

# Online Teaching and Teachers' Mental Burdens during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

*This study focused on outlining the psychological effects on teachers caused by the implementation of online teaching and learning during the COVID 19 pandemic. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed in conducting this study. There were 34 female teachers aged between 25-38 years old involved as respondents. The instrument used was a questionnaire sent through WhatsApp application. The data were analyzed using interactive analysis (data condensation, data display, and data verification). The results show that 34 respondents (100%) experienced uncertainty to their students; 58.8% (20 respondents) have physical pain and fatigue; 41.2% (14 respondents) experienced demotivation; 38.2% (13 respondents) tend to procrastinate their work; 67.7% (23 respondents) have bad time management; and 94.3% (32 respondents) experienced the feeling of isolation. Hence, it is suggested that educational institutions provide a care unit to handle any potential problems on teachers' mental health.*

**Keywords:** *mental burdens, online teaching, psychological health, psychological effects, and COVID-19 pandemic.*

## 1. Introduction

The Coronavirus Pandemic over the world has profoundly changed almost all life aspects. Education is also an affected aspect of this pandemic. The World Health Organization (2019) has proposed the policy to commit social and physical distancing, and this becomes a challenge for many countries. In Indonesia, *Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar (PSBB)* or large-scale social restrictions was embraced in March 2020 due to the increasing numbers of Coronavirus patients. These were then followed by different guidelines through work from home, prayer from home, and study from home regulation (Regulation of Indonesian Government No.21, 2020, 2020). The learning system which changed in all of sudden needs adaptation, both technically and non-technically. The digital teaching-learning model used involves online learning, e-learning, distance education, correspondence education, external studies, flexible learning, and massive open online courses, and those models have been applied thoroughly worldwide (Rasmitadilla, et.al., 2020). However, some countries are not ready for this sudden change, including Indonesia. Major adaptation concerning the instructional strategies, technological readiness, and mental support provision is profoundly necessary (Rasmitadila, et. al, 2020).

Research on online learning generally studies rules and methods used in the learning apparatuses, instructional procedures, comparisons of conditions between the online classroom that of the face-to-face classroom, a mixed learning project, and differences between the examination conducted in the classroom-based and online-based learning. The emphasis is given regularly on the students' mentality, recognition, appraisal, assessment, fulfilment, and

performance (Sun, 2014). Albeit a major number of studies have been done to explore the adequacy of online learning (Gonzalez & Louis, 2018), the research on online learning affecting teachers' mental during the pandemic is rarely discovered. This pandemic causes sudden opening of online classes which are held in unexpected and ill-equipped circumstances.

Various issues have incorporated the arrangement of school digital infrastructure (Bakalar, 2018). For example, the internet connections and computers that all schools have not purchased beforehand, particularly in suburbs and rural areas; and buying all of this equipment is costly. Bakalar (2018) further urges that, although the Indonesian government allocates the educational funds to purchase internet data packages, schooling at home online still appears unbearable for most students and teachers. Other distracting factors such as poor internet connection, house chore distraction, and unfriendly learning atmosphere are still on hand. All of these hindrances lead to poor students' understanding and teachers' burdens in material explanation.

Another challenge is that it is the parents who should get more involved in assisting their children when learning at home. Parents are expected to help the students to understand the topic of learning which is not well-delivered by the teacher. A coordinated effort among teachers and parents in the online learning system is fundamental (AlAteeq et. al (2020)). Additionally, teachers also need to keep in touch with their fellow teachers as it can help them stay motivated. As suggested by Ismail and Wahyuni (2017), peers can give positive contributions, such as building communication skills, critical thinking, and self-confidence. Teachers, as the lead of the performance of online learning, must have extra options to condition every single instructional element. This incorporates instructional strategies, media that will be utilized in learning, well-managed time, as well as psychological and social factors that altogether influence teachers' motivation during their teaching time (McKenna, et.al., 2002). Teachers' duties are not easily transferable; they struggle when they should transform face-to-face classes into online classes. Besides, McKenna, et.al., (2002) add that the teachers have never encountered the online teaching framework. Further, teachers must also overcome all the issues that happen in the internet adapting responsively so the learning keeps on going and the learning objectives can still be achieved.

Based on the rationale above, it is necessary to see how far teachers cope with the mental burdens during online teaching in this pandemic. Theoretically, the novelty offered by this study is clearly to fill in the gaps in the area of digital teaching and learning regarding the teachers' psychological health; while practically, limited research on this subject makes it necessary for researchers to shed some light on it. To be more precise, the question that this study seeks the answer for is: what is the mental burden(s) experienced by teachers during online classes in COVID-19 pandemic?"

## 2. Method

This study was carried out by utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach. This model juxtaposes a straightforward methodology in answering the problems being questioned by the researchers at the time being (Creswell, 2013). This method is practical, efficient, and suitable for this current study. Concerning the respondents, there were 34 teachers voluntarily involved in this study; 16 of them were college/university lecturers, 12 of them were high school teachers, and 6 of them were primary school teachers. The respondents were chosen using criterion sampling, considering the following two deliberations. First, AlAteeq et. al (2020) found that most female students are more lethal to stress levels and depression caused by digital learning so that this study selected only female teachers to make a more detailed comparison to that of male students. Second, people who are born within 1981-1995 (millennials or Generation Y) are the digital generation who grow up with the exposures of computers and the internet (Prensky, 2001). The idea of using digital devices and the internet are familiar to them.

Consequently, the respondents' age was determined only for those who grew up during the digital era and are familiar with digitalization. In brief, the criteria for the respondents are: (1) they must be a teacher for at least 5 years (this was considered as a standard length of time for teaching to have various teaching method adaptability), (2) they must be a female and, (3) their age must be within 25-39 years old.

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire set which was adapted from Wiles (2020). There were seven statements in the set and the respondents were to respond only *Yes* or *No*. These items are valid ( $\alpha=0.05$ , *Pearson's Product Moment*  $r=0.926 > r_{table} = 0.754$ ) and reliable (*Alpha Cronbach's*  $r = 0.811$ ). The questionnaire items are listed in the following table.

**Table 1. Questionnaire set (Wiles, 2020)**

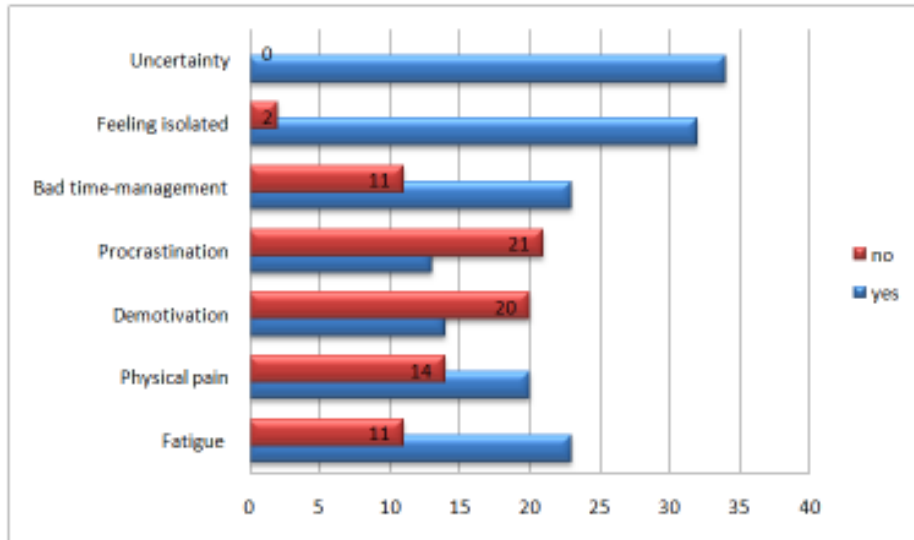
No	The mental effect of prolonged online teachings	Response	
		Yes	No
1	Fatigue		
2	Headaches and other physical pain		
3	Demotivation		
4	Procrastination		
5	Bad time management		
6	Feeling isolated		
7	Uncertainty toward students		

Then, the data collection was done through the *WhatsApp* messenger application. The authors sent the questionnaire directly to the qualified respondents via *Whatsapp*; and after setting their response, they sent it back directly to the authors. Some teachers also inserted additional comments concerning their students' behaviors and problems about internet connection but the data about this were removed since they were not part of the research question. Later on, the data were analyzed using Interactive Analysis as suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). There are three steps in this analysis model: data condensation, data display, and data verification/conclusion. In data condensation, data which were not relevant to the teachers' psychological burdens were discarded. Then, in the data display, the actual data concerning the teachers' psychological burdens were shown. Lastly, in the data verification step, the conclusion based on the findings was drawn.

### 3. Results and Discussions

After the foremost step in data analysis, which is the data condensation, some irrelevant data were condensed/discarded. The condensed data were the ones related to information about students. Some teachers also sent the responses along with their students' behaviour during online classes such as matters of etiquette and ghosting cases (students are found online but they do not respond at all). Besides, cases about internet connection were also discussed by some respondents. These kinds of data were discarded as they do not align with the objective of this current research—which is to find out the teachers' mental burdens during online teachings in COVID-19 pandemic.

The result is as shown in the following display.



**Figure 1. Teachers' mental burdens during online teachings**

The figure above shows that the main problem faced by the respondents during teaching online classes is uncertainty. This is a problem concerning their expectation of the students. They did not know what to expect as they delivered the teaching materials. All of the respondents (100%) experienced this burden. They were questioning whether their students understood the explanation, whether the assignments given were plagiarized, or whether the students cheated on every offered occasion. This uncertainty made the teachers lose the sense of control towards their students, and it surely manifested into mental. For human beings, interaction is crucial to actualize their identity, social status, and to simply connect with other people's ideas. Being withdrawn from this need can stretch to mental trouble—regardless of slight or severe condition (Jacobson et.al, 2020). Then, the majority of the respondents (32 respondents) experienced isolation because they did not meet the students. Sometimes they even felt that the 'online' relationship with their students was not real, and they might interact as if strangers when they met in real life. Expectations in meeting people during the online and offline meeting are different. Online environment inhibits the actual person's persona and makes the interaction safer compared to the offline environment. Although, indeed, it is a good environment for those who are primarily anxious individuals and socially loners (McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002).

Next, the problems faced by the teachers are fatigue and bad time-management. These two problems were experienced by 23 respondents. In addition to that, 20 respondents admitted that they had other physical pain such as headache, shoulder pain, and back pain. Increased screen time, indeed, leads to eye-focus pressure which ends in headache or other physical pain. This is as supported by Stilic and Viner (2018) that increased screen time that is spent daily brings about higher energy intake and leads to fatigue, poor dietary habit, and obesity. Concerning physical pain such as headaches, an eyesore, and shoulder sore. Mathers, et. al (2009) state that excessive use of electronic media can weaken an individual's health condition. In their study, they found that 925 adolescents with 3-hour-16-minute screen time on average daily undergo psychological distress, poor health status, poor behaviors, and anxiety.

The other two problems also faced by the respondents—but not the majority of them—are procrastination and demotivation. Thirteen respondents tend to procrastinate their work; 14

respondents got demotivated because of the prolonged online learning. Learning online at home means learning autonomously. Ismail, et. al, (2016) suggest that, mostly, when autonomous learning awareness emerges, the intrinsic motivation raises. When this concept applies to teachers, this means that the teachers need to motivate themselves at the same time they need to motivate their students. Teachers need to develop more interesting teaching materials to motivate their students. As the students get motivated and excited, it will satisfy the teachers and motivate them. Furthermore, when in offline classes teachers can make various activities to keep the motivation (Ismail, et. al, 2016), in online classes, teachers need to prepare the activities beforehand.

#### 4. Conclusions

The conclusion verified by the finding is that most teachers had problems with uncertainty. They doubted their students whether their explanation was clear enough, or they doubted themselves whether they could explain as well as it should be in a face-to-face classroom. The second major problem is the feeling of isolation as they did not meet their students directly. The third problems are bad time management and fatigue. More than half of the respondents admitted that they experienced fatigue and their time management deteriorated. Then, some of them also experienced problems of mental burdens manifesting as physical pain such as headaches, shoulder pain, etc. Some of them also felt demotivated and tend to procrastinate their work.

After looking at the conclusion, there are two major limitations in this study that could be addressed in future research. First, it only sees the mental burdens of a teacher selected with a very specific scope of criterion; hence, extended criteria for respondents in future research is suggested. Second, regarding the time constraint issues, the respondents in this study only represent several teachers from university, high school, and primary school level. Future research might scrutinize more on the comparison to find out which teachers are more prone to stress while teaching online classes: whether university lecturers, high-school teachers, or primary school teachers.

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