STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF DRAMA PERFORMANCE CONDUCTED ONLINE

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Abstrak

Perintah Kawalan Pergerakan (PKP) 1.0 yang dikuatkuasakan oleh Kerajaan Malaysia sejak 18 Mac 2020 berlarutan sehingga 2021 telah mengubah kaedah pembelajaran di Malaysia. Kajian dilakukan bertujuan meninjau persepsi pelajar terhadap persembahan drama atas talian. Fokus kajian ini adalah untuk mengenalpasti kekuatan dan kelemahan melaksanakan persembahan drama atas talian dan kaedah persembahan drama pilihan pelajar . Data bagi kursus TSLB3233 (Drama) bagi tujuan kajian telah dikumpulkan semasa pandemik Covid-19. Pandemik ini telah mengubah mod sistem pendidikan di Malaysia di mana pembelajaran di sekolah atau di universiti dilaksanakan secara atas talian di rumah termasuk persembahan drama bagi kursus TSLB3233. Responden kajian terdiri daripada 50 pelajar PISMP TESL di Institut Pendidikan Guru, Kampus Pendidikan Islam, Bangi, Selangor (IPGKPI). Reka bentuk kuantitatif deskriptif digunakan untuk mengenalpasti persepsi pelajar terhadap kekuatan dan kelemahan persembahan drama atas talian. Keputusan kajian menunjukkan persepsi pelajar terhadap penggunaan alat dan aplikasi digital lebih tinggi dari segi peningkatan pengetahuan dan sumber digital. Kajian ini juga mendapati majoriti pelajar memilih persembahan pentas berbanding persembahan drama atas talian.

Kata kunci: persepsi , pembelajaran atas talian, cabaran, aplikasi digital, drama atas talian .

Abstract

The Movement Control Order 1.0 enforced by the Malaysian Government since 18th March 2020 continued in 2021 which had changed the method of learning. This study was conducted in the Malaysian context, particularly in carrying out a perception study to look into the student teachers' perception of performing drama online. The focus of this study was to determine the strengths and weaknesses of performing drama online and to determine the student teachers' preferences. The Drama course TSLB3233 Drama was taught at the Institute of Teacher Education Islamic Education Campus, Selangor (IPGKPI) while the data were gathered during the Covid-19 pandemic in which the Malaysian education system changed modes from learning inside the classrooms at schools or universities to learning remotely in the respondents' home states, hence the drama performance had to be conducted online. The respondents in the study were 50 B.Ed. TESL student teachers in the PISMP Programme at IPG KPI. A descriptive quantitative design was employed to delineate the respondents' perception of the strengths and weaknesses of drama performance conducted online. It is found that, although the student teachers found the use of digital tools and applications is better for their selfdevelopment in terms of the enhancement of digital knowledge and resources, a majority of the student teachers preferred live stage performance to online drama performance.

Keywords: perception, online learning, challenges, digital applications, drama online.

In March 2020, the Malaysian government-imposed Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia as a prevention measure to curb the spread of COVID-19 virus. In light of this development, students were instructed to undergo remote learning from their home states. In 2021 the MCO continued and this study was conducted to determine the impact of having to perform a drama performance online which involved 50 undergraduate students in the Bachelor of Education Teaching of English as a

Second language for Primary School programme at the Institute of Teacher Education Islamic Education Campus and the course involved in this study was Drama TSLB3233.

The significance of this study is that the course was designed as a Drama course with a stage performance being part of the Continuous Assessment. The components of the course entailed four tasks. Response to a play Script Adaptation, Dramatisation -Stage performance, Props preparation for stage performance and Critical Analysis of Stage Performance. There were adaptations to be made in order to transform the stage performance into an online drama performance, particularly in the aspects of using stagecraft and the dramatization itself. Even though the researchers acknowledge issues like internet connectivity would probably be the biggest challenges in executing an online drama performance, this study was more focussed on determining the student teachers' perception of the online drama process, looking into the strengths and weaknesses involving stagecraft, use of digital tools and group cohesion.

Statement of Problem

The research conducted by Chung et al. (2020) on online learning readiness among 399 UiTM students concludes that students were not ready for online learning. They preferred to have conventional classes compared to online learning due to internet connectivity difficulties whenever the lectures were conducted via live-streaming platforms. Nevertheless, with regard to performing a drama performance online, it requires adaptations of many aspects such as the stagecraft elements, the script which will include stage directions and "blocking"– a drama strategy that can be very limited in an online performance with its limited space and setting. Hence, this study was conducted due to the gap in determining the strengths and weaknesses of online drama performance related to the use of stagecraft elements and the impact of the online drama performance process on the student teachers attending the TSLB322 Drama course.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the perception of students on the strengths of drama performance conducted online.

2. To identify the perception of students on the weaknesses of drama performance conducted online.

3. To analyse the students' preferences between live stage performance and online drama performance.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is students' perception of the strengths of drama performance conducted online?

2. What is students' perception of the weaknesses of drama performance conducted online?

3. What are students' preferences between live and online stage performance?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Drama can be defined as a composite art, a mixture of literature and many other arts, originally written to be performed on stage. The performance of the text will lead to the discovery of the theme, characterization and symbolism of the play. O'Neill (2018) describes drama as a specific mode of fiction represented in performance on stage. Its representational meaning is portrayed by the

playwright's messages in the script, interpreted by the readers, and performed by the actors through their stagecraft skills in speech, facial expressions, gestures, movements and actions. Drama usually assumes engagement and commitment from the group members as well as from a strong individual input. Chelsea Toczauer (2021) defines theatre or drama as a live art form that was developed to be shared and describes the human condition.

In 2020, COVID 19 affected almost all countries and more than 50 million people around the world. As a result, the Covid-19 outbreak has significantly halted a variety of activities including theatre and drama performances. Teachers across diverse educational contexts were required to rapidly embrace different modes and combinations of delivery. Innovations and the implementation of new educational and evaluation methodologies are urgently needed (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). With schools and universities suspended classroom teaching for an indefinite period, online learning appears to have quickly become the acceptable alternative option to traditional learning (Nur Hazilah Omar et al.,2021).

There are strengths and weaknesses of performing online drama compared to stage drama. Among the weaknesses of performing online drama, is the internet connection. A study has been conducted to discover the perception of Ghanian international students in China on their perceptions of online learning. Some of the drawbacks mentioned by the students are online learning is costly as they have to buy internet data access. Besides, they also faced difficulties in attending online classes due to unstable internet connections (Demuyakor, 2020).

In addition, internet connection has also become one of the problems that students are facing in online learning. As stated by Agung and Surtikanti (2020), the main concerns of the students are the availability and sustainability of internet connections. Without a good internet connection, the process of performing online drama will be disrupted. There were lots of complaints from the students regarding unstable internet connections and additional cost burdens for internet quotas. The problem of disconnection and slow internet speed could lead to feeling frustration and anxiety among the students (Faize & Nawaz, 2020).

The research conducted by Chung et al. (2020) on online learning readiness among 399 UiTM students concludes that students were not ready for online learning. They preferred to have conventional classes compared to online learning due to internet connectivity difficulties whenever the lectures were conducted via live-streaming platforms. Another weakness of online learning is the lack of face-to-face interaction between teachersand students. The perspective is reflected in Omar et al.'s (2020) findings. Most of the participants stated that they need more interaction with their instructor and support in completing their online class tasks. This is because they are still unfamiliar with online practices, thus leading to uncertainties among them. The same case goes for those who majored in Drama and Theatre courses where practical learning is needed. Muhammad Azri (2021) believes that learning and performing drama has always been a face-to-face situation, and moving to online platforms will definitely restrict students' and lecturers' ability to have a complete experience of hands-on learning.

To have a successful drama performance, ones need to incorporate all the elements of drama techniques and stagecraft. The elements of facial expression and gestures will help the actor to deliver the character's thoughts and feelings. Facial expressions and gestures could also convey an emotion that informs the audience about the character and the way they react to the situation. Clelsea Toczauer (2001) stated that good communication between the actors could be reached through each other's energy but it could not be done over the phone or the Zoom application due to lag and delay in the recording.Furthermore, performing online drama is difficult due to limitations because face and body play vital roles in helping actors tell a story (Trujillo, 2021). At the same time, Hagan (1991) suggests that physical touch is important for establishing relationships between actors. Performing online drama will certainly make the staging process more difficult as the actors are performing individually in different locations without a face-to-face meeting.

The limited size of the rehearsal and performance space and backstage for costume change is also one of the weaknesses of online drama performances. Although the current students are digital natives who have developed new approaches to thinking and have the skills in using technology, certain scenes in drama are difficult to be performed online such as scenes of hugging and holdinghands ((Yee et al., 2022). On the contrary, the development of digital media technology and the application of new media have made many impossible possible, even in drama stage performances. The intervention of digital technology which combines the sound, light and electricity elements in the drama performance allows the audience's auditory and visual experience to be integrated. In the face of the continuous development and intervention of technology, the visualization of music stage performance moving towards a better development (Shuai Xu, 2021).

Digital technology offers opportunities for students to explore the digital world and gain experiences using digital devices when doing online drama performances. Alhudiry and Alahdal (2021), describe the incorporation of technology in learning resonates well with the social state of gadget addiction among the lower age group. Furthermore, they are now able to see how they could use smart devices as learning tools, making learning an everyday habit. The use of diversified tools in online learning may help and attract students to learn. Martin and Bolliger (2018) found that the use of various materials in online learning is indeed beneficial for the students.

Technology also enhances the development of coordination and collaborative work in which team spirit becomes stronger. This dimension of study has a lot in common and similarities with the findings by Zhang, Keil, Rai & Mann, (2003), Thamhain (2004); Lambert (2013); and Altınay (2014) in Muhammad Azri (2021). The studies revealed that through technology, sharing, exchange of knowledge, and team spirit are at a higher level as long as they are well aware of their responsibilities and tasks. By referring to technology more often and using it more effectively, a team spirit could be operated in full harmony.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

 The study focused on the quantitative research method which was a cross-sectional survey. According to Fraenken and Wallen (2019), a cross-sectional survey allowed the researcher to answer research questions one and two. This method of design is particularly relevant for the researcher to identify student teachers' general overviews of the strengths and weaknesses of online drama performance and their preferences for an online drama performance. The questionnaire consists of 26 items.

These questionnaire items are not separated according to specific sections in order to minimise the influence on student teachers' perceptions. In addition, a second questionnaire based on student teachers' preferences was administered asking them to state the reasons for choosing the particular preference.

Participants of The Study

The respondents of the study were 49 TESL students from the Institute of Teacher Education, Islamic Education Campus, Bangi, Selangor. The senior student teachers comprised 49 PISMP June 2020 intake students (third semester) from two classes. The student teachers were selected as the respondents since they had the experience of performing drama online and live performance. They were 35 females and 14 males and their ages were between 19 to 20 years old.

Data Gathering Method

A total of 49 questionnaires were given to the student teachers where they had to choose 5 Likert scales of the strengths and weaknesses of online drama performance. The quantitative data were analysed using percentages to obtain descriptive information based on the questionnaire. According to Jackson (2016), descriptive statistics are numerical measures which describe a distribution by giving vital information on the central tendency of the distribution as well as the width and shape distribution. The open-ended questionnaire was also administered to all the respondents from each class to state the reasons for their preferences.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents an analysis of data based on the findings from the questionnaires gathered from June 2020 second semester TESL student teachers of the Institute of Teacher Education Islamic Education Campus. Findings from the questionnaires display the results of the strengths and weaknesses of online drama performance perceived by the student teachers and their preferences for an online drama performance.

RQ 1 What is students' perception of the strengths of drama performance conducted online?

Table 1: The strengths of online drama performance

No	Question Items	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
1	explore new knowledge on suitable digital applications for online drama performance	59	39	0	2	0
2	explore suitable video editing skills	53	43	4	0	0
3	explore digital apps for lightning and setting	41	37	16	6	0
4	apply online stage direction	39	45	16	0	0
5	spark imaginative in performing specific actions	35	41	10	12	2
6	employ suitable voice projection	35	43	18	4	0
7	express freely with different voices accents	31	47	18	4	0
8	group rehearsal	31	37	20	8	4
9	feel less exposed and more secure	31	39	18	12	0
10	be resourceful	31	43	27	0	0
11	have a sense of togetherness	29	33	29	8	2
12	express character thoughts and feelings	27	33	27	12	2
13	use a variety of costumes	27	49	16	8	0
14	limit the use of props	24	51	14	6	4
15	explore drama techniques to the fullest	24	29	27	18	2

Table 1 depicts the respondents' "Perceptions on the strengths of online drama performance". With regard to the statement "The strengths of online drama performance", the trainee teachers perceived "having the opportunity to explore new knowledge on suitable digital applications for online drama performance" as the main strength (59%) and 39 % agreed with this statement. The student teachers need to have knowledge of the digital world to be able to choose suitable digital tools for an online drama performance. Most student teachers viewed this in a positive way. Therefore, 53% strongly agreed, and 43% agreed that performing online drama gave the opportunity to explore suitable video editing skills. Most of the student teachers also 41% strongly agreed and 37% agreed that they had the chance to explore digital apps for lightning and setting when performing online drama. 39% of them strongly agreed and 45% agreed that they could apply online stage direction when performing online. This is because the student teachers were given the freedom to choose suitable digital applications and platforms to present their online drama performance. Student teachers also believed that online drama performance will spark their imagination in performing specific actions with 35% strongly agreeing and 41% agreeing. The student teachers shared the same perception on the other strengths of online drama performance which are "having the opportunity to express freely with different voices and accents" 31% strongly agreed and 47% agreed, "being able to have group rehearsals" 31% strongly agreed and 37% agreed. 31% of the student teachers strongly agreed that they "felt more secure facing the audience" (31%) and "become more resourceful" (31%) due to online drama performance. The five other strengths of online drama performance identified by the student teachers were "having a sense of togetherness" (29%), able to express character thoughts and feelings (27%), "using a variety of costumes" (27%), "having the chance to limit the use of props" (24%) and "explore drama techniques to the fullest" (24%).

RQ 2 What is the students' perception of the weaknesses of drama performance conducted online?

Table 2: The weaknesses of online drama performance

No	Question Items	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
1	Have a sense of togetherness	29	33	29	8	2
2	To perform a variety of movements and gestures	18	22	27	24	8
3	Apply blocking techniques	14	31	29	18	8
4	Have eye contact with the audience	16	18	14	27	24
5	Create human connections	8	41	31	14	6
6	Explore lighting techniques	22	59	10	8	0
7	Employ suitable voice projection	35	43	18	4	0

Table 2 illustrates the results for research question 2 which aims to discover the respondents' perception on the weaknesses of performing drama online based on the statement "Performing drama online will

give opportunities to" followed by the items in the questionnaire above. For the statement "having a sense of togetherness", 10 per cent of the respondents disagreed with this statement, 29% were neutral while another 29 % agreed that they felt a sense of togetherness conducting online performance while. The data collected for "to perform a variety of movements and gestures shows an almost balanced percentage between those who disagreed and those who agreed with the statement in which 8 % strongly disagreed and 24 % disagreed while those who agreed and strongly disagreed were 22% and 18% respectively. A significant number of the student teachers were undecided 29% when asked about the opportunity to apply blocking techniques during the online performance while 26% disagreed. The most significant response to show disagreement is illustrated in the statement "have eye contact with the audience" with 27% disagreed and 24% strongly disagreed. To the statement online performance created human connections, 31% remained neutral, 14 % disagreed and 6% strongly disagreed. However, a significant 41% agreed that online performance creates an opportunity for human connections. For the statement "…employ suitable voice projection, 18% were unsure and remained neutral and 4% disagreed.

RQ 3 What are students' preferences between live and online stage performance?

Based on the student teacher's response to the statement "I prefer live drama performance", 82% answered "Yes" only 18% answered "No" and 61% answered "No" to the statement "I prefer online drama performance and contrastively only 39% answered "Yes" to this statement.

DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study gives rise to the following conclusions and recommendations:

There was a mixed reaction to the question of having a sense of togetherness with online performance. It was an unexpected outcome because the student teachers did not entirely perceive that performing online was a weakness. More than half of the respondents felt a sense of togetherness while 29% were neutral. This could be interpreted as not having a conclusive decision on this particular aspect. Nevertheless, some of the respondents did feel that online performance did not encourage a sense of togetherness. This weakness is in line with a study by Trujilo (2021), performing drama online is difficult due to limitations because face and body play vital roles in helping actors tell a story. Hagan (1991) stated that physical touch is important for establishing relationships between actors but the staging process of online drama would be more difficult as the actors are performing individually in different locations. Hence, the implications as a result of these ambivalent reactions would be while it can be concluded that online drama performance is perceived as having weaknesses due to the remoteness and isolation among the individuals, there are other factors that encouraged a sense of togetherness among the individuals as a result of using digital technologies. This resonated with a study that has a lot in common and similarities with the findings by Zhang, Keil, Rai & Mann, (2003), Thamhain (2004); Lambert (2013);and Altınay (2014) in Muhammad Azri (2021). Technology enhances the development of coordination and collaborative work in which team spirit becomes stronger. This dimension of the studies revealed that through technology, sharing, exchange of knowledge, and team spirit are at a higher level as long as they are well aware of their responsibilities and tasks. By referring to technology more often and using it more effectively, a team spirit could be operated in full harmony. Therefore, further studies are recommended to find out the factors that encouraged a sense of togetherness in performing drama online. The factors could be that the sense of isolation actually ironically bonded the students together in accomplishing their tasks using the digital tools despite the adversities of internet connectivity.

2. The limited size of the rehearsal and performance space and backstage is one of the weaknesses of online drama performances. A certain percentage of the student teachers felt that they were not able to perform a variety of movements and gestures and apply blocking techniques. This finding is similar to the studies conducted by Yee et al (2022) in which although the current students are digital natives who have developed new approaches to thinking and have the skills in using

technology, certain scenes in drama are difficult to be performed online such as scenes of hugging and holding hands. In addition, gestures that could convey emotions were also limited gestures could also convey an emotion that informs the audience about the character and the way they react to the situation. As a result, certain drama techniques and stagecraft to deliver the character's thoughts and feelings could not be done effectively.

On the question of establishing human connections due to online drama performance, another unexpected outcome came to light. Even though a good percentage of the student teachers were neutral and disagreed with online performance would create opportunities for human connections, almost half of the respondents agreed that they could establish human connections in an online drama performance. Perhaps the perspective of seeing weaknesses in establishing human connections can be connected to Omar et al.'s (2020) findings on the lack of face-toface interaction between teachers and students where most of the participants stated that they need more interaction with their instructor and support in completing their online classes tasks. It is recommended that further studies be conducted to explore what aspects of human connection are perceived as a strength or weakness in the process of performing drama online.

4. Another weakness found in this study relates to online drama performance does not allow eye contact with the audience because of the nature of an online performance itself. In a drama performance, the drama technique such as a soliloquy and aside call for a "private" moment with the audience. This is when actors engage with the audience through eye contact. Performing drama online takes away this important technique hence it is perceived as a weakness by the student teachers. To simulate eye contact, student teachers are left looking straight into the camera in their individual and isolated environment. A study by Muhammad Azri (2021) resonates the importance of face-to-face interaction when performing drama. Azri believes that learning and performing drama has always been a face-to-face situation, and moving to online platforms will definitely restrict students' and lecturers' ability to have a complete experience of hands-on learning. The hands-on learning experience would include mastering drama techniques like performing a soliloquy in front of a live audience.

5. With regard to the respondents' perception of the strengths of online drama performance, digital technology offers opportunities to students to explore the digital world and gain experiences using digital devices when doing online drama performances. the student teachers perceived having the opportunity to explore new knowledge on suitable digital applications for online drama performance as the main strength (59%). To be able to choose suitable digital tools for an online drama performance, the student teachers need to have knowledge in this field. The majority of them view this in a positive way as to gain new knowledge in the digital world. This resonates with a study by Martin and Bolinger (2018) on the use of diversified tools in online learning that may help and attract students to learn. They found that the use of various materials in online learning is indeed beneficial for the students.

6. The next strengths are having the opportunity to explore suitable video editing skills and exploring digital apps for stagecraft elements like lighting and setting. This is because they are given the freedom to choose suitable digital applications and platforms to present their online drama performance.

7. The student teachers also believe that online drama performance will spark their imagination in performing specific actions. The development of digital media technology and the application of new media have made many impossible possible, even in drama stage performances.

The intervention of digital technology which combines the sound, light and electricity elements in the drama performance allows the audience's auditory and visual experience to be integrated. Hence

the respondents felt they are able to perform specific stagecraft such as music and lighting through manipulations of digital tools. A study by Shuai Xu 2021 resonates with the use of music, that is, in the face of the continuous development and intervention of technology, the visualization of music stage performance moves towards a better development (Shuai Xu, 2021).

8.The student teachers responded that their online drama performance encouraged them to be more resourceful. Using digital tools allowed them to experiment with new applications during the drama process. Alhudiry and Alahdal (2021), describe the incorporation of technology in learning resonates well with the social state of gadget addiction among the lower age group. Furthermore, they are now able to see how they could use smart devices as learning tools, making learning an everyday habit.

9.It is also found that the students felt less exposed and more secure in terms of facing the audience. This is perceived as the strength of online drama performance. Such perception could be due to the fact that some of the respondents have different personalities. Students who are more introverted would find the individual drama performance done in their personal spaces most agreeable and reassuring. It is recommended that further studies be done to gauge the influence of personalities to perform the tasks for online drama.

10.With regard to the respondents' preferences for drama performances, the result showed a unanimous agreement for live drama performance as opposed to online drama performance. To reiterate Muhammad Azri (2021) finding, drama has always been a face-to-face situation, and moving to online platforms will definitely restrict students' and lecturers' ability to have a complete experience of hands-on learning.

CONCLUSIONS

The focus of this study was to determine students' perception of performing drama online and to find out the strengths and weaknesses of performing drama online compared to live stage drama. Hence, this study established several findings that illustrated the strengths and weaknesses of online drama performances. On the whole, the student teachers perceived that there are limitations to practise stagecraft and certain drama techniques during the online performance. In terms of teamwork, there was a mixed reaction to the question of having a sense of togetherness with online performance. It was an unexpected outcome because the student teachers did not entirely perceive that performing online was a weakness. The implications as a result of this ambivalent response would be while it can be concluded that online drama performance is perceived as having weaknesses due to the remoteness and isolation among the individuals, there are other factors that encouraged a sense of togetherness among the individuals as a result of using digital technologies. It is recommended that further exploration on this aspect be conducted to determine factors that contribute to team spirit and enhancement of human connections. In conclusion, although the student teachers found the use of digital tools and applications is better for their self-development in terms of the enhancement of digital knowledge and resources, a majority of the student teachers preferred live stage performance to online drama performance.

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