# An Insight into Motivational Factors of Integrating Edu-Tech in Learning Arabic During COVID-19 Outbreak

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## Abstract

The employment of instructional technology in teaching and learning has becoming a crucial requirement among teachers and educator especially in the 21st century education. Moreover, the current global emergence situation of COVID-19 pandemic has been forcing the educators towards using various online platforms and technologies In Malaysia, universities have scrambled to move the program to an electronic platform to tackle the proliferation of COVID-19 under the national Movement Control Order (MCO). Malaysia's 20 public universities including Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia was to encourage or mandate online learning for various major languages including Arabic. During this difficult period, Arabic lecturers might need more training to allow them to have an in-depth understanding of how technology can improve learning and motivate their students to learn. The researchers employed responsive semi-structured interviews, which allowed the respondents to share about their teaching practices and how technology

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motivated them to be more creative in their teaching practices during MCO. The result indicates that online learning can be a solution for the Arabic language educators and practitioners to share their knowledge by using e-Learning or other platforms as education needs to be conducted during MCO. One of the online learning benefits is lecturers become motivated and students become active when they learn using online learning as they are the one who take responsibility of their learning.

**Keywords:** *Covid-19; Arabic language; motivation; online learning; lecturers' perceptions.*

## 1.0 Introduction

On 31st of December 2019, there was a growing report on the acute respiratory illness that started in Wuhan. The virus, which is later identified as COVID-19, attacks the human respiratory system and caused death to several thousands of individuals worldwide (Chen, et. al., 2020; Ali, et. al., 2020). Rapid transmission of COVID-19 from human to human occurs through droplets or direct contact (Lai, Shih, Ko, Tang, & Hsueh, 2020), which spreads when someone who is infected with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes or exhales (Williams, 2020). Hence, the temporary closure of schools all over the world have been announced, impacting more than 91 per cent of students worldwide around 1.6 billion children and young people (Miks. J. and McIlwaine, J., 2020). The World Health Organisation also has named COVID-19 a pandemic across the world and the ongoing possibility of more global spread (Ducharme, 2020).

In Malaysia, colleges raced to move their courses to an electronic platform to counter the spread of COVID-19 under the national Movement Control Order. (Tee, 2020). This became a measure of higher education institutions resilience for several initially focusing on the content to an online environment (Wu, 2020). The higher education institutions have to adapt to the changing environment in terms of student load, government self-isolation advice and funding for administrative staff and students who are not able to travel cross-nationally or to their local campus. As of 16 March 2020, the response by most of Malaysia's 20 public universities including Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) was to promote or regulate online learning (Lim, 2020), using video conference platforms, live streaming or in-house e-learning platforms. This approach can be described as a transformation process that offers an opportunity for rethinking educational practices and enhances the emphasis to sustainability in the curricula. This includes teaching and learning (TnL) strategies for various major languages subjects such as Arabic, English, French, Mandarin and Japanese.

## 2.0 Literature Review

Technology has taken over many aspects of everyday life, including how lecturers deliver instruction (Zhang, 2017). Though some lecturers have been convinced that technology is needed to motivate students to learn, others have been resistant (Tondeur et al., 2017). Many Arabic language lecturers have been among those resistant to technology.

Additionally, most Arabic language lecturers have limited computer literacy and training (Sahrir, 2017). Further, they have not used technology effectively in their classrooms because of their pedagogical beliefs (Tondeur et al., 2016). However, motivation is important for increasing learner engagement, which can be done with multimedia such as images, graphics and text with attractive colors and shapes (Mayer, 2014) as well as technology like iPads (Flewitt et al., 2015), interactive whiteboards (Uluyol & Şahin, 2016), digital storytelling devices (Chan et al., 2017) and web-based applications (Fatimah & Santiana, 2017). Multimedia also allows students to access multiple information sources, which may promote deep learning (Amadieu et al., 2017) and better learning outcomes.

Due to the seriousness of the rapid spread of this pandemic and to further prevent the spread, almost 1 billion people across the globe are put on home confinement (lockdown/movement control order) including Malaysia (NST Online, 22, March 2020). As such, the employment of instructional technology in teaching and learning has becoming a crucial requirement during the current global emergence situation of COVID-19 pandemic which has been forcing the educators towards emergency remote teaching and learning (ERTL) and home-based learning (HBL) by using various online platforms and technologies (Leon, Trian, Ellen and Yogi, 2021). Worldwide school and university cuts also have forced millions of pupils, instructors and lecturers online, adding decades of expertise in the sector to the public eye (Bates 2020).

Among the main issue in Arabic online learning during Movement Control Order (MCO) is the way Arabic is being taught, which causes students to disengage and become passive. Despite the many studies that encourage lecturers to use technology as a motivational tool and make the learning process enjoyable for their students (Gabsi et al., 2015; Harris et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2015; Nikou & Economides, 2016), many Arabic language lecturers struggle in using technology (Zainuddin & Sahrir, 2016) during this difficult period. This problem arises because their training focuses on theoretical rather than practical elements (Al-Zahrani, 2015). Lecturers may also have negative perceptions about the benefit of integrating technology because they thought that it was useless and a source of distraction (Al-Busaidi et al., 2016). Further, there is a lack of Arabic language lecturers who use modern technology and innovative teaching strategies in the Arabic TnL in Malaysia (Sahrir et al., 2016).

Many researchers have investigated how different languages are being taught, but they were not specific to Arabic (Zainuddin et al., 2018). Moreover, research has been unclear on the effects of incorporating technology in classrooms (Flewitt et al., 2015). Additionally, there is a lack of knowledge of the educational advantages of mobile devices as learning tools. One of the obstacles is the lack of motivation of lecturers to use them for learning (Khan et al., 2015). In addition to issues with using technology for motivation, Arabic language students at the university level, have experienced frustration due to teacher-centered and didactic teaching practices (Bahou, 2016), which has reduced motivation to learn Arabic (Siregar et al, 2016).

In this study, the aim is to explore the perceptions of Arabic language lecturers in USIM about the influence of technology on their creative teaching practices and motivation during MCO.

## 3.0 Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self-system

According to Dörnyei, there are two types of motivation: external motivation such as getting good grades, threats, and punishment such as failing a course, and internal motivation, which might include self-satisfaction and the joy of learning something new (Dörnyei, 1994). Thus, it is important to examine multiple factors and patterns of motivation (Dörnyei, 2007, 2012).

Learning a new language involves complex cognitive processes that influence the mental activities, which in turn impact the identity of the learner (Dörnyei, 1994). Several motivational factors might influence a person to learn another language such as being interested in a particular culture, broadening mental horizons, challenging one's self, or being accepted by a new community (Dörnyei, 1994). However, the classroom environment, as set by the lecturers, influences the level of motivation the students feel during a lesson, especially when the goal is sustainable learning experiences (Dörnyei, 1994). Because learning a new language takes many years, lecturers need to help their students keep their motivational levels high to reach their goals (Dörnyei, 2007).

Because many Arabic language learners feel frustrated and demotivated in the Arabic language classroom (Bahou, 2016), Dörnyei's theory (2012) shed light on ways that Arabic language lecturers can use to enhance the motivation of the Arabic language learners. Furthermore, Dörnyei's theory (2001) helped show how motivation can help students learn better and enjoy the process even during MCO. Lecturers need to work at creating a motivating classroom environment to help the students enjoy and persist in their learning (Dörnyei, 2001). This theory worked well with this study, as it suggested ways in which the lecturers could increase the motivation of their students to continue learning Arabic.

## 4.0 Methodology

This study was an exploratory case study. The researchers employed responsive semi-structured interviews, which allowed the respondents to become conversational partners (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). 9 Arabic language (5 female and 4 male) lecturers from the Faculty of Major Language Studies, USIM were interviewed about their teaching practices and how technology motivated them to be more creative in their teaching practices during MCO.

A case study is a research strategy and does not imply a specific method to collect data (Yin, 1981). What distinguishes a case study from other research techniques is that it is used to examine a current phenomenon in real-life context, especially when the limits between the phenomenon and the setting are not visible (Yin, 1981). This study describes how technology influences Arabic language online learning during MCO, which were natural contexts.

**5.0 Results and Findings**

The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of Arabic language lecturers in USIM about the influence of technology on their creative TnL during MCO. The following themes were identified from the responses of the Arabic language lecturers to the interview question: What are the factors that motivate them to use technology in their TnL sessions?

**a)        Factors that motivate Arabic language lecturers to use technology in their TnL sessions.**

In this section, the researchers tried to understand what encouraged Arabic language lecturers in USIM to use technology in their TnL session during MCO. The result shows the factors that were inductively generated from the interviews:

*Factor 1: Technology facilitates teaching*

All but one lecturer agreed with this by saying that she did not find any added value to the use of technology in her teaching practices; she could teach well whether there was technology or not. On the other hand, 8 lecturers agreed that technology did make delivering lessons easier.

Lecturer 1 said, "Technology facilitates the interaction process between lecturers and students. Maybe the students find this to be nice. They enjoy it. But at the same time, they are benefiting from the learning experiences." Lecturer 3 believed that technology helped her "Find a lot of new things that are ready on YouTube and Google, and so I don't even have to do a PowerPoint or work longer hours." Moreover, Lecturer 6 said that technology helped in accelerating his work a little. When asked to give an example, he said that he saved time in the classroom by asking the students to open their exercise books to a specified page. He could screenshot the page on his smartphone and send it through WhatsApp group. This practice allowed all the students to follow with him in one place, which also saved time during the lesson. He continued to say that the students started to want to learn Arabic. She added, "At the beginning Arabic language was a dry language which they didn't like. With technology, the students began to participate in the class."

When asked what motivated him to use technology in a creative way in his classroom during MCO, Lecturer 7 said, "The positive things that get reflected on my work such as facilitating my work and it makes my work more alive. It stops being a dead class period. Even I, personally, I can't tolerate routine." He continued to say that he would "suffocate" if he had to teach the same class, in the same way every year. This progress was even more fundamental for the lecturer who liked to update their skills and their teaching practices. "So, this reflects positively on me. This keeps me finding new paths during this MCO to update, to add, to change, to do things in a different way. And for the students, it brings the subject close to them. Online learning motivates me to explore and discover on how to use technology for Arabic TnL more," he added. Lecturer 9 agreed with this and he added, "Technology facilitates the search for information" because he was able to find materials about the topic he was teaching on the internet, instead of having to create his own content.

These responses showed that all of the lecturers, who were interviewed, agreed that during MCO, technology did help them deliver the material in a more interesting way, update their teaching practices, find more engaging materials from the internet, save time since they did not have to create new material, and save lessons for later use. In addition, these lecturers found that technology attracted the attention of students and hence increased the interaction between the students and their lecturers.

*Factor 2: Saves time*

One of the Arabic online learning issues during MCO that all 9 lecturers mentioned many times was the amount of time lost during a lesson due to many reasons, but the use of technology has helped them save much needed time. They also talked about how technology and having textbooks on the smartphones save the trees and hence, the environment. Lecturer 3 said that "I find a lot of new things that are ready on YouTube and USIM Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) mooc.usim.edu.my, so I don't even need to do a PowerPoint presentation or work for longer hours." She continued to say, "I can find ready-made resources that are compatible with what is required in the classroom." When the researchers asked her about what motivates her to use technology in a creative way, she replied that "I think that our facilities, here at USIM, are quite equipped with everything technological. So, when you have the equipment, you have many ways to do your work."

One of the advantages that Lecturer 4 mentioned about how technology saves time during MCO. She expressed her relief at the ease of sharing text and explaining vocabulary words to the students in learning management system (LMS) namely Global Open Access Learning System (GOALS). Moreover, she scanned the notes without the need to write everything again, which saved her precious time.

Lecturer 7 said, "Technology has made my role easier, from getting information to organizing it. Sometimes it saves time. I may explain a certain lesson, but there is not enough time for the students to write it so that I can send it to them." Some of the other lecturers expressed how technology saved them time when they share the handouts to their students via online instead of wasting time photocopying and stapling them.

*Factor 3: Brings the subject closer to students*

Arabic language lecturers have mentioned how students disengaged from the Arabic lessons since it is a "dry" and difficult language to learn. Lecturers noticed that students enjoyed and were motivated to learn Arabic due to the use of technology. 6 out of the 9 lecturers agreed on this point. When asked about the advantages of using technology during MCO, Lecturer 4 said, "Arabic has become close to them more than ever before.

Their generation, now, is the generation of the iPad, of technology, and so Arabic has moved to become very close to them." Lecturer 7 said, "Technology helps the lecturers bring the Arabic subject matter closer to the students or to help students understand.

Especially today, when it is the era of technology, from smartphones to laptops. So, today's students will not feel as if they are part of the process unless it was close to them and resembles their daily life."

Lecturer 9 elaborated on this by saying that, technology helps the lecturers a lot, and it facilitates their job, especially in the subjects that are losing their value. For example, in mathematics, the students interact with it a lot. They do so, also in physics, but in Arabic, English and Mandarin, these are literature-based subject matters, and the students are staying away from them. They don't read much. It is very rare that you see a student who reads. Even if they have to get a news piece, they don't listen to the news. So you feel, as you work with them, that you have to ask them to find information and tell others about it. Then you would feel that they are working. Lecturer 1 agreed with this by suggesting that there was a need for technology and education to be integrated together. This integration brought together the two dichotomies technology and education and let the students become more involved in the world.

As a summary to this factor, from what the lecturers shared, it became clear that technology had a positive impact on their students' motivation to learn Arabic. The lecturers needed innovative resources to help their students deal with the outdated Arabic language curriculum, and technology facilitated this task.

### *Factor 4: MCO requires the use of technology*

5 out of the 9 lecturers who were interviewed, voiced that they felt that students at this time have to learn how to use it. The main advantage that Lecturer 1 mentioned more than once during the interview was that "MCO require us to use technology." When asked whether technology was compatible with her teaching philosophy, Lecturer 6 said, "During MCO we cannot teach without technology. We cannot remain, and excuse the term, in the Stone Age, while the rest of the students and universities are using technology. We have to adapt to progress."

Lecturer 7 corroborated this by saying, "I have been working here at this vortex, if I can call it this, because we don't have the choice to enter it or get out of it. I am speaking about this on the level of our present era and on the level of the whole world." Lecturer 7 did not feel that he has the choice to stop using technology, even if he wanted to since we were all stuck in this vortex and so we had to adapt to it and learn how to use it. Lecturer 8 supported this by saying, the students enjoy the online classes and exams because it is their era now, and you have to go along with the times and the progress. You can't be stuck in one place while the world is moving forward. We have to go along with the times. Even in Arabic, there are so many ways that we can let students use technology.

### *Factor 5: Lecturers get immediate feedback*

6 lecturers said that they liked using technology in their TnL during MCO because they got immediate feedback on how their students were doing either on digital exams or on the websites that informally tested the students' knowledge. In the Faculty of Major Language Studies, USIM, the Arabic lecturers used a LMS called GOALS, where the students read

the instructions on their own and completed the accompanying exercises individually. This gave the lecturers immediate feedback on how the students did on their session, what questions were answered incorrectly or correctly, in addition to any other information that let the lecturers know what her students acquired. Lecturers could then go back to the questions and explain to the students how to answer them correctly.

In summary, these lecturers agreed on the benefit of technology for Arabic language online learning in helping them know the skills and knowledge levels of their students as well as having the ability to know the weaknesses of their students and the skills or knowledge that should be retaught or explained again. This knowledge could be immediate since they can get stats about their students' levels through the different websites that they use.

### *Factor 6: Technology helps in differentiating teaching*

7 of the 9 lecturers who were interviewed, agreed that technology helped them in differentiating their lessons depending on their students' needs. This aspect was more evident at the faculty, where the lecturers made conscious attempts to differentiate their teaching by using different tools, whether they were technological or not, to allow all students to learn.

When asked whether technology helped her differentiate her teaching or not, Lecturer 3 said, "Technology has a role. When a student is not proficient enough in writing in a fast way, but they can listen in a better way, or understand better through listening, so I would ask them to listen to a document using voice note in our WhatsApp group while the rest of the class writes." She continued to say that she could make sure, later, that the student understood the information orally via questions. "Technology does help them, yes," she added. When asked to give more details on how technology helped her differentiate her teaching, she added, "I can give the information I want to the students to learn in two ways, maybe the traditional way, and via technology. This depends on each student and the best way for them to receive the information."

Lecturer 6 explained that technology helped her differentiate her teaching because "Let's say that I have a high achieving student who knows how to solve the exercises or anything else on their own, so I use the same objective for these exercises." He said that she could give them a more advanced version of the exercise while keeping the same objective. Lecturer 9 also suggested, "When we prepare the lesson plan, we are activating the visual and the auditory and the writing and everything. So, when I prepare a lesson, I send it to our WhatsApp group or GOALS. The student who likes technology will learn it directly from these 2 platforms. Some people like the paper and pen, and they write it in their copybooks. Some people type with me, and when we finish, we send them to each student via WhatsApp. My role is to ensure that the information has reached all the students: the auditory, the visual, and the person who likes to write, the person who likes to memorize."

As a conclusion to this question, it was obvious that all 9 lecturers supported USIM's decision to use technology during MCO. This was despite the opinions of a few lecturers who said that they were reluctant, at the beginning, to use technology during the first month of MCO, since they thought that it would be a source of distraction and not of learning. As

time passed, and as the lecturers attended professional development and training sessions or even self-trained, their confidence in using technology increased, and hence, they became more proficient and comfortable in using it in their teaching techniques.

## 6.0 Discussions of Results and Findings

*a)        Challenges in employing online learning during MCO*

Notwithstanding the many benefits of using technology in the Arabic language online learning during MCO, the lecturers did have some concerns about its disadvantages. One of the disadvantages mentioned by all 9 lecturers was the slow internet connection that affected technology use in USIM, in addition to the repeated power cuts and technical issues. The challenges that they face while using technology are the same that every person might face, such as limited time of the period, sometimes something might come up, and that would alter the teaching process such as the laptop stops working and smartphones hanging issue. A few instructional videos have been sent to the students via WhatsApp group or GOALS to brief them what should they do when the internet connection is weak.

*b)        Challenges in accessing educational resources during MCO*

Regarding the Arabic educational resources, the researchers identified that most of the lecturers were able to find some resources but with difficulty. The lecturers did not feel that this was a problem since the faculty provided them with all the necessary resources created by the subject resource person and moderators. Somehow a few lecturers found it challenging to find resources in Arabic that were class appropriate, and that served the topic they were teaching. To alleviate this issue, different strategies have been implemented. They created interactive PowerPoint presentations for all the lessons for all the class levels so the lecturers could show the students the explanation of the lessons, vocabulary words, grammatical rules, in addition to any other tool needed by the lecturers to explain the lesson.

*c)        Challenges in using educational technologies and platforms among educators*

Lecturer 3 shared with her students a few videos in English. When the researchers asked her if she agreed with the style of using a language other than Arabic in her classroom, she said that she preferred for the videos to be in Arabic or to have Arabic subtitles, "But the good thing about technology and since we have globalization now, then it becomes mandatory that each of us learn a different language." She continued to say, "Now, it would have been better if the video was dubbed in correct Fusha (Standard) Arabic or subtitled in Arabic. Most of the films would be in a foreign language, and they would be dubbed or subtitled in Arabic." Lecturer 3 added that some of the translations were done quickly and so they would contain many grammatical or linguistic errors. She taught her students to look for those mistakes and avoid them. The scarcity of Arabic educational resources for non-native students that the lecturers and their students could use to create presentations, watch a video or other purpose, forced them to use materials that were developed in a different language. Some lecturers also mentioned that many errors could be found in the materials that were translated into Arabic.

The other issue was voiced by five lecturers who said that they could not rely on the information their students got from the internet because much of it could be incorrect or inaccurate. This issue was more as the lecturers asked their students to do their own research on specific topics. We can't count on the quality of the information that we get from technology. The lecturers have to be more aware of the information that they share with their students. They can't take everything in an automatic way and teach it to the students. They need to stay away from untrusted websites such as Wikipedia for anyone could change, add, or edit the information.

Lecturers 2, 4, 5 and 8 described how they could not depend on technology for the entirety of a lesson and that they used many different activities in the online learning to ensure that the students learned the necessary skills and information. When asked about the disadvantage of using technology, Lecturer 4 said, "I can't depend on it always. I have to see where the students have reached, what they have understood. I don't know if you have noticed, but after we watched the video, I tried to observe more how the students complete the assignments. I will know more about this when the students are assigned homework or even when they write in the WhatsApp group. So, we can't rely only on technology and what the students watch because the students might forget what they have watched with technology. So, for sure, we need to supplement it with flashcards or printed materials. Writing expression can't solely depend on technology, but it should be linked to technology."

## 7.0 Conclusion

This study was conducted to explore the perceptions of Arabic language lecturers in USIM about the influence of technology on their creative teaching practices and motivation during MCO. As a conclusion, the researchers asked the lecturers what would they change if they were given a magic wand and were told that they could change anything they wanted in the educational system of the faculty or in USIM itself. Many of them said, "It doesn't need a magic wand; it needs determination and seriousness in our work on the administrative level in general so that they can revise and review the curricula and delivery mechanisms. This is the most important thing. Our curricula today, have been created in 2005 or 2006, and that after 15 years, we have to review and improve it. We have to put a new vision in Arabic education, with the different techniques, with the more current things that we add to the lessons.

In addition, it became evident that many issues demotivated lecturers from using technology in their Arabic language online learning during MCO in a creative way. The researchers observed the frustration of some of the lecturers when their students were not be able to join the online learning as their laptops or smartphones did not connect to the internet. But still the lecturers cannot deny the fact that online learning is a method that can benefits both lecturers and students especially during MCO, where most of the schools and universities have to close down their operation due to Covid-19. Online learning can be a solution for the Arabic language educators and practitioners to share their knowledge by using e-Learning or other platforms as education needs to be conducted during MCO. One of the online learning benefits is lecturers become motivated and students become active

when they learn using online learning as they are the one who take responsibility of their learning. This will lead to a new era in Malaysia education system where it can replace conventional way of learning to suit with the current situation of MCO.

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