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THE APPLICATION OF THE CHICKERING THEORY IN DEVELOPING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' EMOTIONS AND WELLBEING

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Abstract: *There were countless factors that caused undergraduates to experience tension, sadness, restlessness or even boredom during the 2020 Malaysia Movement Control Order (MCO). Unfortunately, these students did not know how to deal with problems and obstacles they encountered. If these concerns were not adequately handled, more psychological health difficulties could be faced by students, and these could impact their personal well-being. Therefore, this research tends to use Chickering Theory as a formal theory as students move to through seven vectors of the Chickering theory in facing those issues during the pandemic at UUM. The objective of this research is mainly to further understand the impact of Covid-19 on students' emotions and their wellbeing specifically in dealing with teaching and learning processes. Hence, this research is very significant in the sense it can help in understanding students' inner feelings and problems and finding ways to alleviate the problem through intervention from many parties such as UUM, lecturers, family and friends.*

Keywords: *Students' emotion, Chickering Theory, Covid-19 and Malaysia Movement Control Order*

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Introduction

In the climate of Covid-19 pandemic, emotion instability and online learning difficulty are the foremost issues that university students struggle with. During this period, one that manifested boredom, sadness and restlessness was the general wellness crisis of the students concerned. Apart from that, many of the undergraduate students in the residential colleges were becoming depressed, with nervousness and impatience. Many have clarified how the experience was boring and daunting because of the abrupt change to online learning. In addition, many students were also overwhelmed by the tasks imposed by online learning, which amounted to more work in contrast. Such emotions have also influenced their studies.

Chickering is one of the most widely known theories that referred to identity as students' concepts themselves as autonomous, independent people with carefully articulated opinions, beliefs, talents, skills and ethics. Given this definition, this study insists that Chickering is the most relevant theory that can help to achieve the objective of this research. The seven vector of the Chickering can be related to the issues faced by students in this research. The vectors mentioned are:

1. Vector **developing emotional/competence** involves the acquisition of knowledge and skills related to the particular subject matter (Evans et. al, 2010, p. 67).
2. Vector **managing emotions:** the ability to recognize and accept emotions, as well as to appropriately express and control them (Evans et. al, 2010, p. 67).
3. Vector **moving through autonomy toward independence**: "freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance, affection, or approval from others" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 117).
4. Vector **developing mature interpersonal relationships:** "include the development of intercultural and interpersonal tolerance and appreciation of differences, as well as the capacity for healthy and lasting intimate relationships with partners and close friends" (Evans et. al, 2010, p. 68).
5. Vector **establishing identity**: "acknowledge differences in identity development based on gender, ethnic background, and sexual orientation" (Evans et. al, 2010, p. 68).
6. Vector **developing purpose: "**developing clear vocational goals, making meaningful commitments to specific personal interests and activities, and establishing strong interpersonal commitments" (Evans et. al, 2010, p. 69).
7. Vector **developing integrity:** personalize humanizing values and apply them to their own behavior (Chickering, 1969).

From the seven vectors or *vectors of development* (the term that Chickering (1969) used), many scholars have discovered the stage of students' development in university. Evans et. al (2010) also explains that Chickering's theory offers an acceptable explanation of how students develop in university environments and how the environment influences them. Because of that, the study believes when students experience difficulty, they will redevelop themselves to adapt to the current situation. But stages of development are different from each student since the vectors are not in the hierarchy.

From the perspective of students' ability in adapting to the Covid-19 outbreak, the research supposes that the emotional instability of a student depends on the difficulty in accessing online learning and the severity of the Covid-19 cases. If the student finds that it is more difficult to have accessibility to online learning and facing problems in understanding the study lessons, then he or she may feel more stressed and easily disturbed. At the same, the seriousness of Covid-19 is another factor that influences the students' emotions and well-being.

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Therefore, this study is proposing an 'emotional instability theory' whereby the emotional instability of students during this pandemic outbreak depends on the levels of difficulty in accessing online learning and the severity of the Covid-19 cases. In other words, there exist relationships among the three factors. This informal theory is closely related to Vector 1 and Vector 2 from the Chickering Theory which deal with competence and emotions. The findings from this study is to conform the significance of this proposed theory.

Literature Review

The year 2020 has brought a new episode with the Covid-19 outbreak which caused a new norm taking place. Universities all over the world are not spared from this pandemic and have been affected tremendously within a short time. In Malaysia, the sudden implementation of MCO beginning 18th March 2020 made university campuses become empty while traditional face to face lecturing has all been switched to online learning. Universities and academics, particularly the Ministry of Higher Education, play an important role in allowing students to remain safe in such circumstances.

Aristovnik et al. (2020) presented a comprehensive study on how higher education students from 62 countries adapt with the new normalcy as the impact of the Covid-19's first outbreak and in which aspects of their lives have been impacted. Students were generally content by the university's support in helping them to cope with the transitions. Nevertheless, students were worried on several matters including their future career path and some have expressed their anxiety and frustration. This has been supported by studies which assessed the strategies taken by the Malaysian higher education students in coping with the psychological impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the MCO (Kamaludin et al., 2020; Sundarasen et al., 2020). In addition, students' readiness in moving into online learning has been identified as another challenge. Chung et al. (2020) found that internet connectivity and difficulty in understanding the subject without face-to-face communication were the main issues in online learning. Therefore, there should be more actions that need to be taken by all parties in assuring that higher education students are better off in facing these unprecedented events.

The COVID-19 pandemic had created mental instability and students' well-being, and it could potentially lead to worse cases of stress and mental health problems (Cao et al., 2020; Farhah & Hemaloshinee, 2020; Kamaludin, et.al, 2020; Irfan, Akram& Abd Ghani, 2020; Abdullah, 2020; Marques, et.al., 2020).

Cheng et al. (2020) measured the impact of COVID-19 on emotion amongst 534 pediatric medical staff. She found that having a physical disorder and epidemic-related problems were positively correlated with levels of anxiety. Whereas the degree of anxiety was negatively correlated with positional title, better living style, and education. Similarly, another study conducted by Wang et al. (2020) discovered that compared to other medical personnel in China, there was substantially higher psychological distress among medical workers deployed to Hubei province. Hence, most of the studies have only focused on the general public and medical staff such as Ferrucci et al., (2020), Cheng, et. al., (2020), Huang & Zhao (2020), Pieh et al., (2020) and Wang, et.al., (2020) but ignored college and university students. To date, few studies have attempted to estimate the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of students as mentioned earlier, therefore, there is a need to bridge the gap by exploring the emotion of university students in Malaysia generally and in UUM in particular.

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Pandemic Covid-19 also affected teaching and learning (T&L) at the university which is traditional face to face T&L totally revert or switch to E-learning, online learning, remote learning or asynchronous learning. These new norms T&L actually are not surprising because several scholars have discussed E-learning many years ago. Although it has been vigorously discussed in the 4.0 industrial revolution or specifically in education 4.0, the sudden implementation due to the spreading of the deadly virus has aroused educators and students.

The research conducted by Salamat, Ahmad, Bakht & Saifi (2018) reveals that e-learning has a positive effect on students' academic learning at the university level. Based on the data collected from 205 students at the University of Lahore shows that e-learning offers fluid learning time, makes students more independent, and students feel comfortable in seeking and browsing information. Studying the effect of e-learning also shows no difference with traditional lecture specially to nursing students. Lahti, Hätönen & Välimäki (2013) discovered that e-learning has a slight effect on nursing student knowledge, skills and satisfaction. Because of that, they concluded that the promising T&L method can be an alternative to multiple student learning experience.

Nejad & Nejad (2012) also point out that technology can be an alternative method to replace traditional education. Based on their work, many aspects should be revised to suit the education with the needs of current society. Education nowadays must offer continuous learning, engage any age students, any location and any social. These moves provide new learning perspectives that bring opportunity to maximise student learning style, flexibility and, follow their own capability and facilities.

Besides, the current study on T&L in the time of Covid-19 crisis indicated that quick transitions to online learning (in Georgia) are going well and bring new information and experience that can be used for future preparedness (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020). On the other hand, connected e-learning during a pandemic seems not a major obstacle to students. A study by Abdeldayem, Aldulaimi & Aldulaimi (2020) indicated that during e-learning, students care and help with each other, and students do not feel isolated in the online courses. But that findings shows the student's situation in Bahrain. Besides the positive advantage of e-learning, there is still an uncertain effect to students' emotions and wellbeing during remote learning, especially to Malaysian students'(based on our reading capacity). So, this study tends to tackle that issue to shed light on what happens to Malaysian students' (especially to UUM students) during remote learning.

Methodology

This research employed the focus group method as part of data collection process, where all the three researchers acted as the moderators. The participants were asked questions and interactions within the focus group were recorded. The focus group method was chosen since it allowed the moderators to concentrate on the discussion by asking initial and follow-up questions that emphasize on the subject concerned and manage the participants as well (Parker & Tritter, 2006).

Participants and Procedure

Prior to the discussion, the students were selected from among the researchers' previous semester's students. The researchers personally contacted the students and asked for their willingness to be in the focus group. Finally, 10 undergraduate students agreed to be involved in this focus group discussion where their participation was based on a voluntary basis. The

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focus group consists of 5 male and 5 female students who are aged 20 – 26 years old. They were all semester 3, but one from semester 7, local and full-time students who obtained CGPA of more than 3.30. The students came from different schools or faculties, such as 2 students from School of International Studies, 2 students from School of Business Management, 2 students from School of Technology Management and Logistics, 2 students from School of Economics, Finance and Banking, 1 student from School of Tourism, Hospitality and Event Management and lastly, 1 student from Tunku Puteri Intan Safinaz School of Accountancy.

Due to the pandemic and MCO situations, the students were not available on campus and the focus group discussion had to be conducted virtually through an online platform, the Webex, on 8th October 2020. The discussion was held in the evening as all students and moderators found that evening was the most convenient time considering it was outside the working hours.

The discussion began by questioning each student individually with the pre-prepared questions in Malay Language, hence the students felt more comfortable in expressing their views and experiences during the discussion. The 14 open-ended questions were intended to try to address each of their concerns regarding emotional management and challenges that they faced during the Covid-19 outbreak, particularly during the abrupt implementation of MCO. Any elaborations by the students were stimulated with each of their replies.

Data Analysis

This study employed a variety of analytic strategies that involved sorting, organizing and reducing the data, as well as assembling and interpreting it (Hashim, 2006). The first major step in analyzing the data was to organize the materials so that portions of the data could be readily retrieved. The analysis of the data began with transcribing interviews. In this process, the main task was to identify the key terms, codes or themes, which meant identifying which extracts of data from the transcripts were informative, and sorting out the important messages from each interview.

A category system was then developed through reading a portion of the data, and the content of the database was coded into different concepts to identify any recurring themes, phenomena or experiences within the discussions. By doing this, any information can be retrieved from the study by going to a single file and using a suitable quotation for the issues discussed in the research.

Results and Findings

Findings from Focus Group Discussion

For the focus group, the questions have been divided into four sections. They are the factors, impacts, solutions and suggestions. The data will be illustrated each in the following paragraphs.

i. Factors of Emotional Instability

Based on the data gathered, several factors lead to emotional instability during Covid-19. However, the majority of students agreed that family and online learning caused them to feel unhappy during the MCO. The quotations below showed that online learning is the factor of emotional instability and well-being.

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Informant 2 said that:

> *I am not stressed by the MCO, but more into the online system. Sometimes, the system will be down and hung. This will affect the teaching and learning process. For example, when I was in the middle of answering the online quiz, and suddenly the system was hung. It was so stressful.*

Informant 5 insisted that:

> *I am so stressed with the remote learning due to the internet accessibility at my home as well as it is so tiring, and I feel restless.*

Meanwhile, Informant 6 and 8 insisted that their family caused them to feel stressful. Below are the quotations.

Informant 6:

> *I feel stressed staying at home while having remote learning as my mother does not understand that I am studying. I am not on holiday.*

Informant 8:

> *I am stressed about having online learning because of the environment at home. There are a lot of distractions.*

Informant 2:

> *(institution) Need to control the system, not to burden and put pressure on students. For a good system, there is no need for a system that looks corporate and looks sophisticated. WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook live are enough.*

ii. Impacts on Emotional Instability

All the students agreed that Covid-19 has affected their emotion as well as the teaching and learning process.

As claimed by informant 2, he said:

> *Yes, it is so stressful as I am the person who always loves to go out. I love social activities*

Informant 3 added that:

> *I was stranded in the campus, the environment during that time was so dull, bored, gloomy and full of sadness.*

Meanwhile, informant 7 insisted that the Covid-19 has impacted his learning process, as stated below:

> *To be honest, I did not experience tension because of the online learning, but I became stressed about doing group assignments. Due to the invisibility of individuals, there were lots of free riders in a group. Because I am the group leader, thus I have to take all the responsibilities to finish up all the assignments with some help from a few group members.*

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iii. Solutions to Overcome Emotional Instability

There are numbers of solutions done by the students in order to overcome their emotional instability. However, majority of students agreed that keeping them busy has become an emotional reliever as stated by informant 2 and 4:

Informant 2:

> *I will keep myself busy. For example, when I was stranded on the campus, I joined the campus social activities such as distributing the foods, feeding the animals, cycling and jogging around the campus.*

Informant 4:

> *When I went back to my hometown, I could not just stay without doing nothing. Therefore, now, I am working as a part-timer at KFC branch.*

iv. Suggestions by the Students

From the data gathered showed that there are numbers of suggestions expressed by the informants. Interestingly, most of the suggestions are related to the teaching and learning processes.

As suggested by Informant 2:

> *(process T&L).. can change to a more effective system (Facebook live and so on) to impart knowledge because Webex is impractical to the student side…*

Informant 1:

> *...use simpler electronic devices when doing quizzes especially about technical subjects…*

Informant 3:

> *I hope the university will widen YTL offer… it means there is no limit for two months only.*

Informant 2:

> *... provide packages to students.. which is probably a package called TM-STUDENTS or something like that.. for better internet connection.*

Informant 6:

> *Every lecturer needs to record the Webex because students can repeat the video to understand the lecture when they are free.*

Informant 2:

> *Webex is too heavy to live and record… maybe use Facebook live because it does not use high data, autosave, (FB also) can do stream recording itself .. Lecturers can also include additional videos from Youtube and so on.*

Informant 6:

> *Good to use Fb because now there are many internet plans for unlimited Fb. This Webex uses too much data. Mostly internet plans provide FB unlimited, so it is easier for students…."*

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Discussion, Suggestions and Implications for Practice

Based on the data gathered through a focus group and a google form, the research indicates that there are some issues revolving around the Covid-19 pandemic. Apart from its impact on the students' emotion and wellbeing, the research also discovers its factors, solutions and suggestions on emotional instability.

For the factors of emotional instability during the pandemic, the data found that the family and online learning have pushed themselves to the lowest level of emotional curves. Education has drastically changed as a result, with the distinctive emergence of e-learning especially during the pandemic, whereby teaching is carried out remotely and on digital platforms. Even though it can take as a positive impact, nevertheless, in some aspects it has resulted in an emotional and wellness crisis to students (Farhah & Hemaloshinee, 2020). This is also supported by Kamaludin et.al. (2020) mentioned that the online learning somehow may lead students to the feeling of restless, unhappy, boredom, nervousness and impatience if the institutions are failing to offer and provide the best platform and form of learning processes.

On the other hand, in the aspect of family factors, parents should understand the nature of remote learning. Even though the students are at home, it does not mean that they are on holidays. In fact, they have been burdened by numbers of responsibilities at once such as a student, a sibling and a child. This issue is mostly experienced by the girls as they have to do household chores like cooking, cleaning and washing (UNICEF, 2016; Botea, I. & Rouanet, L., 2020).

For the impact of Covid-19 on students' emotion, the research indicates that students are mostly experiencing problems and difficulty in terms of managing emotion and teaching and learning processes. However, these problems and difficulties are facing by the majority of students globally (Cao et al., 2020; Farhah & Hemaloshinee, 2020; Kamaludin, et.al, 2020; Irfan, Akram& Abd Ghani, 2020; Abdullah, 2020; Marques, et.al., 2020). In the teaching and learning aspect specifically, the educational institutions in Malaysia need to be more aggressive in embracing new technologies and innovation. Thus, this is the time for every educator and institution to strategize the best ways to achieve the goals of education in shaping the future generation. As a result, there is a need to change educational management systems by introducing a strong integrated model of educational technology in order to push institutions to higher levels.

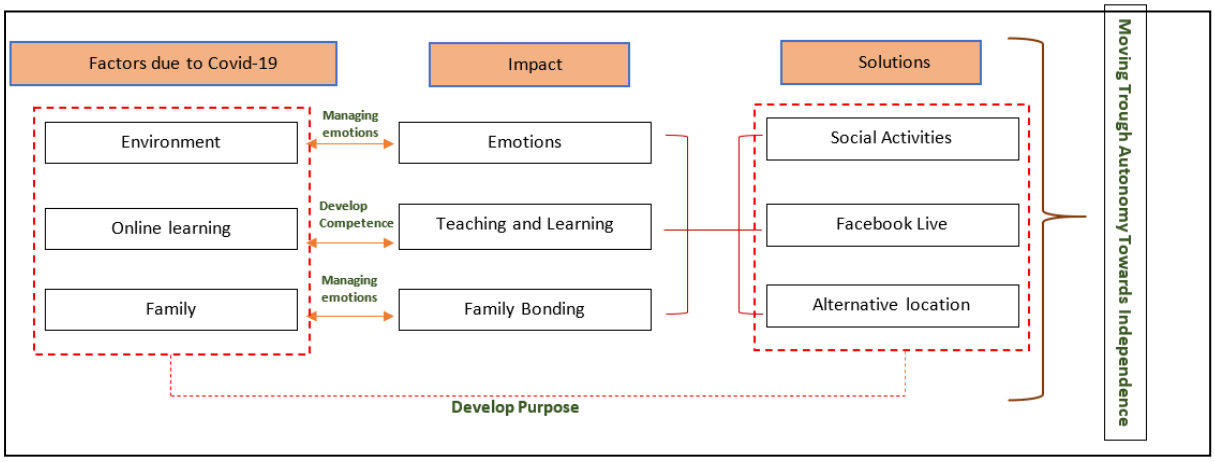
For the solution aspect, informants have used several ways in overcoming the problem that they are dealing with. Majority of the informants will keep themselves busy by doing activities such as sports. Ann-Jennings (2018) suggested that exercise is one of the most important things to combat stress. She also added that by regularly exercising such walking, jogging or cycling can be particularly stress relieving. In fact, people who exercise regularly are less likely than people who do not exercise to experience anxiety. This is due to the releasing endorphins, which are chemicals that enhance the mood and serve as natural painkillers. On the other hand, some informants who were stranded at campus during the MCO, have joined the campus social activities such as distributing the foods and face masks, feeding the animals and donating to those in need. These kinds of activities were supported by Tartakovsky (2018) as she claimed that staying busy to avoid pain is one of the best therapies. What is more, by doing these activities, the students will get two benefits, one is for their own goodness while the other is for community goodness.

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Since all of the informants face issues on the teaching and learning process, this research received few suggestions in that particular issue. What is interesting is that most informants suggest the online classes should be conducted using the Facebook live platform. The platform is said to be simpler and does not consume too much data. Plus, most telecommunications companies offer unlimited data packages for Facebook. Therefore, this option can facilitate and save students' money compared to spending additional allocation to purchase data to enable them to attend online classes. This suggestion is also in line with Nurul Farhana & Zaidatun (2016) that indicate Facebook has the potential for academic purpose because their research finding shows students' achievement increases as a result of academic activities (discussion with instructor and peers) held in that particular platform.

Moreover, the informants also raise their thoughts about recording the online class and share it with the students. This will bring opportunities for students who face connectivity issues and able to make revision through recording lectures. These things should not be an issue if educators understand the elements of e-learning. E-learning is a combination of technology and education. Video is a part of e-learning which enables students to learn through video and activate the flexible learning time (Nejad & Nejad, 2012). Hence, academic institutions should conduct more training to strengthen academic staff knowledge about developing e-learning content.

Chickering-(Covid-19) Students' Emotional Management (CSEM) Model



The issues surrounding Covid-19 and its relation to students' ability to adapt to changes is illustrated through a newly developed 'Chickering-(COVID-19) Students' Emotional Management (CSEM) Model, as in the above figure . The CSEM model shows the relationship between the Chickering theory and the informal theory. Indeed, it has a significant relationship as there are numbers of vectors that can be related to this informal theory. They are vector number 1, 2, 3 and 6 from Chickering Theory which are developing competence, managing emotion, moving through autonomy towards independence and developing purpose.

The diagram illustrates that the factors of emotional instability due to COVID-19 are environment, online learning and family. When all of these factors are dealing with the problems of emotions, teaching and learning and family bonding, it involves 2 vectors of the Chickering which are managing emotion and developing competence. With that, throughout the process of overcoming the problems and finding the solutions, it involves the vector 6 which is developing purpose. All of the solutions such as social activities, Facebook live and

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alternative location are very important as they can help the students to achieve vector 3, which is moving through autonomy towards independence. Therefore, the CSEM model is remarkably significant in managing students' emotions.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has created chaos, trauma, problems and panic to all people from all over the world including students. This is due to education being one of the sectors that got a huge impact on the pandemic. In fact, Covid-19 has resulted in schools, colleges and universities being closed worldwide. Around 1.2 billion children worldwide are out of the classroom.

The findings of this research also found that there are significant impacts of the pandemic on the students' emotion and well-being. The issues of emotional instability and e-learning experience have become a crucial crisis faced by the majority of students in UUM. The 'emotional instability theory' that has been proposed earlier is now being supported. The levels of difficulty in accessing online learning and the severity of the Covid-19 cases are significantly more likely to give a big impact on the stress level of students during this pandemic outbreak. In addition, the development of the CSEM model is sought to address the students' ability to adapt to unexpected events throughout their personal growth journey. Therefore, the findings of this research perhaps can give ways and solutions to many parties such as students, lecturers, parents and university in helping students to combat emotional instability and well-being. To sum up, with a new norm in education, every constitution should play a constructive role to challenge the dilemma, crisis and issues revolve around the Covid-19 pandemic.

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