

CHAPTER

2

STRESS DURING ONLINE LEARNING

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

To sustain the education system during the pandemic in 2019, educational institutions transitioned from physical learning to online learning, also referred to as virtual learning or internet-based learning. For over a year, online learning became compulsory for every student when the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia officially announced that all academic institutions must conduct online learning until the situation stabilized. As a result, online learning becomes compulsory for students and educators.

Online learning has often been perceived as flexible, and it has been demonstrated that they can benefit students by improving their academic performance, such as on quizzes, tests, and other academic tasks. However, the fact is that many challenges occur during online learning. One of the challenges students face during online learning is workload. According to Simamora (2020), majority of students complained that the number of academic tasks, such as assignments, increased during online learning, and it was hard for students to focus on one task since other assignments needed to be completed immediately at the same time. The workload for students is defined as

the number of academic tasks that cause students to feel burdened and under pressure.

In the academic context, the workload is based on several factors, including students' credit hours, the amount of educational activities or tasks, and hours of administrative and scholarly activity. Aside from that, according to Adeoti et al. (2017), workload in the academic context refers to doing tasks related to academics under pressure. Moawad (2020) identified that academic workload during online learning is influenced by some factors such as the type and dates of the exam, amount and type of assignment, class time, the home setting, and the type of online platform. The pressure to manage an increasing workload during online learning can be overwhelming for students, often leading to burnout and discouragement, particularly when deadlines for multiple tasks coincide (Simamora, 2020). Excessive workload may negatively affect students by reducing their focus, awareness, and alertness during class sessions. It is estimated that 10% to 30% of students experience academic stress related to workload, which can significantly distract them from learning. This stress may further manifest as mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

According to Irawan et al. (2020), students are prone to face depression, anxiety, and stress when they are involved in online learning. The impairment of students' mental health worsens during online learning, and the factors that contribute to this are the burden of online tasks (academic workload) and the need to complete the task immediately with the online media that they just learned. To sum up, this chapter discusses the workload and academic stress experienced by undergraduate students during online learning.

2.2 ONLINE LEARNING

Issues among students are crucial to be given attention because online learning methods are widely used in the 21st century, even after the pandemic ends. Therefore, the concern that workload significantly affects academic stress should be raised. According to Yang et al. (2021),

workload can be categorized as academic pressure that positively leads to stress during online learning. Stress can be defined as a signal from our body that something needs attention. Academic stress refers explicitly to the pressure or response that occurs because of academic demands (Yang et al., 2021). It is believed that the statistics of students diagnosed with stress during online learning have increased dramatically. According to prior research in the United States, 71% of students indicated their stress increased when they were experiencing online learning (Son et al., 2020). The explanation of workload affecting academic stress will be presented in the following sub-section.

2.2.1 Academic Stress

Academic stress is consistently identified as one of the most prevalent psychological challenges faced by university students. Misra and Castillo (2004) proposed that various factors such as scholarship requirements, family-related pressures, in-class competition, and financial burdens may evoke the emergence of academic stress, especially during online distance learning. Yang et al. (2021) further described academic stress as arising from a range of academic demands, including social, environmental, and external expectations.

Rahim et al. (2016) defined academic stressors as academic demands regarding academic activity, co-curriculum, and merit system. Academic stress can be described as the body's physiological and psychological response when academic demands exceed a student's ability to cope, reflecting a broader understanding of stress as a response to an imbalance between expectations and available resources. Malhotra and Mahasheva (2019) define academic stress as the pressure on students to accomplish and get better in academic demands, either in routine classes and finals or various examinations that the college requires. It contrasts with Hess and Copeland (2006), who reported that academic stress could be shown in many aspects, one of which is the environment, such as home environment, friendship, or neighborhood environment.