the respondents, this was inconvenient and unnecessary. PT19 questioned, "how would students benefit? I mean we're giving them (activities) on Google Meet and Google Classroom. So, the same thing. You're gonna put it on the LMS yeah, so what's the difference here? It's like double work." As perhaps rightly demanded by PT19, a thorough explanation should be given to justify making the university's e-learning platform compulsory and a detailed explanation of the BL requirements would help to explain why such components were necessary. For respondent PT21, "it's the handling of the system that is tough". Hence, she would need a workshop on how to use the platform "so that my students go there on purpose to get help or to see what to expect for the rest of the lessons?"

This view is supported by another respondent when she voiced that "if you expect us to use the LMS… so, probably that is the one that you need to train" (PT18). In most cases, the sessional academics were able to set up their courses and use the basic functions of the platform. Nevertheless, as pointed out by PT8, "there are a lot of things actually that I need to know right now." Most importantly, "hands-on training" should be provided instead of a lengthy manual guide which "doesn't make for easy reading" (PT9). It is apparent, therefore, that there should be a thorough explanation of the BL requirements and how the sessional academics could achieve the stipulated requirements.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the experience and problems faced by sessional academics in conducting online lessons and identify their training needs to help with their transition to full-time online teaching mode. Greater insights have been gained into the problems they faced in lesson delivery and difficulties in students' learning, as well as the types of training they needed to further support their e-teaching. From the study's

findings, it was quite obvious that many sessional academics were nervous to face the shift to online learning and the rapid need for innovations. Whilst some sessional academics had previous online teaching experience, most still had some degrees of uncertainty and are concerned with their student's language learning experience. All were concerned over the reliability of internet connection, technology struggle, and lessons' effectiveness (Byun & Slavin, 2020; Li & Lalani, 2020; OECD, 2020). Reports on those who were disadvantaged by poor internet connection were irrefutable (NST, 23 January 2021; NST, 23 July 2021; The Borneo Post, 19 July 2020; The Star, 14 April 2021). These problems add stress to an already stressful environment where sessional academics struggled to upgrade their online teaching skills and at the same time had to help ease their students into adapting to the new learning norm.

The sessional academics in this study found that online teaching offered time flexibility and they had the choice of conducting synchronous or asynchronous lessons. However, there was also the uncertainty of internet connectivity and students' comprehension of the lessons delivered. Apart from that, students' responses in classes tended to differ among the sessional academics' experiences. Some, like PT9, found their students responsive, "we get more questions online" from students; while others found that it was difficult to build rapport with students, especially the introverted ones.

Despite the advantages of technologies in bridging geographical gaps between students and instructors through online lessons, some problems hamper effective teaching and affect learning experiences such as poor internet connection and technical issues. Ideally, instructors would prefer to see their students on screen for eye contact and better interaction. According to Al-Freih (2021), eye contact allowed instructors to gauge their students' reactions and facial expressions to assess their understanding of topics and discussions. A similar finding was found in Khalil et al.'s (2020) study on the perspective of students at Unaizah College of Medicine and Medical Sciences, Qassim University in Saudi Arabia, where the students agreed that eye contact with the instructors was crucial for the learning process and to better understand the content. However, students taking communication skills in PT5's and PT13's classes did not switch on their video cameras due to bad internet connection. Poor internet connection also results in technical issues such as lost audio and frozen screen, as experienced by instructors PT9 and PT18. This is similar to the findings of a study by Smith and Schlaack (2021) on ten elementary teacher candidates in Hawai'i, America, where the teacher candidates faced issues such as internet connectivity (screen freezing) and visibility (grid view limitations).

Online teaching is not able to produce the same effectiveness as face-to-face teaching and, therefore, it needs to be adapted and simplified. Instructors PT3 and PT5 had to modify and make their writing and grammar lessons more interactive due to the lack of online participation from the students. The findings in this study are consistent with Al-Freih's (2021) study with five faculty members in Saudi Arabia who changed some of their learning materials and pedagogical use of technology tools to increase students' engagement. Similarly, 834 faculty staff (93%) who were surveyed in the United States agreed that they made at least one modification to their teaching practices (Johnson et al., 2020). Bao (2020) proposed adopting asynchronous and synchronous learning. In asynchronous learning, the students are required to read the assigned materials before class and later conduct discussions with other students and the instructor during synchronous learning. Due to the restricted view and use of body language and facial expressions during online teaching, Bao (2020) suggested slowing down one's speech at

an appropriate speed to allow students to capture the main points of the instructions.

Authentic learning in the context of COVID-19 can still be adapted based on situatedness and contextualization. Learning activities, which mirror the classroom, can be designed with the student's context in mind. For example, Science teachers in New Zealand instructed students to use safe household products to perform chemistry experiments at home (Yates et al., 2021). In addition, digital technologies were used to emulate authentic experiences in Biology lessons, debate, and drama performance (Yates et al., 2021). Similarly, online assessments also need to be adapted. One such example is Alshamsi et al.'s (2021) study that reported the changes made by the Higher Colleges of Technology in Dubai in its students' assessments during the COVID-19 lockdown while maintaining the quality and rigor of its student awards. However, in the context of this study, PT15 lamented that the students were deprived of the authentic experience of presenting their project in front of a live audience.

Another challenge that instructors experience with online teaching pertains to managing their students, including lack of response from students and irregular attendance. Al-Freih (2021) reported a similar challenge among undergraduates in a Saudi Arabia university whereby only one out of 31 students switched on his/her video camera and interacted with a guest speaker while the other students preferred to have their video camera switched off and interacted through the chatbox. On the contrary, Smith, and Kaya (2021) were able to motivate and actively engage their undergraduate students in two universities in Australia through the application of a variety of digital programs and tools such Jamboard, Kahoot, and Padlet. They emphasized that:

> It becomes easy for the tutor to fill the void of blank screens and silent gaps with the answers, but doing so limits and disservices many of the pedagogical strategies that contemporary teachers identify as pillars of learning such as peer interaction, collaborative learning, and inquiry-based learning, all of which support the diverse and dynamic ways that students learn (Smith & Kaya, 2021, pp. 196-197).

Irregular student attendance can be linked to the poor internet connection in the students' areas. Al-Amin et al. (2021) and Islam et al. (2020) reported that students' attendance ranged between 40% - 60% due to the Internet and device-related problems. To accommodate students who are not able to attend online classes synchronously, instructors should provide asynchronous classes (Bao, 2020) and upload recordings of online lectures and self-learning materials (Mahmood, 2020) that students can access via the university's LMS platform.

As highlighted by the present research participants, the transition to e-teaching has impacted their teaching habits and challenged their styles of teaching. The findings of this study also echo previous research concerning the lack of support extended to sessional academics in higher learning institutions (Crimmins et al., 2017; Shannon & Doube, 2004). As indicated by the sessional academics, many felt that training on essential or compulsory applications such as the university LMS platform should be provided for them to be able to utilize and incorporate the platform in the e-lessons more effectively. Crimmins et al. (2017) reported that

> The need for professional development in information and communication technology-supported learning and teaching skills was voiced repeatedly. Most

respondents identified a need for support with navigating the university virtual learning environment (Blackboard) and using e-learning forums, as well as the need to increase competence in technology use within the classroom. (p. 149)

The respondents in Crimmins et al.'s (2017) study, who were sessional academics attending a sessional staff training, felt they should be trained to make effective use of the university's LMS and related technologies to fully harness the potential of e-learning technology. This is similar to the findings of Shannon and Doube (2004) who conducted a study focusing on the adoption of an Australian university's LMS and found that one of the academic staff's concerns regarding the use of the internet-based teaching support system was their limited knowledge and skills.

Another important takeaway from this study is that the training needs of the sessional academics evolve from semester to semester. It has to be pointed out that the pilot study conducted the semester before this main study was undertaken, found that the types of training deemed most essential to the sessional academics at that point of time were video-conferencing platforms for conducting online lessons. However, they have indicated that this aspect was no longer an issue for them as they are now more familiar with the various conferencing platforms, and hence, there is a need to focus on learning other applications that could help enhance their online teaching repertoire.

In the case of this study, the contribution of sessional academics to the teaching and learning of the university's English courses is very significant as they make up most of the teaching team and take up a higher portion of the classes as compared to those taught by the full-time staff. It is the university's responsibility to ensure that its sessional academics' training needs are met to ensure that they feel supported and are well-equipped to handle their online lessons. May et al. (2013) found that access to career support in terms of professional development was associated with the career satisfaction of sessional academics, which helped them to meet the minimum standard of teaching quality. Cowin and Moroney (2018) suggested that a support system is needed for sessional staff to reinforce their expertise and enhance their job satisfaction. Dean et al. (2017) noted that a support system where sessional staff and facilitators encouraged sharing of teaching reflections – personal stories, resources, and advice – increased confidence and sense of belonging among the participants. The contribution of sessional staff to learning institutions is vital to ensure the continuity of quality teaching and learning. Hence, the need to provide them with professional support. One of the direct outcomes of this research project is that since the pandemic, the Center of e-Learning of the university has conducted LMS training for sessional academics on several occasions. These training sessions were provided as immediate measures to help their adoption of the university's LMS platform.

Limitations

While the findings of this study have revealed in-depth the experiences and problematic aspects of online teaching, as well as shed light on the training needs of a group of sessional academics in a university setting, one key limitation of this study is that the respondents were made up of sessional academics teaching different English courses. This is due to the distinct difference in the numbers of sessional academics

recruited for each of the courses. This also meant that they might have been given different levels of support by the different chairpersons of the courses they were teaching. To counter this, all of the sessional academics employed during the semester the study was undertaken were recruited and participated in this study, and this provided the research team with an overall understanding of what were the common problems they faced in online teaching and the types of training they needed. Nevertheless, due to the qualitative nature of this case study, it may not be possible to generalize the findings of this study to other settings. Thus, it is recommended that future studies explore the training needs of different groups of sessional academics in other settings or fields and investigate the impact of training on sessional academics' performance, motivation, and job satisfaction.

Conclusion

This study found that there was still a lack of attention placed on sessional academic training needs due to the typically "temporary" nature of their service. As such, attention should be placed on this aspect of staff development and efforts should be undertaken to tackle this issue as long as the employment of sessional academics is essential to the successful operation of an institution. Online teaching and learning resources should be provided to sessional academics. During the pandemic, many are struggling on their own to ensure classes are carried on. To a majority of the sessional academics, the outcome of their online language lessons could be adversely affected by the problems they faced, and the lack of essential training given to them before teaching a course. Nevertheless, such situations can be improved through more thorough institutional planning involving the training of the sessional academics to better prepare them for the challenges that they may encounter. The in-depth interviews with the sessional academics have revealed not only the problems faced but also the specific training needs of this group of academics, which subsequently allowed the researchers to propose an online training program that could provide them with the application know-how to enable them to fully leverage on technology integration for more effective lessons that promote students learning.

References

Addressing digital poverty in Sabah should be a priority, says Salleh. (16 November 2020). *Malay Mail.* https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/11/16/addressing-digital-poverty-in-sabah-should-be-a-priority-says-salleh/1923167

Al-Amin, M., Al Zubayer, A., Deb, B., & Hasson, M. (2021). Status of tertiary level online class in Bangladesh: students' response on preparedness, participation and classroom activities. *Heliyon, 7*(1), 1-7. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e05943

Al-Freih, M. (2021). The impact of faculty experience with emergency remote teaching: An interpretive phenomenological study, *IAFOR Journal of Education: Special Issue 9*(2), 7-24. https://doi.org/10.22492/ije.9.2.01

Al-Kumaim, N.H., Alhazmi, A.K., Mohammed, F., Gazem, N.A., Shabbir, M.S. &

Yousef, F. (2021). Exploring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on university students' learning life: An integrated conceptual motivational model for sustainable and healthy online learning. *Sustainability, 13*(5), 2546. https://doi.org/10.3390/su13052546

Alshamsi, A., Zahavich, A., & El-Farra, S. (2021). Why graded assessment for undergraduates during the COVID-19 lockdown? An experience introspection. *IAFOR Journal of Education: Special Issue, 9*(2), 55-76. https://doi.org/10.22492/ije.9.2.04

Baik, C., Naylor, R., & Corrin, L. (2018). Developing a framework for university-wide improvement in the training and support of 'casual' academics, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 40*(4), 375-389. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2018.147 9948

Banks, J. (2016). Promoting change: Professional development to support pedagogic change in sessional teaching staff. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 228* 112 – 117. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.07.017

Bao, W. (2020). COVID-19 and online teaching in higher education: A case study of Peking University. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies 2,* 113–115. https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.191

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa?needAccess=true

Bryson, C. (2013). Supporting sessional teaching staff in the UK – to what extent is there real progress? *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice, 10*(3), 1-18. https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol10/iss3/2/

Byers, P., & Tani, M. (2014). Engaging or training sessional staff: Evidence from an Australian case of enhanced engagement and motivation in teaching delivery. *Australian Universities' Review, 56*(1)*,* 13-21. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1017993.pdf

Byun, S. & Slavin, R. E. (2020). Educational Responses to the COVID-19 Outbreak in South Korea. *Best Evid Chin Edu, 5*(2), 665-680. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1288073.pdf

Caldwell, M. (2020). An Investigation into the Perceptions of Japanese University Educators on the Use of ICT in an EFL Tertiary Setting. *Computer Assisted Language Learning Electronic Journal, 21*(2), 2020, 1-16. http://callej.org/journal/21-2/Caldwell_2020.pdf

Choong, J. (2020). Study shows Covid-19 could devastate private universities as students delay studies to brace for looming recession. *The Malay Mail.* https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/05/09/study-shows-covid-19-could-devastate-private-universities-as-students-delay/1864519

Chung, E., & Mathew, V. N. (2020). Satisfied with online learning amidst COVID-19, but do you intend to continue using it? *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development, 9*(4), 67–77. http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v9-i4/8177

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). London, UK: Routledge.

Cowin, L. S., & Moroney, R. (2018). Modelling job support, job fit, job role and job satisfaction for school of nursing sessional academic staff. *BMC Nursing, 17*(22),

1-9. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-018-0290-2

Crawford, T., & Germov, J. (2015). Using workforce strategy to address academic casualisation: a University of Newcastle case study, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 37*(5), 534-544. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2015.1079394

Crimmins, G. (2017). Feedback from the coal-face: How the lived experience of women casual academics can inform human resources and academic development policy and practice. *International Journal of Academic Development*, *22*(1), 7-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2016.1261353

Crimmins, G., Oprescu, F., & Nash, G. (2017). Three pathways to support the professional and career development of casual academics. *International Journal for Academic Development*, *22*(2), 144-156. http://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2016.12639

Dean, B. A., Harden-Thew, K., & Thomas, L. (2017). Building an online community to support the professional development of casual teachers. *International Journal for Academic Development, 22*(1), 31-42. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2016.1261356

Dean, B., Zanko, M., & Turbill, J. (2015). Mobilizing PD: Professional Development for sessional teachers through mobile technologies. In Y. Zhang (Eds.), *Handbook of Mobile Teaching and Learning* (pp. 165-182). Heidelberg, Germany: Springer.

Department of Statistics Malaysia (2021). Key statistics of labour force in Malaysia, October 2021. https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemeByCat&cat=124&bul_id=VkVveHlUWm5MMTlkc3oxK2svL00rUT09&menu_id=Tm8zcnRjdVRNWWlpWjRlbmtlaDk1UT09

Erikson, D. (2020). Q&A: A founder of distance education weighs in on its educational benefits. University of Wisconsin-Madison. https://news.wisc.edu/qa-a-founder-of-distance-educationweighs-in-on-its-educational-benefits/

Filho, W. L., Wall, T., Rayman-Bacchus, L., Mifsud, M., Pritchard, D. J., Lovren, V. O., Farinha, C., Petrovic, D. S., & Balogun, A. L. (2021). Impacts of COVID-19 and social isolation on academic staff and students at universities: a cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health*, *21*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11040-z

Gufron, & Rosli, R. M. (2021). Exploring faculty's experiences in teaching English online: A study at the university level in Indonesia. *Computer Assisted Language Learning Electronic Journal, 22*(3), 126-145. http://callej.org/journal/22-3/Gufron-Rosli2021.pdf

Gulbahar, B. (2020). Investigation of the relationship between perception of supervisor support, perceived school effectiveness, work engagement, job satisfaction and organizational cynic attitude of teachers. *Participatory Educational Research, 7*(3), 1-20. https://doi.org/10.17275/per.20.32.7.3

Harvey, M. (2017). Quality learning and teaching with sessional staff; systematising good practice for academic development. *International Journal for Academic Development, 22*(1), 1-6. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2017.1266753

Heffernan, T. A. (2018). Approaches to career development and support for sessional academics in higher education. *International Journal for Academic Development, 23*(4), 312-323. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2018.1510406

Higgins, K., & Harreveld, R. (2013). Professional development and the university casual academic: Integration and support strategies for distance education. *Distance*

Education, 34, 189-200. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2013.801759

Huang, R., Tlili, A., Chang, T. W., Zhang, X., Nascimbeni, F., & Burgos, D. (2020). Disrupted classes, undisrupted learning during COVID-19 outbreak in China: Application of open educational practices and resources. *Smart Learning Environments, 7*(19). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40561-020-00125-8

Islam, M.S., Tanvir, K.M., Amin, M., & Salman, M. (2020). *Online classes for university students in Bangladesh during the Covid-19 pandemic - Is it feasible?* https://tbsnews.net/thoughts/online-classes-universi

Jameel, A. S., & Ahmad, A. R. (2020). The mediating role of job satisfaction between leadership style and performance of academic staff. *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation, 24*(4), 2399-2414. https://doi.org/10.37200/IJPR/V24I4/PR201349

Johari, Z. (2020) Grouses over poor Internet access. *The Borneo Post Online.* https://www.theborneopost.com/2020/07/19/grouses-over-poor-internet-access/

Johnson, N., Veletsianos, G., & Seaman, J. (2020). US faculty and administrators' experiences and approaches in the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Online Learning*, *24*(2), 6–21. http://dx.doi.org/10.24059/olj.v24i2.2285

Karalis, T., & Raikou, N. (2020). Teaching at the times of Covid-19: Inferences and implications for higher education pedagogy. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 10*(5), 479–493. http://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v10-i5/7219

Khalil, R., Mansour, A. E., Fadda, W. A., Almisnid, K., Aldamegh, M., Al-Nafeesah, A., Alkhalifa, A., & Al-Wutayd, O. (2020). The sudden transition to synchronized online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia: a qualitative study exploring medical students' perspectives. *BMC Medical Education 20*(1), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-020-02208-z

Khalili, H. (2020). Online interprofessional education during and post the COVID-19 pandemic: A commentary. *Journal of Interprofessional Care, 34*(5), 687–690. https://doi.org/10.1080/13561820.2020.1792424

Khor, S @Abdullah, B. F. & Bharucha, J. (2019). Job satisfaction among senior and junior academic staff: A technological assessment from Malaysia. *International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering, 8*(9), 318-320. https://www.ijitee.org/wp-content/uploads/papers/v8i9/ H7455068819.pdf

Knott, G., Crane, L., Heslop, I., & Glass, B. D. (2015). Training and support of sessional staff to improve quality of teaching and learning at universities. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education, 79*(5), 72. https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe79572

Krashen (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition.* Oxford: Pergamon Press

Lansangan, R. V. (2020). Teaching junior high school chemistry during the Covid-19 community quarantine season: lessons, challenges, and opportunities. *KIMIKA, 31*(1), 20–37. http://doi.org/10.26534/kimika.v31i1.20-37

LeBlanc, P. (2020). COVID-19 has thrust universities into online learning—how should they adapt? Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus development/2020/03/30/covid-19-has-thrust-universities-into-online-learning%E2%81%A0-how-should-they-adapt/

Lee, S. (2021) Urgent action needed for online learning in Sabah to be effective, says NGO. *The Star.* https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/06/09/urgent-

action-needed-for-online-learning-in-sabah-to-be-effective-says-ngo

LeFebvre, L., & Allen, M. (2014). Teacher immediacy and student learning: An examination of lecture/laboratory and self-contained course sections. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 14*(2), 29–45. https://doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v14i2.4002

Lekkas, D., & Winning, T. A. (2017). Using quality enhancement processes to achieve sustainable development and support for sessional staff. *International Journal for Academic Development, 22*(1), 70-83. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2016.1261357

Li, C., & Lalani, F. (2020, 29 April). The COVID-19 pandemic has changed education forever. This is how. *World Economy Forum.* https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-education-global-covid19-online-digital-learning/

Lillejord S., Børte, K., Nesje, K., & Ruud E. (2018). Learning and teaching with technology in higher education – a systematic review. Oslo: Knowledge Centre for Education. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327057633

Lim, C. K. N., Yow, C. L., & Chow, O. W. (2021). Coping with teaching and learning creative arts in Malaysian public universities in the time of Covid-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 11*(14), 337-358. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e05339

Littleton, E., & Stanford, J. (2021, September). *An Avoidable Catastrophe: Pandemic Job Losses in Higher Education and their Consequences.* The Australia Institute. https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/an-avoidable-catastrophe/

Luzia, K., Harvey, M., Parker, N., McCormack, C., Brown, N. R., & McKenzie, J. (2013). Benchmarking with the BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework, *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 10*(3), 1-15. https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol10/iss3/5

Mahmood S. (2021). Instructional strategies for online teaching in COVID-19 pandemic. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies, 3*, 199–203. https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.218

Martin. F., Wang, C., & Sadaf, A. (2018). Student Perception of Helpfulness of Facilitation Strategies that Enhance Instructor Presence, Connectedness, Engagement and Learning in Online Courses. *The Internet and Higher Education. 37*, 52–65. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2018.01.003

Marzban, H., & Sadighi. F. (2013). A Study of the Impact of Motivation and Attitude on Speaking in Academic Contexts: A Case Study of Iranian EFL University Students. *International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics, 3*(4), 154-177.

May, R., Strachan, G., & David, P. (2013). Workforce development and renewal in Australian universities and the management of casual academic staff. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 10*(3), 1-24. http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol10/iss3/3

McComb, V., Eather, N., & Imig, S., (2021). Casual academic staff experiences in higher education: Insights for academic development, *International Journal for Academic Development, 26(1)*, 95-105. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2020.1827259

Ministry of Higher Education. (2020a). Statistics of Higher Education. Putrajaya: Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. https://www.mohe.gov.my/en/download/

statistics/2020/494-statistik-pendidikan-tinggi-2020-05-bab-3-ipts/file

Ministry of Higher Education. (2020b). Statistics of Higher Education. Putrajaya: Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. https://www.mohe.gov.my/en/download/statistics/2020/493-statistik-pendidikan-tinggi-2020-04-bab-2-universiti-awam/file

Mu, P. (2021) Education in Sabah's rural areas interrupted by poor internet access. *The New Straits Times.* https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2021/05/691452/education-sabahs-rural-areas-interrupted-poor-internet-access

NST Leader: The Digital Divide. (29 September 2021). *New Straits Times.* https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/leaders/2021/09/731739/nst-leader-digital-divide

OECD (2020), *Strengthening online learning when schools are closed: The role of families and teachers in supporting students during the COVID-19 crisis*, OECD.org. https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/strengthening-online-learning-when-schools-are-closed-the-role-of-families-and-teachers-in-supporting-students-during-the-covid-19-crisis-c4ecba6c/#contactinfo-d7e1969

Omar, N. H., Thomas, B., Jusoh, M. Z., & Jalil, S. Z. (2021). Students' Perception and Preference for Online Learning in Sabah During Covid-19 Pandemic. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 11*(11)*,* 270 – 292. http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v11-i11/11262

Pather, N., Blyth, P., Chapman, J. A., Dayal, M. R., Flack, N.A.M.S., Fogg, Q. A., Green, R. A., Hulme, A. K., Johnson, I. P., Meyer, A. J., Morley, J. W., Shortland, P. J., Štrkalj, G., Štrkalj, M., Valter, K., Webb, A. L., Woodley, S. J., & Lazarus, M. D., (2020). Forced disruption of anatomy education in Australia and New Zealand: An acute response to the Covid-19 Pandemic. *Anatomical Sciences Education, 13*(3), 284-300, https://doi.org/10.1002/ase.1968

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Peacock, S. & DePlacido, C. (2018). Supporting staff transitions into online learning: A networking approach. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice, 6*(2), 67-75. https://doi.org/10.14297/jpaap.v6i2.336

Percy, A., Scoufis, M., Parry, S., Goody, A., Hicks, M., Macdonald, I., Martinez, K., Szorenyi-Reischl, N., Ryan, Y., Wills, S., & Sheridan, L. (2008). *The RED Report, Recognition - Enhancement - Development: The contribution of sessional teachers to higher education.* Sydney: Australian Learning and Teaching Council. https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8d31/aadf9f304f6d27735fcf6fa558cc031a283f.pdf 7

Philippe, R.A, Schiavio, A., & Biasutti, M. (2020). Adaptation and destabilization of interpersonal relationships in sport and music during the Covid-19 lockdown. *Heliyon*, *6*(10), e05212. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e05212

Rashidi, N., Yamini, M., & Shafiei, E. (2011). Oral communication apprehension and affective factors: Self-esteem and introversion/extroversion. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning, 5*(7), 145-192. https://elt.tabrizu.ac.ir/article_623_e84c6b33bc345a8b552967d719189263.pdf

Richardson, J., Wardale, D. & Lord, L. (2019). The 'double-edged sword' of a sessional academic career. *Higher Education Research & Development, 38*(3), 623-637. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2018.1545749

Ross, J. (2021). University shuttered across Malaysia. *Times Higher Education*. https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/universities-shuttered-across-malaysia

Ryan, S., Burgess, J., Connell, J., & Groen, E. (2013). Casual academic staff in an Australian university: Marginalised and excluded. *Tertiary Education and Management, 19*(2), 161-175. https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2013.783617

Sahu P. (2020). Closure of universities due to Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): Impact on education and mental health of students and academic staff. *Cureus*, *12*(4), e7541. https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.7541

Shannon, S. & Doube, L. (2004). Valuing and using web supported teaching: A staff development role in closing the gap. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, 20*(1), 114-136. https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.1370

Shen, P. & Slater, P. (2021). The effect of occupational stress and coping strategies on mental health and emotional well-being among university academic staff during the COVID-19 outbreak. *International Education Studies, 14*(3), 82-95. https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v14n3p82

Sia, J. K-M. & Adamu, A. (2021). Facing the unknown: pandemic and higher education in Malaysia. *Asian Education and Development Studies, 10*(2), 263-275. https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-05-2020-0114

Smith, E. K. & Kaya, E. (2021). Online university teaching at the time of COVID-19 (2020): An Australian perspective. *IAFOR Journal of Education: Special Edition 9*(2). https://doi.org/10.22492/ije.9.2.11

Smith, M. G. & Schlaack, N. (2021). Teaching during a pandemic: Elementary candidates' experiences with engagement in distance education. *IAFOR Journal of Education: Technology in Education, 9*(4), 7-22. https://doi.org/10.22492/ije.9.4.01

Talidong, K. J. (2020). Implementation of emergency remote teaching (ERT) among Philippine teachers in Xi'an, China. *Asian Journal of Distance Education, 15*(1), 196-201. http://www.asianjde.org/ojs/index.php/AsianJDE/ article/view/463

Tawie, S. (2020). Amid spotlights on Sabah. *Malay Mail*. https://www.malaymail.com/ news/malaysia/2020/09/08/amid-spotlight-on-sabahsarawak-pkr-urges-authorities-to-upgrade-internet-c/1901188

Thevanes, N. & Saranraj, Y. (2018). The impact of perceived organizational support on job satisfaction of academic staff. *Asian Journal of Economics, Business and Accounting, 6*(2): 1-8. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1290051.pdf

Thomas, L., Herbert, J., & Teras, M. (2014). A sense of belonging to enhance participation, success and retention in online programmes. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 5*(2), 69-80. https://ro.uow.edu.au/ cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1488&context=asdpapers

UNESCO (2020), *COVID-19 Educational Disruption and Response*. UNESCO. https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/

Wevill, T., & Savage, J. (2020). Peer-pairing sessional staff in a large first year Science unit as a form of supportive academic development. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 17*(1). https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol17/iss1/2

Yates, A., Starkey, L., Egerton, B., & Flueggen, F. (2021). High school students' experience of online learning during Covid-19: The influence of technology and pedagogy. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education, 30(*1), 59-73. https://doi.org/ 10.1080/1475939X.2020.1854337

Zalat, M.M., Hamed, M.S., Bolbol, S.A. (2021) The experiences, challenges, and acceptance of e-learning as a tool for teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic among university medical staff. *PLoS ONE 16*(3): e0248758. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0248758

Zhang, W.N., Wang, Y.X., Yang, L.L., & Wang, C.Y. (2020). Suspending Classes Without Stopping Learning: China's Education Emergency Management Policy in the COVID-19 Outbreak. *Journal of Risk and Financial Management, 13(55)*, 2-6. https://doi.org/10.3390/jrfm13030055

Appendix A

Interview Questions for Sessional Academic Staff

(A) Experience in teaching the Center's courses during MCO
1. Can you describe your experience teaching English courses at the Center during the Movement Control Order (MCO) period?
2. What were your first thoughts about using online teaching platforms during the MCO?
3. What platform and application did you choose for your online teaching?
4. How did you decide which platform to choose for your online teaching?
   Possible follow-up questions:
   Was it based on the platform that you used in your place of work?
   Was it decided by the course chairperson?
   Did you choose the platform that you were comfortable and familiar with?
5. Can you describe your communication with your students during the MCO?
   Possible follow-up questions:
   Which platform did you use to communicate with them?
   Did you use multiple platforms or applications to stay in touch?
   Did you face any problems staying connected with your students?
6. Can you describe one good experience in teaching English courses at the Center during the MCO?
7. Can you describe one bad experience in teaching English courses at the Center during the MCO?

(B) Problems in teaching online during MCO
8. Did you face any problems in conducting online lessons?
   Possible follow-up questions:
   If yes, what were the problems?
   How did you overcome those problems?

9. Did your students face any problems learning online?
   Possible follow-up questions:
   If yes, what were the problems?
   How did they overcome those problems?

(C) Specific training required

10. Since all the Center's language courses will be conducted fully online this semester, what specific training do you need?

Possible follow-up questions:

Why is the training necessary?

11. Do you have any other suggestions on how training and support for sessional academic staff could be improved?