

Pembelajaran pecahan dan sikap ke arahnya tidak berhubung

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ABSTRAK

Kurikulum matematik sekolah Malaysia dengan jelas menyatakan bahawa aspek utama dalam pembelajaran pecahan adalah untuk membina dan mengembangkan pemahaman pelajar dalam konsep dan pada masa yang sama mencapai tahap yang tinggi dalam deria pembelajarannya. Dalam konteks ini, bagaimana pelajar berfikir dan memahami pembelajaran mereka berkait dengan sikap mereka terhadap pembelajaran itu telah menjadi perhatian utama pembuat dasar dan pendidik di seluruh dunia. Oleh itu, kajian ini dimulakan dengan tujuan untuk mengkaji hubungan antara sikap terhadap matematik dan deria pecahan di kalangan pelajar sekolah menengah. Seramai 474 pelajar yang terdiri daripada 147 pelajar Tingkatan 1, 203 pelajar Tingkatan 2 dan 124 pelajar Tingkatan 4 mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini dengan menggunakan kaedah deskriptif-korelasi. Dua instrumen iaitu Attitude Towards Mathematics Inventory (ATMI) dan Fractional Sense Test (FST) telah diadaptasi dari penyelidikan sebelumnya untuk tujuan kajian ini. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar memperoleh pencapaian tahap rendah dalam ujian deria pecahan dengan skor min 10.31 (SD = 4.95) dari skor maksimum 30. Dengan kata lain, pelajar-pelajar ini memperoleh skor peratusan rendah 34.37% dalam ujian deria pecahan. Hasil kajian juga mendapati hubungan yang lemah tetapi signifikan antara sikap pelajar terhadap matematik dan pencapaian deria pecahan di kalangan pelajar yang terlibat dalam kajian ini. Oleh itu, dengan mempertimbangkan senario di atas, adalah penting untuk memahami faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pemahaman konsep pelajar dalam pembelajaran pecahan dan sikap mereka terhadap matematik. Pelajar yang tidak mempunyai deria pecahan yang kuat cenderung bergantung pada prosedur yang diajar untuk bekerja dengan pecahan lebih terdedah kepada prosedur yang salah, salah konsep, dan tanggapan yang salah dalam menyelesaikan masalah. Komitmen untuk mengembangkan deria pecahan memerlukan perubahan dramatik dalam cara pelajar belajar matematik di bilik darjah hari ini kerana ia tidak sesuai dengan jangkaan keperluan kurikulum.

Kata Kunci: Deria Pecahan , Pencapaian, Prestasi Pelajar, Sikap,

The Learning of Fractions and Attitude Towards It Does Not Add Up

ABSTRACT

The Malaysian school mathematics curriculum clearly states that the main aspect in the learning of fractions is to build and develop students' understanding in the concept and at the same time attain high facility in making sense of its learning. In this context, how students think and make sense of their learning in relation to their attitude towards learning have been a major concern for policy makers and educators worldwide. Thus, this study was embarked

with the aim to investigate the relationship between fractional sense attitude towards mathematics among secondary school students. A total of 474 students comprising 147 Form 1 students, 203 Form 2 students and 124 Form 4 students participated in this study utilizing a descriptive-correlational design. Two instruments namely Attitude Towards Mathematics Inventory (ATMI) and Fractional Sense Test (FST) was adapted from previous research for the purpose of this study. The findings indicate that students obtained a low-level attainment in the fractional sense test with a mean score of 10.31 (SD=4.95) from a maximum score of 30. In other words, these students obtained a low percentage score of 34.37% in the fractional sense test. The findings also found a weak but significant relationship between students' attitude towards mathematics and fractional sense achievement among the students involved in this study. Thus, considering the above scenarios, it is important to understand the factors that influence students' conceptual understanding in the learning of fraction and their attitude towards mathematics. Students who do not have a strong sense of fractions tend to rely on the procedures taught to work with fractions are more exposed to incorrect procedures, misconceptions, and flawed reasoning in solving problems. The commitment to develop fractional sense requires a dramatic shift in the way students learn mathematics in today's classroom as it does not add up to the expectation of the curriculum requirement.

Keywords: Achievement, Attitude, Fraction Sense, Students Performance.

Background

One of the fundamental requirements for the learning of mathematics is to make a sense of it. However, many believe that one just need to find a way to memorise some rules and formulas for problems to be solved. One of the contributors for this epistemology is due to the learning orientation structure of classroom and prevalence of the role of the teacher as the dispenser of knowledge that inadvertently leads to learner's notion that if one doesn't understand, the answer can be attained from their teachers or just memorise it. Various research over the years have indicated that school mathematics in Malaysia still emphasises on rote learning as elucidated by local researchers (Parmjit, et al., 2018; Aida, 2015; Mohamed & Johnny (2010) where they found that students have difficulties applying facts and formula in their daily lives despite having high scores in standardized tests. For example, research by Parmjit, et. al (2018) among high school leavers found that their national examination grades in SPM do not strut in tandem with their mathematical thinking development. They elucidated that these students have a superficial understanding of mathematics as most instructions still employ the "drill-and-skill" method that inadvertently curb their mathematical thinking growth. Does this superficial understanding have an impact on student's attitude towards leaning or vice versa? Arsaythamby (2006) in his study showed that attitudes towards learning mathematics have a positive relationship with mathematics achievement and is a significant contributor to Mathematics Learning Orientation. Since 2015, several efforts have been undertaken by the education ministry of Malaysia, so as to bring about positive changes in the Malaysian education system. In particular, the aim of these reforms from the mathematics perspective was particularly due to the substandard ranking of Malaysian student's participation in the international studies of Trends in Mathematics and Science Studies (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The question to ponder upon is "what is the current nature school students learning of mathematics in Malaysian contexts?" This study investigates on the two variable of study namely mathematical fraction learning and attitude towards it.

Fraction concepts and fraction sense are among the most difficult mathematical constructs for most students regardless of whether they are at primary, secondary or higher education level. The former relates to utilization of learnt formal content of fractions in classroom setting whereas the latter usually refers to the informal knowledge constructed from this formal content that relates to the ideas of using reasoning, logic and reasonableness of answer or as Seeley (2016) elucidated “like a light bulb going on in a learner’s head”. Behr, et al. (1984), Streefland (1993) and Empson & Levi (2011) emphasize that when the concept of fractions is introduced, it is important that students are given the opportunity to develop a better understanding of the concept of fractions. Without a solid conceptual understanding, students have trouble figuring out the procedures involved in solving a mathematical problem and that idea or knowledge is easily forgotten. On the other hand, fraction sense generally refers to the collection of conceptual understanding of rational numbers and flexibility with visual representations of fractions with a strong foundational sense of fractions rather than single mathematical idea (Jennifer, 2011). It can be termed as the ability of one to make sense of fractions, the relative size of fractions and the rationale of calculations that involve fractions (Woodward, 1998).

Research studies depicted students face a great challenge in learning fractions (Lamon, 2007; Van de Walle et al., 2013) and teachers are teaching the way they were taught in their schooling days. Often an emphasis on algorithms and computation has been the focus in mathematics learning, especially in fractions learning. For example, a study by Cramer, Post and Del Mas (2002) who based their study on the fourth and fifth grade textbook curriculum found that competent methodology and symbol manipulation as an end in itself was a primal concern at the expense of context and physical models.

The teaching of fractions spans from the early years of school and continues to the primary, secondary level, with teaching techniques that provide more depth and enhancement with the passing years. Although fraction sense is something that develops over a period of time, it is foundational for a deeper understanding of complex concepts and processes such as addition and equivalence of fractions. Students who lack fractional sense are frequently dependent on memorized techniques without a proper understanding of how they work. The many representations and interpretations of both fractions concept and fraction sense are amongst the factors that make it difficult to grasp (Kilpatrick, Swafford, & Findell, 2001). Wu (1999) claimed, “The teaching of fractions is the first major bottleneck in school mathematics, and yet it has remained problematic”. The difficulty faced by students involving fractions is similarly echoed by other researchers due to a mutually exclusive learning environment between procedural orientated teachings of fractions with secondary school curriculum (Etienne, 2014; Woodward, 1998). In addition, Groff (1996) implied that there is a lack of related lessons when the application of fractions is taught in schools.

Despite the fact that teachers may have a strong understanding of fractional concepts, their methods of instruction and procedures may not support the development of fractional sense. The researcher believes that most teachers may be in denial of the lack of correlation between beliefs and practices. The Fractional Sense Test can shed some light in providing tangible evidence of students understanding of part whole numbers, the magnitude and effect of operations and effectively their fraction sense. Hence, the objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between students’ fractional sense achievement and their attitude towards mathematics.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach using a descriptive-correlational design among 474 secondary school students. These students were randomly selected using stratified sampling technique according to the strata of grade level and location. The stratification details of the grade levels comprised 147 (31.01%) students from Secondary 1, 203 (42.83%) students from Secondary 2 and 124 (26.16%) students from Secondary 4. On the other hand, the stratification details based on location comprised 362 (76.4%) students from urban schools and 112 (23.3%) students from rural schools. Two instruments namely Fractional Sense Test (FST and Attitude Towards Mathematics Inventory (ATMI) were adapted from Phipps (2008) and Tapia and Marsh (2004) respectively for the data collection purposes. The former comprising 24 items which include both close-ended (multiple choice) and open-ended questions. were sectionalised into six (6) categories namely *density*, *part-to-whole*, *magnitude*, *equivalent*, *addition* and *multiplication*. On the other hand, the latter comprised 40 items from the dimensions of *enjoyment of mathematics*, *motivation*, *self-confidence* and *value of mathematics* where it was analysed based on a 5-point Likert scale. All measures were taken in establishing the validity and reliability processes for both these instruments in conforming the validity of the data collected for the study.

Result

The first section investigates the statistical significant differences in Fraction Sense Test (FST) achievement among grade levels (Form1, Form 2 and Form 4). The hypothesis to be tested is:

$$H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2 = \mu_3$$

H₁: There is at least one pair of grade/level of student's achievement are different where,

μ_1 = the mean score of FST for Form 1

μ_2 = the mean score of FST for Form 2

μ_3 = the mean score of FST for Form 4

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of FST scores among Form 1, Form 2 and Form 4 students.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of FST Score among Grade/Level

Grade/level	N	Mean	SD	%
Secondary 1	147	10.39	5.20	34.6
Secondary 2	203	9.37	4.00	31.2
Secondary 4	124	11.75	5.67	39.2
Overall	474	10.31	4.95	34.4

Max score: 30

The highest mean score is obtained by Secondary 4 students (Mean=11.75, SD=5.67), followed by Secondary 1 students (Mean=10.39, SD=5.20) and Secondary 2 students (Mean=9.36, SD=4.00). In terms of percentages, the scores are a low 34.6%, 31.2% and 39.2% each respectively. To investigate if there is a significant difference between these mean scores, a One-Way ANOVA was conducted.

Table 2. ANOVA Table of FST Score among Grade/Level

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	435.877	2	217.938	9.210	.000
Within Groups	11145.912	471	23.664		
Total	11581.789	473			

The analysis in Table 2 shows a significant difference [$F(2, 471) = 9.21, p < .05$] in the test scores in the FST among these levels (Secondary 1, Secondary 2 and Secondary 4) at the 0.05 level. Thus, we reject the null hypothesis.

Table 3. LSD Multiple Comparisons of FST Score among Grade

(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	1.02017	.52684	.053	-.0151	2.0554
	4	-1.35544*	.59315	.023	-2.5210	-.1899
2	1	-1.02017	.52684	.053	-2.0554	.0151
	4	-2.37562*	.55445	.000	-3.4651	-1.2861
4	1	1.35544*	.59315	.023	.1899	2.5210
	2	2.37562*	.55445	.000	1.2861	3.4651

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

LSD comparison revealed that two mean score was significantly different with another. Form 4 students had a significantly higher mean score ($M = 11.75$) than Form 1 students ($M = 10.39$), and Form 2 students ($M = 9.37$). Therefore, it shows that there is significant difference in FST score between Form 4 students with Form 1 students and Form 4 students with Form 2 students.

The second section of the findings investigates the relationship between students' attitude towards mathematics with their performance in the Fractional Sense Test (FST). Descriptive analysis was computed for each item to determine the mean scores for each construct of attitude towards mathematics (refer Table 4).

Table 4. Overall Attitude towards Mathematics

	Category	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Mathematics enjoyment	3.31	1.04
2.	Motivation to do mathematics	3.13	0.98
3.	Self-confidence in mathematics	2.93	1.03
4.	Perceived value of mathematics	3.85	0.90
Overall Attitude		3.28	0.99

Scale from 1 to 5

The mean scores for each of the constructs according to ascending scores are self-confidence in mathematics, motivation to do mathematics, mathematics enjoyment and perceived value of mathematics with scores of 2.93 (1.03), 3.13 (0.98), 3.31 (1.04) and 3.85 (0.90) respectively. The overall mean score of 3.28 ($SD=0.99$) indicate a moderately low level of students' attitude towards mathematics.

The hypothesis to be tested in investigating the relationship between students' attitude

towards mathematics with their performance in the Fractional Sense Test (FST) is as follow:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between students' attitude toward mathematics with their performance in the Fractional Sense Test.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between students' attitude toward mathematics with their performance in the Fractional Sense Test.

Table 5 shows the relationship between students' attitude toward mathematics and their performance in FST

Table 5. Relationship between Attitude and their Performance in FST

		Attitude towards Mathematics	FST score
Attitude towards Mathematics	Pearson Correlation	1	.300**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	474	474
FST score	Pearson Correlation	.300**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	474	474

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The analysis shows a weak yet significant relationship ($r = 0.300$, $p < 0.05$) between students' attitude and their performance in FST. Thus, we reject the null hypothesis. In other words, only 9.00% ($r^2 = 0.09$) of student's fraction sense tests scores can be explained by their attitude towards mathematics and vice versa. This indicates that other factors might be the cause of students' fractional sense performance.

Item Analysis

The following were the items students faced great difficulty in solving it based on the incorrect responses. The four questions were Question 1. Question 14, question 19 and question 21. Table 6 details the descriptive analysis for each of the questions based on the correct and incorrect responses from the 474 students involved in the study.

Table 6. Analysis of Item with highest level of difficulty

Question	% of students who answer correctly	% of students who answer incorrectly
1	5.3% (25)	94.7% (449)
14	35.4% (168)	64.6% (306)
19	16.0% (76)	84.0% (398)
21	17.7% (84)	82.3% (390)

There are two items in the dimension of density, namely question 1 and question 19 in the Fractional Sense Test that the students faced the highest level of difficulty. Density of fractions refers to the important mathematical idea, that between any two fractions, there are infinite number of fractions. Understanding this mathematical fact is crucial in the development of fraction sense.

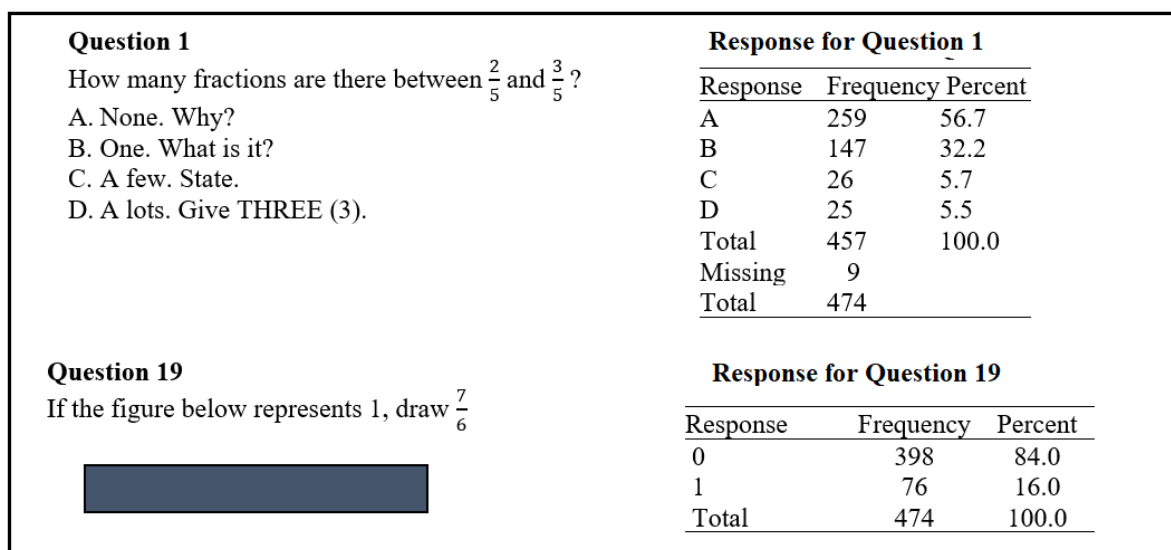


Figure 1. Students response for Question 1 and Question 19

Based on this density category (refer Figure 1), 94.7% (n=449) of the students answered incorrectly for item 1. Item 1 is based on four multiple choice questions and the correct response is D. Based on students' response, majority of the students responded incorrectly of A (56.7%) and B (32.2%) as the answer. Based on the analyses, this item was the most difficult in the dimension of density faced by the students derived from the incorrect responses of 94.7%. They were unable to subdivide $\frac{2}{5}$ and $\frac{3}{5}$ into smaller equal parts. To conceptualize in finding large numbers of fractions between any two numbers with common denominators, finding the next (and subsequent) equivalent fractional form was necessary, i.e. $\frac{4}{10}$ and $\frac{6}{10}$; $\frac{6}{15}$ and $\frac{9}{15}$; etc. skill to master. They were unable to comprehend on the existence of infinite numbers between two fractions.

Question 19 was based on an open-ended question. The students were required to draw $\frac{7}{6}$ based on the figure represented. The correct response obtained by the students was a low 16.0%. (n=76). This item required the students to interpret how large or how much fragments were needed to represent the value. However, majority of them lacked in the sense of emphasizing the fractional parts. The conceptualization of an improper fraction was lacking in these students thinking skills repertoire.

Question 14 refers to the dimension of part to whole where students faced the highest level of difficulty (refer Figure 2). This dimension requires students to fully understand the part-whole concept of fractions, they must develop a conscious awareness of the whole and its relationship to the denominator and numerator. To keep the thought of the whole foremost in students' minds, they need to utilize the three-step process when solving problems with fractions. The first step had students questioning "What represents the whole?" and then ask "How many equal groups or parts of the whole?" The final step had students ask themselves "How many partitions do I count?"

Question 14	Response for Question 14		
If $\frac{8}{7}$ of the whole is 24, then the whole is.....? A. More than 24 B. Less than 24 C. Exactly 24 D. None of the above	Response	Frequency	Percent
	A	219	46.8
	B	171	36.5
	C	56	12.0
	D	22	4.7
	Total	468	100.0
Missing	6	1.3	
Total	474	100.0	

Question 21	Response for Question 21		
Which of the following is false? A. $\frac{1}{5}$ is between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{6}$ B. $\frac{7}{9}$ is between $\frac{8}{9}$ and $\frac{1}{10}$ C. $\frac{8}{7}$ is between $\frac{9}{8}$ and $\frac{7}{6}$ D. None of the above	Response	Frequency	Percent
	A	103	22.2
	B	140	30.1
	C	135	29.0
	D	87	18.7
	Total	465	100.0
Missing	9	1.9	
Total	474	100.0	

Figure 2. Students response for Question 14 and Question 21

In question 14, students were asked if $\frac{8}{7}$ of the whole is 24, then find the whole? For this question, 64.4% most of the 474 students answered incorrectly where 46.8% responded A. (more than 24 as the answer). The correct response is B.

The final question for the analysis, question 21 where students were asked to identify a fraction between two given fractions. In this question, 82.3% of the students answered incorrectly where nearly an equal responded B and C as the answer. This item requires a sense of both magnitude and orderliness of fraction as one need to compare it to the benchmark referents. The correct response is D.

Discussion of findings and conclusion

This study was embarked with the aim to investigate the relationship between fractional sense and attitude towards mathematics among 474 secondary school students utilizing a descriptive-correlational design. The first part of the findings show students in this study are weak in fraction sense that comprises density, part-to-whole, magnitude, equivalent, addition and multiplication of fraction. A low mean scores of 10.31 (SD=4.94) from a maximum score of 30 depicts a notion that the learning of fractions in classroom learning does not make much sense for these students. Attaining a low percentage score of 34.4% ($\frac{10.31}{30} \times 100$) indicates that school mathematics in Malaysia still emphasises on rote learning as elucidated by local researchers (Parmjit, et al., 2018; Aida, 2015; Mohamed & Johnny (2010) where they found that students have difficulties applying facts and formula in their daily lives despite having high scores in standardized tests. This scenario of school mathematics deficiency is a common feature around the world and was confirmed by Parmjit. et.al (2018) elucidating that what is learned in school and common sense are becoming restricted. This finding was in tandem with the results obtained by Steffee (1994) decades ago depicting a notion of that not much change has taken place in students learning of mathematics. He said:

The current notion of school mathematics is based almost exclusively on formal mathematical procedures and concepts that, of their nature, are very remote from the conceptual world of the children who are to learn them. (p. 5)

This elucidation was about three decades ago and is it still prevalent at current time? Based on the findings of this study, the answer is Yes.

The second findings from the research question reveal that students' attitude towards mathematics is at a low moderate level. This clearly indicates that a majority of students' have a somewhat negative or a disinterest attitude towards mathematics. One's readiness to engage in mathematics is reliant on a positive attitude towards mathematics. A positive attitude toward mathematics has been demonstrated to impact achievement in mathematics (Lang, et. al., 2018). On the contrary, a negative attitude towards mathematics or a disinterest were some of the problems faced by students when learning mathematics and this is due to the nature of math as a difficult subject (Ganal & Guiab, 2014). Is there a possibility that due to their disinterest in mathematics impacted their FST scores? Further research needs to be conducted because the findings of the study indicate a low but significant relationship between FST performance with attitude towards mathematics.

The development and evaluation of fractional sense must be emphasized continuously across the spectrum of the secondary school curriculum if vital improvements are to be made in Malaysia. Thus, considering the above findings, it is important to understand the factors that influence students' conceptual understanding in the learning of fraction and their attitude towards mathematics. The commitment to develop fractional sense requires a dramatic shift in the way students learn mathematics in today's classroom. Teachers should link secondary fractional sense teaching to real life problems in order to spark interest among students. Students who do not have a strong sense of fractions tend to rely on the procedures taught to work with fractions are more exposed to incorrect procedures, misconceptions, and flawed reasoning in solving problems. Our students will only develop strong fractional sense to the extent that the curriculum and the teachers encourage the understanding of mathematics as opposed to the memorization of rules and mechanical application of 'rule-based method'. The commitment to develop fractional sense requires a dramatic shift in the way students learn mathematics in today's classroom as it does not add up to the expectation of the curriculum requirement.

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“We Wanna Go Home!”

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia has been part of the global war against COVID-19 since the World Health Organization declared pandemic status to this public health threat. As part of the nation's active measures to prevent the spread of this disease, on March 16 2020, Malaysian Prime Minister, Muhyiddin Yassin has announced the execution of the Movement Control Order (MCO) or globally referred as “partial lockdown” nationwide. MCO is a cordon sanitaire implemented as a preventive measure that entails prohibition on mass gatherings including those for non-critical business, religious, sport, social and cultural activities. This includes the closure of all public and private educational institutions starting March 18 (Majlis Keselamatan Negara [MKN], 2020). This has opened a new horizon of discussion regarding the assessment and management of the psychological impact of the MCO among university students stranded on campus amid COVID-19 pandemic. This paper is a reflection on the issues of psychological challenges among stranded Malaysian university students during National Movement Control Order amid COVID-19 Pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic, MCO, university students, psychosocial challenges, mental health.

Malaysian MCO: The Uncharted Territory

Unclear Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of MCO at the beginning of its implementation and inconsistent universities' decisions on their students' movement has led to the influx of student movement at various transportation centres across the country (Adnan, 2020). Most of them decided to go home rather than staying on campus as they were expecting all teaching and learning activities to be suspended during MCO. Meanwhile, almost 80,000 university students were reported stranded on campus or at a rental house nearby the university since the first day of MCO (Idris & Parzi, 2020).

Psychosocial Challenges among Stranded University Students during MCO

Even though the restricted movement during MCO is not equivalent to medical quarantine, one can argue that the restriction applied is nevertheless the same. University students who remained on campus, for example, were not allowed to leave their respective room and all needs were supplied directly to them door-to-door. At the time of this article being prepared, there has been no official study released on the status of psychological well-being among nearly hundred thousand stranded students in the university. However there has been anecdotal reports from social media as well as information reported from local news regarding the issues raised among this population. The anxiety at the first stage of MCO revolved around the student's daily needs such as food as well as adjustment with the teaching methodology during this period. However, the matter was controlled well with the assurance from the government that the daily need will be taken care of by government agencies for all affected students. Each

university has also outlined specific requirements for the students to adjust to online teaching sessions based on the specification of each faculties.

However, the issues of mental health started to gain prominence when the government announced the extension of the MCO twice which lengthened the partial lockdown further to another 28 days. This was not surprising as previous studies have highlighted the potential psychological impact of quarantine which normally begins to develop beyond ten days of quarantine such as anger, frustration and acute stress reaction (Brooks et.al, 2020). Boredom, loneliness and separation from usual social contact also amplified the effect to some students. Some opted to raise their concern via social media, which has gained public attention. There have been individual comments which highlighted potential risk such as suicide which has sparked the debate among public regarding this issue. Community as a whole seemed to be divided among those who empathised with the concern and urged measures to support this group and also another polar of viewpoint that demanded the student to remain in the university in order to help the fight against COVID-19 pandemic.

It is difficult to properly measure the seriousness of the issue given that there has been lack of data on the objective assessment of their psychological well-being. One of the universities in the central region of the country reported that their internal survey among over 1500 stranded students revealed that only 5.3 percent reported high levels of stress. The National Student Council who made a statement in one of the local news claimed that one of the stressors for the students was the uncertainty regarding when they will be able to reconcile with family. The approaching festive season for Muslim, Ramadhan, also played a factor in amplifying their anxiety (Karim, 2020).

To curb this effect, each university has started to act by providing locally-based counselling and mental health support services. The task, which was mostly run by the university counselling unit has geared up the services by providing online and 24-hour tele-counselling services. It is not widely known regarding the utilization of these services during this period. One of the growing concerns is lack of preference among Malaysian students to utilise any online form of counselling as reported by local study, which showed only 35 percent of students support the use of this service (Wong et.al, 2018). Among other suggestions was to utilise peer-support system among campus residents, whereby each of the students are being paired with another student so that closer monitoring services are in place (Jaafar, 2020). This is vital, especially for high risk groups such as students with a history of prior mental illness. The university was also encouraged to identify high risk groups and screen them more closely for risk assessment and decide on appropriate clinical referral if necessary. At national level, the mental health services provided by government and private agencies continue to offer clinical services, within limitation of MCO (Nasional, 2020). The widespread promotion of the online services has encouraged the affected people to reach out for help.

As a result of increasing concerns on mental health issues of the affected students, the Ministry of higher Education (MOHE) and the universities conducted surveys on students' preference to go home and the reports reveal that the majority of the students agreed to go home compared to the small number of students who preferred to stay on campus. A collaborative discussion between MOHE and the National Security Council (MKN) and Ministry of Health (MOH) led to the development of a proper SOP that is in line with the MCO for university students to return home safely (Ministry of Higher Education [MOHE], 2020). This involved strict health screening on campus in order to get clearance for leaving the premises. At this stage, students

were released home gradually based on zoning. Many have praised this effort and view it as being practical to support mental health of the affected students.

Conclusion

COVID-19 Pandemic has provided an important learning curve for all, including on the aspect of psychological management of the affected population. Even though most are not directly affected by the disease itself, but many, if not all are affected psychologically by the pandemic. Nationwide lockdown or partial lockdown are new to many. Hence the majority are not prepared to tackle the unknown impact that comes with this decision. The current MCO in Malaysia has highlighted the importance of psychological preparedness for every segment of the nation in order to reduce its psychological sequelae. There is a need for more early, rapid and practical measures to assess the psychological status of the affected population. This is to ensure that our psychological first aid measures can take place as soon as possible to the targeted population. Nevertheless, the current MCO has also become a catalyst for the development of more online-based helping services for university students in Malaysia. This advancement will not only be beneficial for the MCO period, but the benefits of it will proceed post-MCO in order to suit the new norm in mental health care provision post COVID-19.

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