

I-ROLE 2023
International Conference of Research on Language Education

**MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES IN ONLINE SUPERVISION OF
MALAYSIAN PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION
STUDENTS' PROJECTS**

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Abstract

During the unprecedented outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the global educational landscape was forced to shift to Open Distance Learning (ODL) by making full use of technology as a medium of instruction which has progressively been the interest of many researchers. Nevertheless, a lack of attention was given to understand motivational strategies among lecturers supervising students' projects as a compulsory requirement for tertiary students to complete their studies, despite the ongoing interest in this area. This study aims to determine the importance and implementation of motivational strategies in online supervision among lecturers in a Malaysian public university. The online questionnaires were distributed to 77 lecturers from two branch campuses. The findings of this study indicated the appropriate behaviour of supervisors is the most critical motivational strategy to boost students' motivation in completing their projects while making the tasks stimulating is the lowest-rated strategy employed in online supervision. It was also found that the lecturers appeared to make online tasks more stimulating, as it is already a great challenge for students to work individually and independently. Nonetheless, no evidence in this study pointed to motivation as a process because the respondents seemed to be selective in putting them into practice even though it is noted in the literature that motivational strategies are viewed as a process-based orientation that it is cyclical. Future studies may use different methods to investigate the motivational strategies used by lecturers by evaluating additional factors to compare motivational strategies used in various supervision settings.

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Keywords: Motivational strategies, online supervision, students' projects

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic's enormous emergence has posed numerous challenges for the education sector. In an effort to stop the outbreak from spreading throughout the country, the Malaysian government announced a plan on March 18, 2020, known as the Movement Control Order (MCO) (Bunyan, 2020). As a response to the MCO, all face-to-face (F2F) interactions were suspended, and open distance learning (ODL) was introduced and adopted as a solitary method for teaching and learning, including project supervision. This abrupt technological change has negatively impacted more than 50% of the global education population (UNESCO, 2020), and the Covid-19 epidemic has substantially increased online teaching and learning (T&L) over the globe. It was enforced as the only realistic option for future schooling, no longer a matter of choice to move away from face-to-face interactions and toward heavily reliant technology. To conduct lessons through ODL, educators must quickly adapt and equip themselves with technology literacy. For decades, the use of technology in tertiary education has been a primary global concern (Daniela et al., 2018). The change from conventionally proposed lessons has been revolutionised to accommodate the new online method. Along with the online T&L activities, the day's main course now also addresses effective online teaching approaches, different online student responses, connections between students and teachers, online dynamics and management, and lecturers' past knowledge and experience in T&L.

Moving away from face-to-face contact and toward a reliance on strictly regulated technology was no longer a matter of choice but rather the only realistic alternative. The focus of the teaching process is no longer solely on the lecturers' ability to impart knowledge; it has expanded to encompass distinctive online student responses, connections between students and instructors, online dynamics and management, and effective online teaching methods. Implementing effective ODL is crucial to ensure the accomplishment of educational objectives in a tertiary education setting. The emergency ODL has varied challenges for lecturers and students alike. According to Torun (2020), several online learning studies have covered various topics, including faculty, planning, evaluation, management, readiness, pedagogy, technology, support, and institution. This has become a key component in meeting the needs of the learner (Martins et al., 2019) and ensuring that the online learning process is still engaging and motivating compared to face-to-face learning (Daniela et al., 2018), which continues to be a key factor in determining the academic performance of the learners (Xu et al., 2020). Nevertheless, despite the ongoing interest in this matter, little attention was given to exploring and understanding motivational strategies among lecturers in supervising students' projects via ODL.

In the context of this study, the focus is placed on the Diploma in English for Professional Communication (LG120) programme offered by Universiti Teknologi MARA. In the final semester of this programme, students are required to complete a project under the supervision of appointed lecturers as supervisors in a course. This project-based course carries a higher credit than other courses. Hence, the supervision aspect holds a significant role in student performance. Despite the numerous studies conducted on the supervision of student projects, there are no fixed supervisory models developed for students at the diploma level. The supervision process is a complicated interpersonal relationship between supervisor and supervisee, and conducting supervision sessions online has posed a new challenge for lecturers in carrying out the task (Ada, 2021). One key point of this situation is whether the supervisors

are motivated to supervise via an online platform. Previous research has indicated that students had more positive perceptions of online supervision compared to having them f2f. However, it is impossible for the supervisors to make the same claim. Their digital proficiencies are found to be insufficient (Farid et al., 2015), and even if they are able to conduct online sessions, there is a great tendency that they will be unsuccessful at delivering content efficiently (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). This inconsistency influenced this study to investigate the motivational strategy supervisors perceive as essential and which strategies have been implemented in supervising students' projects to fulfil requirements via online platforms. Thus, the three research questions considered for this study are:

- i. Which motivational strategies do the supervisors perceive as most and least important in online supervision?
- ii. Which motivational strategies do the supervisors implement in their online supervision sessions?

The findings of this study are anticipated to assist in understanding these supervisors' behaviours and provide insights for improvement through supervisory training courses. In addition, this study extends the previous studies on motivational strategies among language lectures from the specific context of a tertiary institution in Malaysia. The findings would also create awareness of different motivational strategies and their importance in online supervision and considering possible effects on students' performance.

1.1. Literature review

1.1.1. Online supervision

The existing literature addressing the issues of academic supervision has revealed that the supervisor-supervisee relationship is a crucial contributing factor in determining the success of student projects (Heyns et al., 2019). Lecturers assigned to supervise student projects are responsible for creating an environment where students can remain motivated and continue learning (Yun & Park, 2020). Nevertheless, the considerable change in work conditions for both lecturers and students in the ODL practice during the pandemic, including project supervision, has posed new challenges in creating a motivating environment. Previous studies on online supervision have identified a number of challenges experienced by supervisors, yet, studies addressing the supervisors' motivational strategies in supervising diploma students are still somewhat lagging in the literature. In the online environment, supervisors must learn to manage the unidentified anxiety or nervousness the students might experience (Rambe & Mkonu, 2019).

Furthermore, the issue of feeling the inadequacy in connection is identified when students voiced their concern about being treated as an "item" rather than being treated as a person (Ross & Sheail, 2017), although the connection inadequacy could be a mere assumption and influenced by students' perceived stress upon receiving feedback. It is also identified in the literature that students who undergo online supervision may experience isolation, disconnection, working individually, issues with time and space, difficulties completing tasks, and supervisory relationships (Ross & Sheail, 2017). Nonetheless, online supervisory relationships are found to be equally strong with f2f supervision depending on the initiative

and efforts shown by both parties by nurturing mutual, continuous monitoring and negotiation (Aitken et al., 2022).

1.1.2. Motivational Strategies

Motivation plays a significant role in the success of a language educational programme as it is the fuel source to sustain the teaching and learning processes. It is also considered a major factor in determining the success rate of students' language learning as it heavily depends on the motivational quality of lecturers who act as key social figures mirrored in their behaviour as a powerful motivational tool (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). The viewpoints of motivation in this study refer to the strategies supervisors perceive as significant and practised in their supervision sessions. While many studies have addressed motivational strategies among educators in teaching practices, little attention is given to addressing a similar matter in the online supervision of student projects. The hypothetical assumption is that even though there are possibilities that the motivational strategies recognised in previous studies are feasible for classroom teaching across contexts and cultures, they might not be applicable in online project supervision.

The trend of studies on motivation in language education has evolved from the standpoint of first-language learning to second and foreign language learning, as well as from student motivation to the motivation of educators. This study focuses on the motivational strategies of lecturers supervising students' projects perceived as crucial practice in supervision. Nevertheless, most studies in the existing literature focused more on student motivation, and a lack of attention was given to motivation strategies among educators, particularly in the context of supervision. This could be a significant factor in determining the success rate of students learning where strong positive correlations were identified between student motivation and facets of educator motivational practices (Jones, 2019).

The landmark study on motivational strategies was done on Hungarian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and revealed ten motivational plans which were later termed the commandments in motivating students (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998). A similar study was expanded to study motivational strategies in the Asian context, specifically among Taiwanese EFL teachers (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007), where the similarity with the Hungarian context is recorded in the top five strategies, and divergence occurred in which Taiwanese teachers ranked 'recognising students' efforts' as the second most crucial strategy, and 'promoting learner autonomy' as the least important strategy. However, the findings might not be context-specific, bound culturally to their context, and focused on classroom learning. The identified commandments might not share similar grounds in the supervision of student projects. Therefore, this study adapted Cheng and Dörnyei's (2007) motivational strategies questionnaire to examine the practicality of these strategies in the context of supervision of student projects.

2. Research Methods

2.1. Research design and data collection instrument

This study used a quantitative approach and a Google Forms survey tool that was developed and disseminated online. The survey instrument was adapted from Cheng and Dörnyei's (2007) study, which

was then customised to the context of supervision by eliminating items related to classroom teaching and learning. Eight clusters and 31 items were constructed and the data were collected using 5-point Likert scale items being 1=Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree, to examine motivational strategies of Appropriate Supervisor Behaviour, Recognise Students' Efforts, Promote Students' Self-Confidence, Creating Pleasant Supervision, Present Tasks Properly, Increase Learners' Goal-orientedness, Making the Tasks Stimulating and Promote Learner Autonomy.

2.2. Participants

A total of 77 language lecturers from two branch campuses participated in this study. They have varied experiences, with most stating that this was their first exposure to online supervision, while some had previous experience. The respondents' demographic is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics (n=77)

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
30 or younger	2	2.59
31 - 40	45	58.45
41 - 50	19	24.68
51 - 60	11	14.28
Position		
Lecturer	33	42.85
Senior Lecturer	42	54.55
Associate Professor	2	2.59
Years of Teaching		
5 or less	13	16.88
6 to 10	28	36.36
11 to 15	9	11.69
16 to 20	16	20.79
21 or more	11	14.28

Each construct's internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha values. Taber (2018) proposed a descriptor where values > 0.9 are considered good, > 0.8 as strong, > 0.7 as acceptable, and > 0.6 as reasonable. Table 2 demonstrates that each construct had a Cronbach's coefficient value of more than 0.8 or 80 percent, showing high internal consistency and reliability.

Table 2. Reliability evaluation

Components	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	SD
Appropriate Supervisor/Lecturer Behaviour	5	0.955	4.50	0.73
Recognise Students' Effort	4	0.958	4.47	0.74
Promote Students' Self-Confidence	5	0.899	4.43	0.62
Creating A Pleasant Supervision	4	0.867	4.42	0.66
Present Tasks Properly	2	0.930	4.45	0.79
Increase Learners' Goal-Orientedness	4	0.927	4.38	0.70
Making The Tasks Stimulating	6	0.862	4.26	0.70
Promote Learner Autonomy	6	0.849	4.32	0.70

3. Findings

The purpose of the survey was to examine the supervisors' motivational strategies in professional communications students' projects via online platforms to better understand the significance and use of the strategies by addressing the following questions: (1) Which motivational strategies do the supervisors perceive as most and least important in online supervision? and (2) Which motivational strategies do the supervisors implement in their online supervision sessions? The collected data were analysed using descriptive tests. The results of the descriptive statistics for the four constructs, as given in Table 2, are thought to be valid and reliable because all the constructs had Cronbach alpha values of higher than 0.80, indicating that the scales had strong reliability. The following findings and discussion are presented based on the research questions.

3.1. Research Question 1: Which motivational strategies do the supervisors perceive as most and least important in online supervision?

In general, the respondents responded positively to motivational strategies constructs in the survey. Based on the eight constructs of motivational strategies, the respondents scored the highest in the Appropriate Supervisor/Lecturer Behaviour (M=4.50, SD 0.73), which indicates that this construct is perceived as the most important in online supervision, followed by Recognise Students' Effort (M=4.47, SD 0.74), Present Tasks Properly (M=4.45, SD 0.79), Promote Students' Self-Confidence (M=4.43, SD 0.62), Creating A Pleasant Supervision (M=4.42, SD 0.66), Increase Learners' Goal-Orientedness (M=4.38, SD 0.70), and Promote Learner Autonomy construct (M=4.32, SD 0.70). The lowest score is the Making The Tasks Stimulating (M=4.26, SD 0.70), indicating that the respondents perceived it as the least important motivational strategy in online supervision.

3.2. Research Question 2: Which motivational strategies do the supervisors implement in their online supervision sessions?

As depicted in Table 3, it is safe to say that the data analysis shows that the respondents placed their priority on Appropriate Supervisor/Lecturer Behaviour construct (M=4.50, SD 0.73) as the primary motivational strategy in online supervision. The data is consistent with Cheng and Dörnyei's (2007) study, where educators' appropriate behaviour was ranked as the most critical strategy. In this study, it is ranked the first and regarded as the most crucial motivational strategy where the respondents accentuated that they must demonstrate care for students' progress in their studies (M=4.54, SD 0.74). The responders also emphasised the need to build a good relationship with the students (M=4.44, SD 0.84). Nonetheless, showing enthusiasm for supervision (M=4.51, SD 0.72) scored the lowest mean score, suggesting that it is this attribute is the least focused in displaying appropriate behaviour among the respondents.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics on appropriate supervisor/lecturer behaviour construct.

Components	Mean	SD
Cares for the student's progress in their studies	4.54	0.74
Tries to build a good relationship with the students	4.44	0.84
Shows enthusiasm for supervision	4.51	0.72

Table 4 indicates that the respondents believed that recognising students' effort and achievement (M=4.54, SD 0.82) is a strategy that would benefit as a good motivational strategy and is considered the second most critical to implement when supervising students' projects. This shows that supervisors stressed the importance of ensuring students feel acknowledged and appreciated while completing their projects. Monitors students' progress and celebrates students' achievement (M=4.51, SD 0.78) is also their priority, as it shows that they are not neglecting the students by frequently having sessions to ensure the project's progress. The lowest score is promotes students' effort attributions (M=4.33, SD 0.86), indicating that it is not a significant attribute in this construct.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics on recognising students' efforts construct

Components	Mean	SD
Recognises students' effort and achievement	4.54	0.82
Monitors students' progress and celebrates their achievement	4.51	0.78
Makes sure grades reflect students' effort and hard work	4.44	0.82
Promotes students' effort attributions	4.33	0.86

The third-ranked motivational strategy employed by the respondents in supervising students' projects is *present tasks properly* (M=4.45, SD 0.79). The results demonstrated that they should make clear their expectations and explain the significance of assigned tasks. As Table 5 showed, giving clear instructions on the tasks to be carried out (M=4.48, SD 0.80) and explaining why a particular task is important (M=4.43, SD 0.84) are considered critical to ensure students stay on course in the project development. This is in accordance with Cheng and Dörnyei (2007), who highlighted that no matter how skilled an instructor is, it is unrealistic to expect that students will be motivated if the instruction is unclear.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics on present tasks properly constructed.

Components	Mean	SD
Gives clear instructions on the tasks to be carried out	4.48	0.80
Explains why a particular task is important	4.43	0.84

The analysis in Table 6 depicted that the respondents agreed on promoting students' self-confidence construct (M=4.43, SD 0.62) to be ranked the fourth among eight constructs of motivational strategies. The respondents agreed that they *provided students with positive feedback* (M=4.59, SD 0.69) and planned activities that suited the students' skill sets in anticipation that they would motivate them. This was similar to Jones' (2019) findings that motivational practice correlates strongly with student motivation, suggesting that motivational strategies are significant. Furthermore, *encouraging students to try harder* (M=4.43, SD 0.67) is another strategy implemented to ensure students feel that their efforts are valued and that they have the potential to succeed. Nevertheless, *designs tasks that are within students' ability* (M=4.35, SD 0.81) scored the lowest mean and were regarded as the least important in this construct.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics on promoting students' self-confidence construct

Components	Mean	SD
Provides students with positive feedback	4.59	0.69
Teaches students good managerial skills	4.40	0.69
Encourages students to try harder	4.43	0.67
Designs tasks that are within students' ability	4.35	0.81
Does not stress much on students' mistakes	4.40	0.79

Meanwhile, the results in Table 7 show that creating pleasant supervision (M=4.42, SD 0.66) was ranked fifth among the motivational strategies employed by the respondents. This could mean that the respondents conceded the importance of being approachable, supportive, and caring, thus creating a positive relationship and climate throughout the supervision period. Helps to create a relaxing supervision/discussion (M=4.54, SD 0.67) scored the highest mean, implying that the respondents emphasised the need to create a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere by treating students with respect and valuing their views and participation. Explains that mistakes are part of the learning process (M=4.54, SD 0.67) is another strategy utilised by the respondents in this study, proving that consolation plays a role in keeping the students motivated. However, uses an interesting task to initiate discussion (M=4.14, SD 0.90) is deemed the least important strategy in this construct for online supervision.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics on creating pleasant supervision construct

Components	Mean	SD
Explains that mistakes are part of the learning process	4.48	0.86
Helps to create a relaxing supervision/discussion	4.54	0.67
Avoids making comparisons between students' grades	4.52	0.64
Uses an interesting task to initiate discussion	4.14	0.90

A point worth noting, as shown in Table 8, *increasing learners' goal-orientedness* (M=4.38, SD 0.70) is ranked sixth in motivational strategies implemented by the respondents. By incorporating goal-orientedness into their motivational strategies, the respondents believed it could help students stay motivated and engaged in learning and achieve their full potential. The highest mean score for this construct is the attribute of *encourages students to set project goals* (M=4.56, SD 0.80), showing that respondents believed that students would be more motivated when they have a clear idea of what they want to achieve and how they plan to do it. In addition, respondents also believed that *making the students believe that every learner is different in their pace of performing a task* (M=4.48, SD 0.80) will assist students in setting reasonable and feasible goals, giving feedback on their development and encouraging them to reflect on their learning experiences. These strategies can assist students in developing a sense of competence and control over their learning, boosting their motivation. Nevertheless, *reviews students' goals regularly* (M=4.16, SD 0.81) scored the lowest mean, showing that it is the least concern in this construct.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics on increasing learners’ goal-orientedness construct

Components	Mean	SD
Makes the students believe that every learner is different in their pace of performing a task	4.48	0.80
Finds out students’ needs and includes them in goal-setting	4.35	0.85
Encourages students to set project goals	4.56	0.64
Reviews students’ goals regularly	4.16	0.81

The results in Table 9 indicate that the respondents ranked promote learner autonomy construct (M=4.32, SD 0.70) as the seventh motivational strategy in supervising students online. According to Cheng and Dörnyei’s (2007) theory, students are more likely to be motivated and involved in the learning process when they feel that they have some control and ownership over it. In this construct, the attribute lets students decide how the project is carried out scored the highest mean (M=4.49, SD 0.78), implying that the respondents provide liberty for students to feel a great sense of belonging to their projects. On the other hand, during supervision sessions, respondents let students assess themselves (M=4.24, SD 0.89) as a way to allow students to reflect on their work as a part of the discussion for improvement. Acts as a facilitator (M=4.19, SD 0.98); however, scored the lowest mean showing that respondents did not really regard themselves to play the role of a facilitator but rather provided consultation and constructive feedback.

Table 9. Descriptive statistics on promoting learner autonomy construct

Components	Mean	SD
Acts as a facilitator	4.19	0.98
Teaches students self-motivating strategies such as patting-oneself on the back for the good work done	4.29	0.89
Lets students assess themselves	4.24	0.89
Lets students decide how the project is carried out	4.49	0.78
Involves students in designing and running the project	4.38	0.85

Making the tasks stimulating construct (M=4.26, SD 0.70) is the last and ranked eighth in the motivational strategies implemented by the respondents, indicating that it is the least employed strategy in online supervision. Nevertheless, in this construct, the results in Table 10 show that the attributes *uses various supervision strategies such as openly sharing a non-judgmental approach and employing a mindful uncluttered, attentive attitude* (M=4.41, SD 0.80) and *encourages students to create innovative product* (M=4.41, SD 0.69) scored the highest mean implying that there are efforts on the part of the respondents to make tasks more stimulating by providing feedback that is informative, relevant, and timely. The lowest score in this construct is the attribute of *making tasks challenging* (M=4.00, SD 0.92) *demonstrating that the respondents might consider the project development* a great challenge as students have to work independently to produce authentic outcomes.

Table 10. Descriptive statistics on making the tasks stimulating construct

Components	Mean	SD
Uses various supervision strategies such as openly sharing a non-judgmental approach and employing a mindful uncluttered, attentive attitude	4.41	0.80
Assigns attractive tasks that are related to my programme	4.22	0.91
Encourages students to create innovative product	4.41	0.69
Making tasks challenging	4.00	0.92

3.3. Limitation of studies

There were certain limitations found in the study. First, the respondents' comments on online motivational strategies may be prejudiced because they were self-reported. Future research should employ different methods to determine and comprehend motivational strategies. Second, this study only focused on perceptions in order to evaluate the motivational strategies used throughout online supervision. Therefore, it is also critical to sustain the conclusions of this study by examining different factors or determiners in order to compare the motivational strategies used in different supervisory contexts. It may be useful for tracking changes over time; therefore, a longitudinal study can be carried out to reinforce the conclusions even more. Further study like this could also open up a crucial avenue for raising the standards and improving online instructional strategies.

4. Conclusion

This study has revealed the respondents' motivational strategies in online supervision, where the finding is evidence showing that the appropriate supervisors' behaviour is the most critical and of utmost importance to be implemented, and the finding is aligned with Cheng and Dörnyei's (2007) study. Although it is noted in the literature that motivational strategies are viewed as a process-based orientation in which one component necessitates another and that it is cyclical, no evidence in this study pointed to motivation as a process because the respondents seemed to be selective in putting them into practice even when they believed these strategies were necessary. Perhaps this is because this study focused on the use of online platforms that contribute to the divergence from the literature. However, future studies would be beneficial to confirm the hypothetical assumption. However, this study also concluded that online technologies are inevitable in today's technological advancement era, specifically in education. Thus, educators need to be competent and employ effective motivational strategies to ensure an engaging and uninterrupted lesson, albeit digitally.

Acknowledgment

For financing under the Skim Geran Dalaman TEJA (GDT2022/1-2), the researchers are grateful to the Research and Industrial Linkages Department of Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Melaka.

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