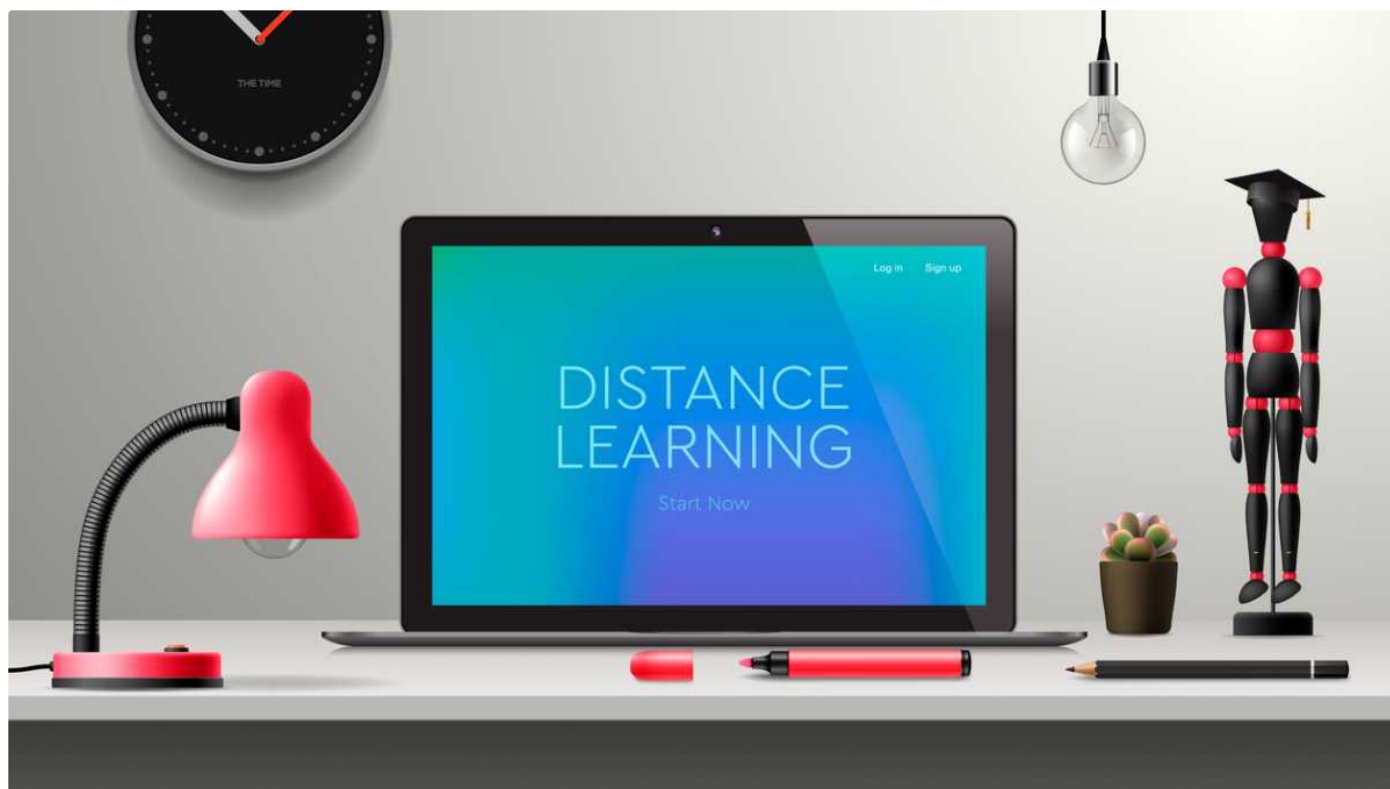


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University Distance Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic

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This article delves into the discussion of challenges, innovations, and adaptation of teaching and learning at higher educational institutions, particularly at International Islamic University in Malaysia, during the global outbreak of Coronavirus.

Like other sectors, the education system, including at higher education level, has also been severely affected when the Covid-19 pandemic began. A number of measures have been put in place by higher learning institutions in order to mitigate its impacts. The measures are informed by a number of fundamentals,

especially on the principles that **health and safety must take precedence over other matters**. Covid-19 is an acute and highly contagious viral disease, transmissible through human interactions, necessitating the formulation of judicious interventions to eliminate or slow the outbreak. The need to prevent COVID-19 infections among university community warrants universities' management to be mindful of their decisions, hence have come up with necessary guidelines to facilitate and regulate their activities, including the teaching and learning processes.

In the case of the **International Islamic University Malaysia**, the measures taken by the University have been based on a number of notions, including, **firstly**, that the pandemic requires us to adjust the way we think, maneuver the way we feel, and alter the way we behave or perform work. This is essential for the sake of one's own and others' health. **Secondly**, we have to make adjustments over the procedures we conduct work and perform core activities. This may involve a rather long period of time before we could resume pre-pandemic norms. The adjustment we make may also perpetuate to be new norms, culture, and work practices in months or years to come. **Thirdly**, we have to be creative in handling work processes, necessitating us to act quickly, sensibly, decisively, and wisely. We must position the health and safety of academics (and their family members) and students as our priority, leading the University to take into account long term consequences and repercussions of any decisions made.

For one, it is important for both academics and students to stay true to their functions as academics/lecturers and students, accomplishing the roles to **generate knowledge** (research), **disseminate knowledge** (publication, teaching, services), and **acquire knowledge** (learning). These are the core activities of a university which should continue to take place, including during pandemic time. Given the University places the well-being of her community at the topmost priority, especially with regard to the students' learning experience, a lot of initiatives have been put in place to ensure that their learning processes is accordingly managed. This includes putting a halt to any form of teaching and learning activities, including the online teaching, being aware of various issues encountered by academics/ lecturers' and students' (e.g. academics' readiness;

and availability of good internet access). **The university started to organize a series of workshops on virtual learning or e-learning for academics to equip them with the virtual teaching skills** (the training are conducted in Arabic and English medium). Besides, various e-meetings at the level of departments and faculties (kulliyah) with local and international students were conducted to open up forums for discussions and exchange of information, especially regarding the way teaching and learning would be conducted. Students have been engaged to participate in online surveys conducted by the University to acquire information on issues the encounter should the University were to start the online learning, such as if the students have computer/internet facilities and access. The University has developed various standard operating procedures, and distributed the guidelines, on the altered approaches in teaching and learning processes at the University. **The attention given by the University has developed her academics' readiness to adopt new work practices and created new norms to accomplish the planned teaching tasks and responsibilities.**

Given the survey found various issues in teaching and learning processes, such as the absence of, or insufficient access to the internet facilities as well as students' safety and health risk if they were to be on campus in a large group, the University has come up with another alternative approach for teaching and learning process, the **Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL)**. It is a teaching and learning process which temporarily substitutes the regular physical teaching and learning (RPTL). The latter which involved synchronous physical face-to-face classes, cannot be simply replaced with other channels (e.g. synchronous online class). ERTL would adopt asynchronous class system, such as by using pre-recorded lecture video, or voice-over power-point slides, or the combination of various methods to conduct teaching and learning process. Students may download the learning materials availed by the instructors at any time of their convenience so that they can remotely learn. Occasionally, lecturers may conduct interactive session with the students, during which further elaboration would be made on topics covered in the course. It is



important to note that there are courses which could not be allowed via ERTL mode, for the courses require students to be physically present in specific teaching and learning settings.

Despite the changes in the teaching and learning approaches, the extent of learning in a student who follows ERTL should be similar with the learning level attained by students who follows RPTL. As noted in the ERTL, the attainment of a course's learning outcome should not be compromised. Even assessment which is used to nurture learning and measure the level of learning, would be revised in order to measure the degree of learning that a student attains. The university has deliberated the mechanisms to ensure that students have good extent of opportunities to attain the course learning outcomes, and subsequently, the program learning outcomes, through the altered teaching and learning processes. Several guidelines have been provided for students so that they could effectively handle learning, completing assignment, and attempting to assessment and examination. In short, **the implementation of ERTL means students do not have to be present on campus, leading to the need to adjust the ways achievement assessment (quiz, test, examination) at the University is conducted.**

Since some view the implementation of ERTL as a drastic change, and hence are worried that it will not be able to function the same way the RPTL processes do, the university has conducted additional online training and briefing with the academics. Many, however, are aware on the need to regard ERTL as an intervention that befits the **principles of *maqasid al-shariah*** at this crucial time, in that the **protection of life is placed in the second order of importance after the protection of religion**. This is indicative of its **priority over the other three objectives; reason, posterity, and property**. The principle guides the need for the University community to prioritize the necessities to prioritize health and safety (**Doruriyat**); over the need to meet the face to face teaching and learning requirement (**Hajiyat**); and then the enrichment (**Tahsiniyat**). In fact, this intervention is **sine qua non** (an essential condition) as the COVID-19 situation requires all to observe physical distancing measures until it is safe to go back to RPTL mode.



This pandemic brings with it enormous types and levels of learning opportunities, allowing us to develop, change, and improve our thinking, feeling, and behaviors. The impacts are not only happening at small scale or an aspect of life, but at a larger level which require us to look at the impacts in a bigger picture. It has been observed that the university has taken into account all factors in managing her teaching and learning processes. **The university management acknowledges the different constraints faced by students and academics/lecturers, and have taken up suitable measures to enhance her readiness in doing the best to provide quality education, hence uphold her amanah toward knowledge, as enshrined in the university's mission.** Many new practices and norms have been introduced, requiring all in the university to be involved. We must relate the challenges we currently encounter with positive step forward for our societal, and economic scenarios. This too warrants academics and students, to position their roles in a functional manner. We should relate our thoughts and actions to the values that we subscribe, which focus on making this world a better place, befitting the principles of leading the others (Khalifah) with the Islamic revealed knowledge and human sciences combined (our Amanah towards knowledge), continue acquiring and making knowledge relevant (upholding the culture of Iqra), and nurture harmonious life to all humanity (staying true to the concept of Rahmatan lil Alamin). May Allah enlighten our journey and ease the hardship we are going through. Indeed He



promises us that "with every difficulty, there is relief." ([Al-Inshirah 94:5](#)

(<https://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.islamicity.org%2F47419%2Funiversity-distance-learning-during-covid-19-pandemic%2F>)) And that "those who strive in

Our%3A%2F%2Fwww.islamicity.org%2F47419%2Funiversity-distance-learning-during-covid-19-pandemic%2F will surely guide them to good." ([Al-Ankabut 29:69](#) (<https://www.islamicity.org/quransearch/?q=29:69>))

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