

The Impact of Stress to Student's Psychological Well-Being Amidst Covid-19 Pandemics

Impak Tekanan terhadap Kesejahteraan Psikologi Pelajar semasa Pandemik Covid-19

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Abstract: Pandemic COVID-19 has taught Malaysians to live in the new norm. The daily life and activities of society have now changed. One of the areas affected by this pandemic is in the education sector either at the primary level or Institutions of Higher Learning. It requires every student to adapt to the online teaching and learning system (T&L) rather than the existing conventional system. This adaptation process requires students to have appropriate coping strategies to cope with the academic pressures that occur. This study aims to examine the impact of stress on psychological well-being on students. This is a quantitative study using a descriptive and inferential analysis through Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. The study involved 210 students of Mahaad Al-Sabirin (MAAS) selected through a random sampling method. The questionnaire consists of three parts that consist of demographic information, stress, and psychological well-being. The result showed there is a relationship between stress and psychological well-being among students ($r = .477$). In Malaysia, research related to the challenges of online learning during the new norm that creates stress is limited and minimal. Therefore, this study can be a platform and a new source of reference especially for educational institutions in this country to ensure that the online learning system can be implemented efficiently and utilized optimally by every student in Malaysia.

Keywords: Stress, Psychological Well-Being, Online Teaching and Learning, New norm;

Abstrak: Pandemik COVID-19 telah mengajar rakyat Malaysia untuk hidup dalam norma baharu. Kehidupan dan aktiviti harian masyarakat telah banyak berubah. Salah satu aspek kehidupan yang terjejas akibat wabak ini ialah pendidikan sama ada di peringkat rendah atau Institusi Pengajian Tinggi. Ia memerlukan setiap pelajar menyesuaikan diri dengan proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran (P&P) secara dalam talian berbanding sistem konvensional sedia ada. Proses penyesuaian ini memerlukan pelajar mempunyai strategi daya tindak yang bersesuaian untuk menghadapi tekanan akademik yang berlaku. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji kesan tekanan akademik terhadap kesejahteraan psikologi pelajar. Kajian ini berbentuk kuantitatif menggunakan analisis deskriptif dan inferensi melalui Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) versi 22. Ia melibatkan 210 orang pelajar Mahaad Al-Sabirin (MAAS) yang dipilih melalui kaedah persampelan rawak. Soal selidik terdiri daripada tiga bahagian yang terdiri daripada maklumat demografi, tekanan akademik, dan kesejahteraan psikologi. Hasil kajian menunjukkan terdapat hubungan antara tekanan akademik dengan

kesejahteraan psikologi dalam kalangan pelajar ($r = .477$). Di Malaysia, kajian berkaitan cabaran pembelajaran dalam talian semasa norma baharu yang mencetuskan tekanan akademik masih lagi terhad dan minima. Oleh itu, kajian ini dapat menjadi satu platform dan sumber rujukan baru khususnya terhadap institusi pendidikan di negara ini bagi memastikan sistem pembelajaran dalam talian dapat dilaksanakan dengan efisien serta dimanfaatkan secara optimum oleh setiap pelajar di Malaysia.

Kata kunci: Tekanan Akademik, Kesejahteraan Psikologi, Norma Baharu, Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Secara dalam Talian;

Introduction

Stress means a state of worry or mental tension caused by an inconvenient situation and environment for the individual. Stress occurs due to the natural response of humans to deal with challenges and threats in their lives (World Health Organization, 2023). Meanwhile, the definition from the Oxford Dictionary (2023), states that stress is an anxiety that stems from various problems encountered in a person's life. Stress is also a response to the environment and circumstances surrounding an individual. Students who must adjust to new norms in their daily routines also face stress (Abdul Aziz et al, 2021). The community's way of life, including that of the students, has transformed because of MCO. Student life is synonymous as getting up in the morning to go to college, hanging out with friends, having conversations, revising material with friends, and other similar activities. However, the COVID-19 and MCO caused students to alter their daily routines, as these groups were no longer primarily concentrated at school and were instead required to remain at home, spending most of their time engaged in online-related activities. Since the students must adjust to these changes in their daily lives, they are indirectly stressed and at risk for developing negative coping mechanisms.

The impact of the pandemic on an individual's mental health has become a great concern worldwide. Social isolation, fear of contagion, and loss of family members is compounded by the distress caused by loss of income and often employment (Ghebreyesus, 2020). Besides that, the spread of the epidemic gives an impact on various sectors, including the education sector. According to information released by the World Health Organization (WHO), physical and social distancing to curb the spread of the virus will not end in one or two months, but spans several months, and may even last up to a year. COVID-19 caused many sectors to be closed and unable to operate as before and people cannot go out to work and only stay at home to break the COVID-19 chain. People are not allowed to leave the house unless there is urgent business.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), there are 1.5 billion students from over 165 countries who cannot continue their education because of the outbreak COVID-19. Malaysia is one of the countries that have taken steps to close the schools. Study done by Abdul Rashid et al. (2021) revealed that 85% of the students from one of the public higher learning institutions in Malaysia experienced a moderate level of stress during the pandemics. Only about 11.5 percent experienced a high level of stress and the remaining 3.5 percent of them experienced low level stress. In another study done by Babicka et al. (2021) and Sundarason et al. (2020) found that the effect of online learning during the pandemic was more prominent in female students' emotions as compared to male students. In general, women are known for expressing their emotions excessively rather than men and when this pandemic happened, it added to those existing traits. Women also have less emotional tolerance than men causing them to find it difficult to control feelings towards inappropriate things. This causes most female students to experience anxiety and stress during online learning. All the previous studies that were mentioned indicated that there is a need for further study to explore the stress among students and its impact on psychological well-being.

Most students are also not prepared for the new norms that they must face such as online learning. Students participating in home learning programs, online schools are confused to adapt because most of them are not ready to go through the previous simulations or training. Students report learning programs at home become more stressful than regular classrooms. According to Berita Harian (2020), learning outside the classroom like online really poses a challenge to teachers like him who teach in rural areas. This was because not all students and their families had internet access and electronic devices, which was the biggest obstacle to realizing the learning method. There are students who do not have the internet and there are families who have more than one child who goes to school, but they only have one mobile phone, so it is

difficult for them (Berita Harian, 2020). Not all students have good internet access in their homes, especially in villages and inland (Bernama, 2020).

Users can face many technical problems that hinder and slow down the teaching-learning process (Favale et al., 2020). Online learning faces many challenges ranging from student problems, educator problems, and content problems. It is a challenge for institutions to engage students and make them participate in the teaching-learning process. It is a challenge for teachers to switch from offline mode to online mode, change their teaching methodology, and manage their time. It is difficult to develop content that not only encompasses the curriculum but also involves students (Kebritchi et al., 2017). To live online learning, students must have adequate internet. So, they need money to buy internet (data) to access online classes, do assignments, homework and more. However, there is among the students their financial capacity for daily food only. Buying internet (data) that has a variety of packages and it requires a lot of money. Students also need to choose a telco that can assess the good internet in their area. The previous study conducted found that about 70 percent of students were involved in financial problems. They had to spend a lot of money to enable them to attend classes online more effectively (Hasnah, 2020).

Teaching and learning online has become a rapidly growing mode of delivery in public institutions and the private sector in many countries, including Malaysia. Indirectly, these new norms have various effects on students in terms of learning experiences and expectations. Due to what has happened, face-to-face learning is transformed into online learning. This has presented various challenges for students to face new norms. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of stress on psychological well-being among students including several objectives measured that are the level of stress and psychological well-being, the relationship between stress and psychological well-being as well as investigating the difference between gender and attributes involved.

Literature Review

Stress is defined as a situation that is triggered by a string of demands that students must fulfill, causing anxiety and disrupting their academic well-being (Mohd Arif & Saodah, 2019). Students' academic tension is triggered by multiple demands at the university. Physical demand, job demand, position demand, and behavioral or interpersonal demand are four forms of causes of stress that are widespread among students (Desmita, 2009). Sri Nurhayati and colleagues (2020) found that stress, coping, and social adaptation have a substantial effect on students'

psychological well-being among 424 respondents in their research on stress, coping, and social adaptation.

Online learning methods necessitate total cooperation and dedication from all stakeholders, particularly when it comes to the provision of learning platforms, the preparing of content, and information and skills related to the use of technology, as it would include the use of digital technologies in addition to high-speed internet connectivity (Golzari et al., 2010). Some preliminary experiments have been conducted to assess the level of preparation and difficulties that students encounter when coping with online learning sessions. Students are certainly among the most impacted because they must move from traditional face-to-face learning to online learning to ensure that the current learning process is not interrupted, particularly when the nation grapples with the effect of the COVID-19 epidemic (Chung, Mohamed Noor & Mathew, 2020; Amani Nawi & Umi Hamidaton, 2020).

In fact, this trend is not specific to Malaysia; other countries, such as the United Kingdom, are also affected. For example, to tackle the proliferation of pandemics among students, the University of Cambridge initiated an online learning session for the 2020/2021 academic year, and these improvements influenced the current learning process to some degree (Elena Pavlovska, 2020). Furthermore, according to Tam and El Azhar (2020), more than 421 million students were impaired by their learning process for the current study session because of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the university had to close indefinitely to ensure the safety of workers and students. Disease causes someone who is at risk. According to a study conducted by Mohamed Nazul (2020), students face a range of difficulties in online learning, including the need to respond to technical transition as it applies to digital learning, as well as shifts in attitudes toward embracing online learning activities.

Psychological well-being is a multifaceted term that incorporates characteristics like self-assurance, self-control, a sense of value, and the lack of fear and isolation (Bordbar, Nikkar, Yazdani & Alipoor, 2011). This definition is consistent with Ryff and Singer's (2008) definition, which notes that psychological well-being is characterized as pleasure, life satisfaction, and the absence of depressive symptoms. Happiness, according to Boehm & Kubzansky (2012), is the aim that any human being aspires to accomplish and is the product of psychological well-being.

Methodology

This study is a quantitative study. Quantitative study is a formal, objective, and systematic process in which

numerical data are used to obtain information about any subject (Burns and Grove, 2005). Other researchers describe this research design as a method that explains phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically (statistics) based methods (Aliaga and Gunderson, 2000). Sampling is a process selecting a number of individuals for a study in such a way that they represent the large group from which they were selected (Gay & Airasian, 2000). In this study, 210 samples were randomly chosen in Maahad Al-Sabirin School (MAAS) based on Krejcie & Morgan sample size determination for populations around 460 students. The sampling of this study includes male and female students from form 1 to form 6. The questionnaire was used as a tool to collect data for descriptive and inferential analysis. It contains three sections. The first section for basic demographic information, including gender, the year of study, course study and age. The Second section measures stress and the third section for psychological well-being.

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is the psychological technique most used to measure stress experience. It is an indicator of the degree to which circumstances are assessed as traumatic in one's life. Items are designed to explain the way respondents find their lives uncertain, uncontrollable, and overwhelming. This scale also includes some direct questions about the current level of stress. PSS is designed for use in a sample of communities with at least primary secondary education. In the other hand, Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) developed by Ryff (1989), which measures six dimensions, namely self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth was used to measures psychological well-being of college student. The PWB scale consists of 42 items, and it was selected for this study because it could be administered straightforwardly to a student population (Ryff, 1991). This study analyzed the data by using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software by which the data obtained will be processed using the SPSS version 22 for window. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze quantitative data such as mean, percentage and frequency. The findings were presented in tables and figures.

A pilot study was conducted on 30 respondents from Maahad Al-Sabirin School (MAAS) students. This pilot study was conducted to test the reliability of the instruments used in this research.

Table 1. Pilot Study

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha	No of items
Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)	.752 .903	10 42

Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB)		
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Table 1 displays the reliability of Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the reliability statistics of Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB). The reliability for Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is .752 while the reliability for Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) is .903. The reliability of the two variables is above 0.70 which is very high and indicates strong internal consistency among the items.

Research Findings

Demographic data

This section presents information obtained from the demographic data. The information included in the demographic data is gender and age.

Table 2. Frequency of respondent according to gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	103	49
Female	107	51

Table 2 shows the frequency of subjects according to gender. There are 103 male (49 percent) and female 107 (51 percent) subjects.

Table 3. Frequency of respondent according to age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
13-14	36	17.1
15-16	50	23.8
17-18	85	40.5
19 and above	39	18.6

Table 3 shows the frequency of subjects according to age. There are 36 students from 13-14 years old (17.1 percent), 50 students from 15-16 years old (23.8 percent), 85 students from 17-18 years old (40.5 percent) and 39 students from 19 and above years old (18.6 percent).

Frequency and percentage according to level of stress among students

Table 4. The Scoring of Perceive Stress Scale (PSS)

Scoring Range	Level
0-13	Low
14-26	Moderate
27-40	High

Table 5. Frequency and percentage of respondents according to level of stress

Level of stress	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Low	21	10
Moderate	178	84.8
High	11	5.2

Table 4 showed the scoring of Perceive Stress Scale (PSS) which helped the researcher to categorize the level of stress in students. PSS has 10 items on a 5-point Likert scale (0=never, 1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=fairly often, 4=very often). Four positively stated items (item 4,5,7, and 8) are reverse scored (0=very often, 1=fairly often, 2=sometimes, 3=almost never, 4=never). The sum of the items represents the total score, with higher scores representing a higher level of perceived stress. Meanwhile, Table 5 showed the frequency and percentage of responding according to level of stress experienced by them. There are 21 students who have a low level of stress (10 percent), 178 students who have a moderate level of stress (84.8 percent) and lastly, 11 students who have a high level of stress (5.2 percent).

Frequency and Percentage according to Level of Psychological Well-being among Students

Table 6. The Scoring of Psychological Well-Being Scale

Scoring Range	Level
0-52	Low
53-104	Moderate
105-157	High

Table 7. Frequency and percentage of respondents according to level of psychological well-being

Level of psychological well-being	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Low	35	16.7
Moderate	148	70.5
High	27	12.9

Table 6 showed the scoring of Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) which helped the researcher to categorize the level of psychological well-being in respondents. Respondents are asked to rate their level of

agreement based on a 6-point of agreement ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Meanwhile, Table 7 revealed the frequency and percentage of respondents according to level of psychological well-being. There are 35 students who have a low level of psychological well-being (16.7 percent), 148 students have moderate level of psychological well-being (70.5 percent) and lastly, 27 students have a high level of psychological well-being (12.9 percent).

The Difference Between Male and Female in Aspect of Stress among Students

This section consists of the finding of the difference between male and female in aspects of stress among students. The data analysis yielded the result as presented in Table 8 below.

Table 8. The Difference Between Male and Female in Aspect of stress Among Students

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	P
Male	103	19.67	4.27	208	.996	.335
Female	107	19.06	4.90			

Table 8 showed the difference between male and female in terms of stress. Based on this table, there was no significant difference between male and female in terms of stress $t = 0.996$, $p = 0.335 \geq 0.05$. The mean score for male $M = 19.67$, $SD = 4.27$ and female $M = 19.06$.

The Difference Between Male and Female in Aspect of Psychological Well-Being Among Students

This section consists of the finding of the difference between male and female in aspects of psychological well-being among students. The data analysis yielded the result as presented in table 9 below.

Table 9. The Difference between Male and Female in Aspect of Psychological Well-Being Among Students

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Male	103	150.17	28.33	208	-775	0.439
Female	107	153.21	28.47			

Table 9 showed the difference between male and female in aspects of psychological well-being. Based on this table, there was no significant difference between male and female regarding psychological well-being $t = -0.775$, $p = 0.439 \geq 0.05$. The mean score for male $M = 150.17$, $SD = 28.33$ and female $M = 153.21$.

The Relationship Between Stress and Psychological Well-Being Among Students

Table 10. Pearson correlation analysis between stress and psychological well-being.

Category	Stress
Psychological Well-Being	Correlation Pearson Sig (2-tailed) -.477** .000

Table 10 shows the correlation between stress and psychological well-being. According to the table, there was a significant correlation between stress and psychological well-being and the Pearson correlation r value is $-.477$, $p<0.05$ (0.000), and the correlation value was negative and moderate. Thus, the value of r shows that there was a significant negative relationship between stress and psychological well-being which the increasing of stress level will result in decreasing the psychological wellbeing of the student.

Discussion

Overall, it is reported that most of the respondents among MAAS's students scored moderate levels of stress as well as psychological well-being. Specifically, based on the findings, only 10 percent of students showed low levels of stress, 84.8 percent of students maintained moderate levels of stress and 5.2 percent of students were at high levels of stress. Stress is seen as a disease in modern society. During the COVID-19 pandemics, students are more at risk of being exposed to stress, which can have adverse consequences leading to mental health problems (Auerbach, 2018). According to a study among first-year students in France, prevalence of stress was also reported in the moderate category which was as much as 61 percent of students when COVID-19 started to spread (Husky, 2020). Similar findings also mentioned by AlAteeq (2020) where 30 percent of students in Saudi Arabia were revealed to have moderate levels of stress.

The finding of this study showed that most of the students only experience moderate levels of stress. This can be explained through a study done by Mohd Zaharen, Md Noor & Muhamad Nasir (2020) which investigates the level of motivation, emotional intelligence, and resilience among Tahfiz students. The result of the study revealed that Tahfiz students have a high level of motivation, emotional intelligence and resilience. All of these are needed for an individual to strive during stressful situations (Hui-Ching, 2011).

In addition, 16.7 percent of students have low levels of psychological well-being, 70.5 percent of students have moderate levels of psychological well-being and 12.9

percent of students have high levels of psychological well-being. As most of the respondents have a moderate level of psychological well-being. This result is interconnected with the level of stress in students. A lot of previous studies mentioned that there is a relationship between stress and psychological well-being in humans (Siddique & Carl, 1984; Sugiura et al., 2005). According to Kurebayashi et al. (2012) and Goff (2011), stress affects sleep, memory, attention, and hunger, among other things. Stress will make students feel uneasy, uneasy, irritable, unhappy, worried, or depressed can have an impact on their psychological well-being (Fröjd et al., 2008; Hjern et al., 2008). Looking at this relationship, which is why the students in this study also revealed that they have moderate level of psychological well-being in view of them also have a moderate level of stress.

According to Pearson and Wonkhe, (2020), online learning has become a challenge for them and has a particular impact on mental health. Many aspects of life can affect mental health problems such as the internet availability, finance, and more unnerving their learning compared to learning in the classroom. Education or learning through computer screens for too long will affect mental, physical, emotional, and even social health (Aida, 2020). Families who have a comfortable home will not feel this problem. Others are for those who live in cramped houses and need to share a room with other siblings during the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO). This is the challenge of online learning for them, plus students who will face big exams such as SPM. The noisy atmosphere at home, uncomfortable study space will make it difficult for them to focus during e-learning sessions. Apart from that, it is said that there are also some parents who do not seem to understand and give homework when the child needs to participate in online classes. If left unchecked, these children will feel depressed and no longer interested in learning.

In addition, this study also showed that there is no significant difference between male and females in terms of stress. Rathakrishnan et al., (2022) found no significant difference for the academic stress of male and female students. It shows that by stress level there is no significant difference. This can be related to General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) theory that everyone regardless of their gender can have a similar response to stress. Furthermore, students also have counseling centers whereby any issue related to academics can be referred to their professional counseling (Rathakrishnan, 2021). In contrary, based on Indira Dhull and Sunita Kumari, (2015), the results show that there was a substantial gap in academic tension between male and female teenagers. It has been observed that female teenagers are under more academic burden than male adolescents. This may be since by default women are delicate & honest and take it

all very seriously, while males are normally quick to go and glad to go lucky. Females were also shown to have more academic burdens than their male counterparts. Since female teens are shown to be under more stress than male students, attempts should be made to control their stress and help them deal with stressors. Academic discontent, academic confrontation, academic burden, and academic distress should also be reduced.

Meanwhile, there is no significant difference between male and female students in terms of psychological well-being. Ibrahim (2018) has developed a scale of stress claiming the insistence in the field of education that requires students to compete has caused the mental health of students vulnerable because of stress such as workload, learning situations, adaptation to the environment, competition in academics and failures in time management. Stability can balance the mental health and psychological process of socialization of students versa In the previous study by Nurul 'Aaina and Che Su (2016) showed that there were no significant differences in terms of gender and psychological wellbeing and all dimensions of psychological wellbeing (autonomy, environment mastery, positive relations with other, self-acceptance, personal growth and purpose of life). This study was conducted to fill this gap focusing on the specific situations of flood disaster victims in Malaysia. However, it explains that there are no differences for the male and female in terms of psychological wellbeing among flood victims in Malaysia. The result of this study supports the finding of Amran and Khairiah (2014) which showed that there is no significant difference of general wellbeing towards gender. This is also in line with findings by Casey and Rebecca (2011) which also showed that there are no differences according to gender in the level of anxiety, depression, and wellbeing. Johari and Pushphavalli (2010) has also found that there were no significant differences in self-concept and the wellbeing of the juvenile toward gender.

In the previous study by Ramelan et al., (2020), there was also a discussion on the level of psychological stress and the level of mental health experienced by undergraduate students at UKM. By emphasizing on the differences between male and female students. Comparisons between men and women are rarely made, but they are increasingly relevant in the current era which has seen the dominance of female students in universities occur simultaneously with the decline in male students. According to Sheela Sundarason, (2020), the female students, the risk of anxiety was higher relative to that of the male students. Females usually convey thoughts to a larger degree than males do, and this condition may have been intensified by the recent pandemic. Studies suggest that the level of tolerance for female insecurity is smaller

than that of males and exceeding that level induces excessive tension and anxiety.

Furthermore, this study indicated that there was a significant negative correlation between stress and psychological well-being and the Pearson correlation r value is $-.477$. It means the strength is moderate (based on interpretation of correlation coefficient value of strength). In the previous study, the results indicate that academic pressure, permissibility, and socio-cultural adjustment have a negative significant effect on the psychological well-being of postgraduate students in Indonesian education. Stress is an individual's interpretation of the relationship between people and the environment in which the individual judges' situations beyond personal sources and permissibility and may endanger well-being. This is supported by the findings of studies that have been conducted by several researchers, they show that stress is an individual condition which is the result of individual interaction with the environment and stress is a common phenomenon that is often faced by university students as part of their academic life (Aihie et al., 2019; Miller & McCool, 2003; Michaela, Pascoe, Hetrick, & Parker, 2019).

Other studies have also determined that stress among the students involved, including academics, social relations, finance, daily complexity, and family relationships (Brougham, Zail, Mendoza, & Miller, 2009). Some researchers such as Khan et al. (2013); Lee (2017); Topper (2007); Veena & Shailaja (2016), have established a conclusive link between stress with poor psychological well-being which related to poor interpersonal skills, a lack of academic resources, not enough time to complete some activities, unfavorable working environment, congested study areas, an abundance of paperwork, and many other issues.

Conclusion

This study involved MAAS's students with different levels of form which identified their levels of stress and levels of psychological well-being. From the findings, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between stress and psychological well-being among students. From this finding also, it can identify the difference between gender based on stress and psychological well-being among students. This study is important in acknowledging the issue of stress and how it affects or influences psychological well-being. Indeed, this study can be extended to various levels of students, so that the real issues can be detected. This will involve a lot of institutions and further attract the attention of the ministry of education in helping together to solve the problems. Therefore, all parties need to prepare themselves to cope with the new norm through online

learning methods to ensure the continuity of the learning process runs smoothly. Online teaching and learning needs to be fully utilized to ensure that the focus on learning is not affected despite the various challenges that will be faced in the future. The students need to be ready to adapt practices that are different from the ways and methods that have been used before that involve face-to-face learning methods.

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