

Online Counselling Reach Out Services to Alleviate Stress among Students during Online Distance Learning

Nurul Fitriah Alias¹, Sharifah Muzlia Syed Mustafa^{2*}, Lina Mursyidah Hamzah³

^{1 2 3} Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA,
UiTM Puncak Alam Campus, 42300 Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia
nurulfitriah@uitm.edu.my
muzlia@uitm.edu.my
linamursyidah@uitm.edu.my
*Corresponding Author

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Abstract: Students in Malaysian higher education were forced to engage in learning using online distance approach due to restricted movement control order since the beginning of Covid-19 pandemic. The acclaim often given to online learning due its practicality, convenience and usage of latest technology has been dampened by the challenges and stress of online distance learning that students began to show after a while. This paper reports the level of comfort and satisfaction students perceived about learning from home. Three brief surveys were completed by 281, 132, and 54 students from the faculty who rated their level of stress, the importance of creating the reach-out blog, and the feedback on the blog after it was created. In terms of experiencing stress during this mode of learning, the majority of the respondents felt stress of various levels with virtual mode of distance learning. Students rated highest their sources of stress as being self-autonomous (learning independently, motivation, interest), followed by self-management (managing time, tasks, classes), home environment, IT facilities, faculty support, peer support, lecturers support, and last but not least family support. Students agreed that there should be a clear process to help students in need either face-to-face or online. The respondents all agreed that a counselling blog was a good idea for students to access information and seek early help. The faculty had taken a quick initiative to create a counselling blog as a venue for students to get information relating to stress and mental health. This step was received well by the students. It is obvious that online distance learning has taken a toll on students' mental, emotional and social well-being. The faculty must be aware of their students' state of mental health and take appropriate initiatives to reach out to students in need.

Keywords: Stress Level, Online Distance Learning, Counselling Reach-Out

1. Introduction

In the year 2020, the whole world has been hit with a deadly coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and this has led to major health crises around the globe. The 2020 Movement Control Order referred to as the MCO, is implemented as a preventive measure by the federal government of Malaysia in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the country on 18 March 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a major shift in education. The government around the world had to close all the educational institutions in order to control the spread of disease, which is creating a direct impact on students, educators and institutions. The sudden shift from the physical classroom to online distance learning is taking a huge toll among the students.

Due to the pandemic and strict isolation measures that had been posed by the government, students of higher learning institutions were instructed to go back to their hometown and had to continue their study fully online. Being confined at home for months and lack of face-to-face interaction between the students and the lecturers have led to difficulties and stress among the students (Muhammad Hakimi, Norwati & Mohd Idzwan, 2022; Nor Hamiza, Sholehah, Mohd Khairi, Noorazlina, Salwani, Nur Azwani & Suhaily Maizan, 2022). Learning in isolation with very minimal social and physical activity has certainly created an experience of stress among the students. Dealing with psychological and academic difficulties can present a huge challenge for students especially during this critical time. Therefore, there is an increasing need for the university to establish support to the students facing psychological and or academic difficulties, especially the one that is easily accessible and anonymous. Such difficulties should not be condoned as they can lead to severe negative outcomes, such as poor academic performance, decreased mental health, reduced study satisfaction, and dropout from study.

2. Reviews of Literature

The following section discusses the impact of online distance learning on students' stress, and how the faculty reacted with a reaching out blog in order to assist students with their mental health issues.

2.1 Academic Stress and Online Distance Learning

Academic stress has become an integral part of students' academic life due to various factors such as pressures and expectations from family, tough competition in the class, course-related burdens as well as financial problems (Misra & Castillo, 2004; Bok, 2022). Apart from that, other circumstances that can lead to academic stress among students are due to adjustment in a new place, learning different language and cultural values and getting adjusted to academic requirements. One particular area of concern for students in higher education nowadays is academic stress relating to their ability to succeed in this new environment of virtual learning (Clabaugh, Duque & Fields, 2021). It was found that the majority of students are still unfamiliar with online distance learning and this lack of experience in online distance learning may be intensified by uncondusive and challenging home environments such as poor internet connection and distractions at home. Research conducted by Son et al. (2020) has found that at-home distractions such as disruptions from other family members and having to carry additional responsibilities at home are a tremendous challenge for students learning from home during COVID-19. Indeed, without doubt these factors can lead to a great amount of academic stress among the students.

As a result of students experiencing a high level of stress from unprecedented academic pressure, the majority of them are reported to suffer from low self-esteem and very poor concentration which has hindered their academic performance (Chandra, 2021). Numerous earlier research has shown the negative impacts of academic stress on students' well-being such as sleeping difficulties, feeling anxious and worry about future, psychosomatic illnesses, inability to accomplish task and manage workload, and severe comorbid conditions for instances anxiety and depression (Bedewy and Gabriel, 2015; Acharya, 2003; Iqbal et al., 2015 in Chandra, 2021). Apart from dealing with adjustment to a new learning environment, another significant stressor that can lead to academic stress is the emotional impact of COVID-19 towards the students' mental health and well-being. A number of recent studies have shown the consequences of COVID-19 where it has resulted in immense increase in stress, anxiety, depression and suicidal tendency among tertiary students (Husky et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020; Luo et al., 2020; Patsali et al., 2020 as cited in Clabaugh, Duque & Fields, 2021). In addition, another stressor that triggers stress among students is the rapidly increasing numbers of cases and deaths due to the COVID-19 pandemic and this may also negatively affect students' psychological well-being and academic life (Hussien et al., 2020).

A recent study by Clabaugh, Duque and Fields (2021) on academic stress and emotional well-being among students reveals that 30% of the students indicated that they were likely to reduce or withdraw from classes if these classes were conducted online. Similarly, research conducted by Oducado & Estoque (2021) to determine the undergraduate students' stress, satisfaction and academic performance during online learning demonstrates that 44.4% students considered online learning during

COVID-19 pandemic stressful; meanwhile another 47.2% rated it as very stressful. Apart from that, 37% of students reported to have low satisfaction and another 46.3% had moderate satisfaction towards online learning during the pandemic. The findings highlight that online learning stress certainly has negatively impacted students' satisfaction and their academic performance.

Several earlier studies have investigated the relationship between the use of digital devices in online learning and stress. A study by Lemola et al. (2015) has demonstrated that excessive exposure to electronic media such as computer and smartphone screens is a risk factor for adolescents' sleep disturbance and depression. It was also found that the duration of the screen's exposure further impacts levels of stress and anxiety. Similarly, Visnjic et al. (2018) who examine the relationship between the usage of smart devices among university students and their stress level has found that the intense usage of smart devices has significant impact towards students' mental health. Using Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS 42) as the instrument to measure students' psychological health, the findings reveal that the students who spend more time with their smart device are reported to experience higher levels of stress and anxiety as compared to those who spend less time with their smart device. This is worrying as students definitely spend a lot of their time in front of the screens due to the demands of the online learning environment.

Additionally, a local study conducted to explore psychological distress among 300 university students in Malaysia from both private and public local universities has found higher levels of stress and anxiety among students and this is more prevalent in both male and female students who obtained a lower GPA score (Arumugan et al., 2021). This data clearly indicates a significant impact of stress towards students' academic performance. Another interesting finding is that although students are reported to feel safe while learning from home, it however does not help students to better cope and manage their study effectively. This is in-lined with another study that examines university students in Oman perceived stress during COVID-19 induced e-learning. The results indicate that 82.5 % of the students experience moderate stress and another 14.4% reported to experience high levels of stress due to online learning during the pandemic (Malek & Javed, 2021). The academic stress factors that lead to higher levels of stress among the students are increased number of exams and academic workload during online distance learning, technical difficulties or poor access to required technology, difficulty to manage time effectively as well as difficulty understanding course contents through online educational platforms. Meanwhile from physiological factors, students are also reported to suffer from constant fear and worry of their performance. Fawaz and Samaha (2020) who explore the effects of online learning on university students' depression, anxiety and stress levels have found that learning through online platforms have given rise to depression and anxiety disorders among undergraduate university students. The results of this study have revealed that the students are not satisfied with their online learning experience and this dissatisfaction is due to technological difficulties such as lack of internet access. These technical difficulties during online learning have caused frustration among the students and thus caused a decline in their motivation level.

The findings discussed above demonstrate that online learning stress negatively impacts the students' mental health, psychological well-being and academic performance. It is vital that teachers, educators, institutional management, students and parents be aware and fully understand the effects of the current online learning environment and its impact on the students. Certain measures and interventions need to be developed for example counselling and mental health programs to alleviate stress among students and help them cope with the current academic demands and challenges and better manage their university life in this pandemic era.

2.2 The Usage of Blog as a Counselling Tool

The rising of Web 2.0 has brought fresh opportunities and challenges to the field of education, specifically involving teaching and learning. According to Hsu and Lin (2008), it was found that there was a wide utilisation of blogs as Web 2.0 tools in both higher education and K-12 settings, and they may be considered as one of the most important platforms for knowledge exchange and sharing. Blogs may be an effective educational tool for enhancing students' writing and promoting class participation. In university settings, blogs are becoming more popular as a teaching tool. A blog is an online platform that allows a person or a group of people to quickly publish text, photos, videos, and other multimedia content and share it with an unlimited number of people over the internet. Blog pages differ in terms of

their ability to be interactive and engaging. The availability of different hosting providers, some of which offer free services, such as Blogger and WordPress, has made the creation of blogs relatively widespread and straightforward. Blogs may be used to communicate with others and exchange ideas. The comment feature on a blog could be turned into an active conversation that offers a space for ideas to flow, grow, and evolve, as well as input from all over the world. A blog post may be accessed by anybody using a simple URL link, regardless of who wrote it, when it was written, or where it was written. As a result, readers might feel involved in the content they are reading. Hence, due to these unique features of the blog, we decided that it is the most effective online platform that can be utilised to create a venue for the students that seek help, especially with the current online distance learning situation.

According to Ferdig and Trammell (2004), there are four pedagogical advantages of using blogs which are (1) participation could promote students to acquire knowledge in their subject matter, (2) stimulates student interest and ownership of the issue, (3) develops a community of learners and practitioners, and (4) exposes students to various viewpoints. Notably, the last two advantages are well supported by many literatures, with blogs have proven to increase student interaction, motivation, peer, and understanding of alternative viewpoints (Philip & Nicholls, 2009). Therefore, in developing ReachOut EDU Blog, we have integrated all four pedagogical benefits of blog as mentioned above. Firstly, students are encouraged to pursue self-directed learning as the blog is equipped with information related to counselling, for example, the definition of counselling, who is the counsellor/client, the goal and the process of counselling, the definition of different terms in the counselling field as well as terms and condition in the counselling process. Secondly, in an effort to stimulate students' interest, the blog has several headings that students can explore about counselling, activities, websites, and contacts of professional help. For example, under the activities heading, it has provided a list of fun and interesting suggested activities that the students can challenge themselves to try. This will definitely stimulate students' interest and foster further engagement with the platform. Thirdly, the blog is also equipped with a chatbox section at the side in order to create a community of learners. The students are free to chat among themselves in the chatbox section while continuing to be anonymous. Without a doubt, the active interaction among the students could definitely foster a sense of belonging and create a community of learners who are willing to help one another. Lastly, another interesting and unique feature of this innovation is the creation of a slot named 'My Story' where the students get to share their stories with others. This is in line with the fourth pedagogical benefit of a blog, as reading other people's experiences and insights will expose students to diverse perspectives and outlooks in life.

Furthermore, the rising of the digital world and social networking has further strengthened the positive effects they have on students' outcomes. This is claimed and proven by many recent studies. These include boosting students' academic performance and activities, developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills, increasing students' happiness, improving students' topic comprehension, and successfully reinforcing the active learning process. Teachers and students at school also use social networking sites such as Facebook, Blogs, and Twitter to communicate in new, modern and accessible ways. As a result, the usage of blogs as a counselling tool takes advantage of the popularising of social networking sites, as many prior studies in the field of education have indicated. Most of the time, it is quite difficult for the students/clients to seek face to face help from a counsellor because they regard the counsellor as a stranger and thus are not willing to fully self-disclose. Thus, there is a need to accelerate the implementation of social network sites in the counselling field so that students/clients have the opportunity to seek help online and, most importantly, remain anonymous. In order to do this, it is important to precisely measure students' perception and attitude towards the creation of a counselling blog.

Aydan (2014) in his study, had found that when students were exposed to blogging as a method of learning, they were always more motivated to attend classes. The students also agreed that the classroom environment has become more dynamic. Aydan (2014) also mentioned that blogs could greatly improve students' learning capabilities. Additionally, blogs could increase students' proficiency as well as help building connections between the students. Tang and Lam (2014) claimed that there are two significant factors that can contribute to the efficacy of blog use in enhancing learning. These factors are; (1) active engagement and high-quality interaction and (2) communication among students. When both of these factors are present, students will benefit from using blogs in the classroom. Hence, in ReachOut EDU Blog, we have created a feature or a slot entitled 'Kisahku' where the students are

able to write down and share their thoughts, stories, problems or anything that they wish to spill out while remaining anonymous. By providing them with a platform where they can share and interact with one another, it is hoped that students will come to a realisation that they are not alone and that we are here to listen and to help them. Students must also feel heard, welcomed, and validated, as well as being able to get feedback and support from others. The usage of the online platform allows these students to feel heard as they are able to write and express whatever stories that they want to. It also shows that their voices matter. Reading other stories could also prove that they are not alone, and there are other students who are in the same boat as they are and thus, helping them to create a connection with others in this stressful time.

2.3 Purpose of study

This university had begun a full swing of online distance learning since the country implemented total lockdown in early 2020. At first the challenges of using and managing online technologies and virtual modes of teaching and learning overwhelmed both lecturers and students. This was especially true for those who are not IT savvy and not comfortable with online situations. After only one semester of learning from home, lecturers began to talk about students feeling stressed out with learning online, doing assignments without the physical support from their peers, and having some personal issues and family problems. There was an urge for the counselling lecturers at the faculty to take action and help monitor the situation. It was a daunting task at first to think about the strategy to reach out to students in need of counselling help since the faculty has always practised face-to-face interaction and counselling with students.

This paper describes the process of designing a counselling blog to reach out to students who need support and assistance with their mental health issues. In addition, this paper also reported three brief surveys conducted by the counselling lecturers in order to determine whether students in this faculty really experienced stress during online distance learning and how students reacted to the new blog. Empirical data about student experiences with stress would be more convincing for the faculty before taking any preventive or remedial actions in order to help them cope with stress.

3. Methodology

This section describes the whole project of how the instructors came to the decision of creating the Counselling blog as one of the reach-out services to alleviate stress among students during online distance learning.

3.1 Research Design

This project adopted an action research approach which requires a systematic collection of information to bring about social change (Bogdan & Biklen (1992) in Smith, 1996) with the practitioner being actively involved in the cause for which research was conducted. The basic cycle introduced by Kurt Lewin (Smith, 1996) involves identifying an initial idea, finding facts, planning the action, testing the action, evaluating the action, amending the action plan, trying out second action, and so on until the solution is effectively implemented.

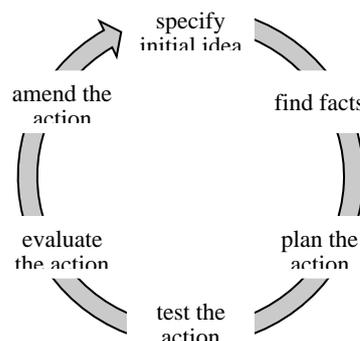


Fig.1 Process of Action Research

As depicted in Figure 1, when identifying the initial idea, it is important for practitioners to examine the idea carefully in view of what resources are available in order to execute an action. For this current project, the instructors who teach an introductory Counselling course at the faculty were asked to think about ways to reach out and help students in need of mental health counselling during the distance learning period. Being away from campus and having to cope with online learning in a drastic manner due to Covid-19, students reported high levels of stress but they have no means of seeking face-to-face help. Virtual counselling is the best alternative, yet students often shy away from seeing counsellors. Thus, an option decided by the practitioners was to create a reach-out blog that provides students with tips and guiding information on mental health. The blog can also be a venue for sharing experiences, as well as seeking information about where to get help. The practitioners were limited in terms of having minimal technological skills, and time constraints due to the urgent need to provide help for students. However, the practitioners quickly searched for the easiest platform to create a blog, and learned the skills of designing and uploading information into the blog. The rest of the steps: fact finding, planning, executing and evaluating should be repeated in a cycle for the purpose of creating the best solution to the problem.

3.2 Sample and Population

The targeted population of the counselling blog is undergraduate students of the faculty, which numbered to about 2,000 every semester. They studied in five main programs of Education in Teaching English as Second Language, Visual Arts, Sports and Health, Sciences, and Mathematics. The age of students ranges from 20 to 27 years old, beginning with semester 1 until semester 8.

Although the three surveys were distributed to all students using Google Form links shared with various students' groups, faculty telegram systems and websites, only a low rate of response was obtained each time. For survey 1, a total of 281 students from the faculty responded to the online google form. Majority of them were undergraduate with 11% postgraduate students. It is a challenge to get students' feedback especially using online form because many more did not respond even though the call for participation was distributed to all faculty students.

For survey 2, a total of 132 undergraduate students responded to a few questions of stress level and whether creating a counselling blog is useful for students at the faculty. The respondents were 18.9% (25) males and 81.1% (107) females. Survey 3 was conducted to get initial reactions of visitors to the newly designed counselling blog. A total of 54 undergraduate students viewed the blog and answered several questions about it, of whom 13% (7) were males and 47 (87%) were females.

3.3 Instrumentation

In reaction to verbal reports about students being adversely affected by online distance learning since the university began its virtual teaching and learning mode, the counselling unit conducted three brief surveys to get empirical evidence related to the blog as fulfilling the step of finding facts when doing action research.

3.3.1 The Surveys

Survey 1 was a brief questionnaire made simple in order to get basic data regarding students' experiences with stress during online distance learning. The questions asked about students' comfort, satisfaction level, and experiences of stress during online distance learning. Students were also asked to rate the extent of factors contributing to their being stressful with learning from home. Survey 2 was conducted in order to gauge the feasibility and practicality of creating the blog. Students were asked about the existing process of helping at the faculty, and what they think about the initiative of designing the counselling blog. Survey 3 was designed to get initial response toward the blog after it was launched. Items include ratings on the aspects of the blog that were seen as attractive or not by the viewers so that refinement of the blog can be made in future.

3.3.2 The Counselling Blog

To properly design the counselling blog, the researchers adhered to the ADDIE model as one of the most common models used in the instructional design field as a guide to producing an effective design. Four phases were followed. The first phase is “analyse”. In the designing phase, the researchers started by identifying the current problem that the students face. Based on feedback that was obtained from students, according to them being at home is not always a positive experience for some students with family or personal issues. They also have issues with online learning. Apart from that, students do not have easy access to seek help from faculty members or counsellors on campus. This is due to the fact that the faculty has no established online platform or known system for students to seek help virtually. Therefore, looking at the issues, there is a need to create a platform that offers students the venue to find solace from their stress.

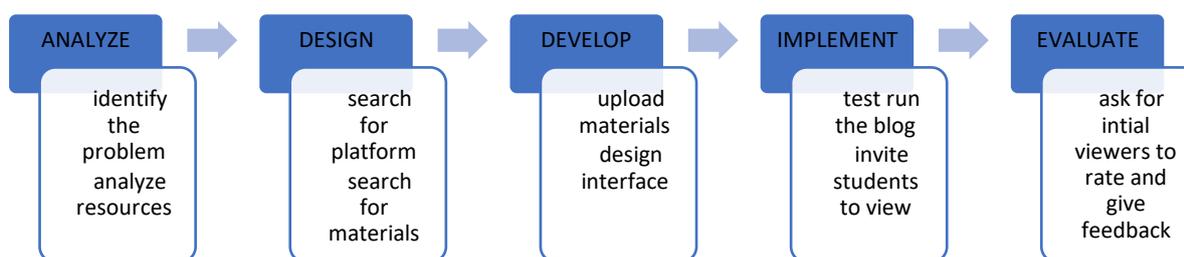


Fig.2 ADDIE steps taken to create the blog

In the second phase, the researchers started designing the contents and materials for the blog. The contents and materials for the blog were carefully selected through thorough discussion and dialogue among the researchers who are also a counsellor and a counselling lecturer. The content of the blog was based on a counselling topic that was divided into several headings. In order to make it as interactive as possible, some criteria should be taken into account and fulfilled such as contents that are coherent with objectives, age-appropriate contents and illustrations, as well as engaging interactive features. Project plan and prototype design was created and drafted. It is also vital to ensure that the design of the blog must be appropriate with learner-computer interaction. In general, at this stage, the researchers made sure that the contents and materials for the blog can really be effective in ways that facilitate students’ growth and problem-solving skills as well as promote utmost interaction with the materials created and provided in the blog.

The third phase of development is where the actual development of the product takes place. At this stage, researchers made sure that the contents and materials uploaded to the blog were suitable for the level of cognitive development of the students, their maturity level, motivation and the psychology of the students. Apart from that, researchers also made sure that activities provided in the blog were parallel with their abilities and interests. This is crucial to attract students’ interest and increase their engagement with the platform.

The fourth phase of implementation is about transforming a plan into action. The implementation stage is where a continuous improvement and amendment is made to the product in order to ensure a maximum efficiency and effective results are obtained (Kurt, 2018). Here the researchers started testing the blog by announcing it to the potential users (students) and subsequently asked them for their feedback regarding the product. This helped the researchers to modify the product in an effort to meet the needs and expectations of the users.

Finally, the evaluation phase reflects the findings of “what, how, why, when of the things that were accomplished (or not accomplished)” of the project (Kurt, 2018). At this stage, researchers identified weaknesses and strengths of the blog based on the survey distributed to the respondents and made further refinements in order to improve the product. The data from the survey provides the researchers with crucial information regarding the effectiveness of the blog. From here the researchers

determined the attainment of the objectives of the product as well as the successfulness of the innovation.

3.4 Data Collection

Three phases of data collection were conducted. The first survey began at the middle of semester when Covid-19 first struck. The purpose was to get actual data on the level of stress students experienced when learning from home. The second survey was conducted when the faculty asked for an action plan to assist students with their mental health issues. This was considered as a simple need analysis survey. Finally, the third survey was designed to get initial feedback on the newly created blog.

3.5 Data analysis

Simple descriptive statistics using frequency analysis was used to analyse all three surveys. Table of frequencies and percentages was created to depict the result better.

4. Results

Survey 1 was made simple to get basic data regarding students' experiences with stress during online distance learning. To what extent students felt uncomfortable with online distance learning, Table 1 shows that 12.5% (35) of the respondents said they were very uncomfortable, 22.4% (63) uncomfortable, 24.9% (70) slightly uncomfortable, 17.8% (50) slightly comfortable, 17.1% (48) comfortable, and 5.3% (15) very comfortable. This indicates that a total of 59.8% of the students claimed they were not comfortable with non-face-to-face learning, whereas 40.4% fell under the category of feeling comfortable with this mode of learning. Students rated their satisfaction level with distance learning as very unsatisfied (9.3%, 26), unsatisfied (24.6%, 69) slightly unsatisfied (22.8%, 64), slightly satisfied (25.6%, 72), satisfied (15.3%, 43), and very satisfied (2.5%, 7). In short, 56.7% of the respondents were in the category of not feeling satisfied with online distance learning.

Table 1. Students' Experiences with Online Distance Learning

Question	Scale	Frequency	%
To what extent are you experiencing stress with online distance learning?	High stress	30	22.7
	Moderate stress	64	48.5
	Little stress	37	28.0
	Slightly comfortable	50	17.8
	Comfortable	48	17.1
To what extent are you satisfied with online distance learning?	Very comfortable	15	5.3
	Very unsatisfied	26	9.3
	Unsatisfied	69	24.6
	Slightly unsatisfied	64	22.8
	Slightly satisfied	72	25.6
To what extent are you stressed with online distance learning?	Satisfied	43	15.3
	Very satisfied	7	2.5
	Very stressful	81	28.8
	Moderately stressful	69	24.6
	Quite stressful	77	27.4
	A little bit stressful	45	16.0
	Not stressful	9	3.2

In terms of experiencing stress during this mode of learning, 28.8% (81) felt very stressful, 24.6% (69) felt moderately stressful, 27.4% (77) felt quite stressful, 16.0% (45) felt a little bit stressful, and 3.2% (9) claimed to be not stressful at all. It can be seen that 91% of the respondents felt stress with virtual mode of distance learning.

Students were asked to rate the extent of each aspect contributing to their being stressful with learning from home. On a scale from 5 (very stressful) to 1 (not stressful at all), students rated highest their sources of stress as being self-autonomous (learning independently, motivation, interest) (mean =3.45), followed by self-management (managing time, tasks, classes) (mean =3.32), home environment (mean =2.73), IT facilities (mean =2.69), faculty support (mean =2.45), peer support (mean =2.31), lecturers support (mean =2.28), and last but not least family support (mean =2.18).

Survey 2 was conducted in order to measure the feasibility and practicality of creating the blog. This survey was distributed in the middle of the semester when challenges of managing virtual learning took a toll on all parties. This was proven by the high ratings on stress level by the respondents who answered the survey. As shown in Table 2, 99.2% of the respondents reported stress. Specifically, 28.0% (37) said they had experienced little stress, 48.5% (64) moderate stress, and 22.7% (30) high stress. Only one respondent said he or she was not stressed at all.

They agreed that there should be a clear process to help students in need (58.3% agreed, 37.1% said maybe, and 4.5% said no need. If they need to seek counselling help, 21.2% (28) chose face-to-face, 20.5% (27) preferred online, and 62.9% (83) said both are okay. The respondents all agreed that a counselling blog was a good idea for students to access information and seek for early help (86.4% yes and 13.6% maybe).

Table 2. Students' Experiences with Online Distance Learning

Question	Scale	Frequency	%
To what extent are you stressed with online distance learning?	High stress	30	22.7
	Moderate stress	64	48.5
	Little stress	37	28.0
	Not stress	1	00.8
There should be a clear process to help students in need	Agreed	77	58.3
	Maybe	49	37.1
	No need	6	4.5
If you need to seek counseling help, which method do you prefer?	Face-to-face	28	21.2
	Online	27	20.5
	Both are okay	83	62.9
Do you think a counselling blog was a good idea for students to access information and seek for early help	Yes	114	86.4
	Maybe	18	13.6

Survey 3 was created to get initial perceptions of visitors to the newly designed counselling blog. A total of 54 undergraduate students viewed the blog and answered several questions about it. Data analysis of Survey 3 showed good responses towards the blog. 47 (87%) perceived it as attractive, 52 (96%) said it will be beneficial to students, and 100% applaud the blog development as a correct step to help students in need.

Table 3. Students' Perception Towards the Blog

Question	Scale	Frequency	%
Attractive	Yes	47	87.0
	No	7	13.0
Beneficial to students	Yes	52	96.0
	No	2	04.0
The blog is as a correct step to help students in need	Yes	54	100.0

With this factual data gained from students, the counselling lecturers proceeded with creating a blog as an initiative to offer students information about mental health and professional help.

5. Discussion

The data collected from three different surveys clearly indicates that assumptions made about students experiencing stress due to online distance learning is supported. It was found that more than half of the students in the first survey reported that they were not comfortable as well as not feeling satisfied with non-face-to-face learning. In addition, almost all of the respondents in the second survey perceived themselves as being stressed with virtual mode of distance learning. These results support other studies which also found that students have reported higher stress levels with the transition to online learning (North Texas Daily, 2020). A study about college students' success in online classes showed that students generally perform worse in online classes compared to in-person classes, due to its flexibility which is a challenge for students who have not learned to manage their own time (Bettinger, Fox, Loeb, & Taylor, 2017).

This study found that students' sources of stress were mainly from having to be self-autonomous (learning independently, motivation, interest) and self-management (managing time, tasks, classes). This result is not far off from studies that found learning through online platforms have given rise to depression and anxiety disorders among undergraduate university students, where there was a significant correlation between student satisfaction and prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress (Fawaz & Samaha, 2020).

Dealing with psychological and academic difficulties can present a huge challenge for students, especially during these critical times. Therefore, there is an increasing need for the university to establish support to the students facing psychological and or academic difficulties, especially the one that is easily accessible and anonymous. Such difficulties should not be condoned as they can lead to severe negative outcomes, such as poor academic performance, decreased mental health, reduced study satisfaction, and dropout from their study. Alternative means of support, such as using online platforms such as blogs, can be efficient and cost-effective to provide inclusive support to the students. Currently, there is a lack of a reach out alternative to support students, particularly in this faculty. Therefore, mental health providers are driven to address the escalating needs of students in need using an online platform. This is because technology is an integral part of the student's communication, and thus, it is more feasible for the students to engage with an online platform for mental health delivery.

6. Conclusion

Creating a counselling blog to reach out to students in need of help with their mental health issue is seen as a significant and timely initiative. The prevalence of psychological distress indeed can be attributed to the sudden shift from traditional learning to distance learning. The incorporation of stress management programs and online counselling will minimise stress and enhance the mental health of school students during distance learning (Radwan, Radwan, Radwan & Pandey, 2021). With this factual data gained from students, the counselling lecturers felt more confident that they have extended the necessary help to students who now know that the faculty members are concerned about the students' welfare and there is an online venue for them to seek more information regarding mental health and professional help.

7. Co-Author Contribution

The authors affirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article. Author 1 carried out the introduction, literature review and conclusion for this paper. Author 2 conducted the interpretation and discussion of the results. Author 3 conducted data collection and checked the format of the whole paper.

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9. References

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