Chapter 18
The Role of the Instructor in the Online Classroom

Nurul Naimah Rose

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3195-0685

Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Malaysia

Aida Shakila Ishak

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8961-9154

Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Malaysia

Nazifah Hamidun

Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Malaysia

Faten Khalida Khalid

Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Malaysia

Nur Farhinaa Othman

Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This chapter is about the role of instructors in the online classroom particularly in Malaysian higher education. This chapter will focus on two important points, which are the redefining instructors in virtual education and the four main role of instructors in virtual education: the pedagogical role, the social role, the managerial role, and the technical role. Understanding the true role of the instructor in online classes aids in the transition between the classroom and online learning. Instructors play a more significant role in online courses than they do in traditional ones in many ways. They can adjust more easily and settle into a new environment by being aware of what the students and the online environment expect from the teachers. The requirement for instructors to facilitate an online course through a wide range of perspectives or roles is highlighted by the complexity of the online environment.

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of higher education in Malaysia has experienced a significant shift with the emergence of virtual education. Virtual education has made a tremendous impact on Malaysian higher education, in terms of its benefits, challenges, and the potential it holds for the future of learning in the country. Virtual education has opened doors to higher education for individuals who face geographical, financial, or physical constraints (Lee, 2017). The virtual environment promotes inclusivity and flexibility enabling students to pursue their educational aspirations regardless of their location or personal circumstances. Malaysian higher education institutions have embraced online learning platforms that offer asynchronous learning opportunities, allowing students to learn at their own pace and convenience (Mohamad Nasri et al., 2020). This flexibility empowers students to manage their schedules, balance work or other commitments, and personalize their learning journey. They can revisit lectures, access course materials, and engage in discussions according to their individual needs.

Virtual education in Malaysian higher education has redefined the concept of collaboration (De Wit & Altbach, 2021). Discussion forums, video conferencing, and virtual group projects foster interactive and collaborative learning experiences. Virtual education has compelled educators in Malaysian higher education to explore innovative teaching methods (Sia & Adamu, 2020). Lecturers leverage multimedia resources, interactive simulations, and gamification techniques to engage students and enhance their understanding of complex concepts (Donath et al., 2020). Virtual education offers cost-effective alternatives to traditional classroom-based learning (Kilag et al., 2023). Additionally, online resources and digital textbooks reduce the expenses associated with purchasing traditional learning materials. Moreover, virtual education aligns with sustainable practices by reducing carbon emissions from transportation and minimizing paper consumption (Sarkis et al., 2020). This chapter aims to provide insight into the role of instructors and lecturers in the online classroom. Information in this chapter merely focuses on Malaysian higher education institutions with a brief history of e-learning, various theories of e-learning and virtual learning as well as the four main roles of online instructors (pedagogical role, social role, managerial role, technical role).

VIRTUAL EDUCATION IN MALAYSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The practices of virtual education in Malaysian higher education institutions started in the 1990s since the emergence of internet usage. The history of e-learning in Malaysia mostly influenced by technological advancements, educational policies, and a growing of digital platforms in the higher education system. Since early 2000s, the emergence of the internet and digital technologies laid the foundation for the adoption of e-learning in Malaysian universities (Nik-Ahmad-Zuky et al. 2020). Initially, universities started exploring the potential of using online platforms to complement traditional classroom and provide supplementary materials to students. Some universities began experimenting with e-learning platforms and online course offerings. These initiatives were often experimental, aiming to evaluate the possibility and acceptance of e-learning among students and educators. Universities started incorporating Learning Management Systems (LMS) to deliver course content and facilitate communication between students and faculty (Iqbal, S., 2011).

The Malaysian government recognized the importance of e-learning in enhancing the country's education system. Initiatives such as the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) and the MyBrain15 program

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