1.0 INTRODUCTION

This is a collaborative effort of all AIU staff as it should be and must be.

We are already living in a highly disruptive world even before COVID-19 and disruption is not the usual companion of logic and reason. Fear and unpredictability will walk with us making it difficult to predict with precision what will remain and what will change. Nonetheless, we have to work within the knowledge we have, take some calculated risks and decide what we want to do. Whatever decision we make, LEARNING AND TEACHING must not stop. Nonetheless, at AIU prior to this we have been using online teaching sparingly.

Now with COVID-19, the Movement Control Order (MCO) plus the advice for prolonged social distancing, we need to ensure that there is limited interruption to teaching and learning activities by practicing remote approaches that are effective for students. We also need to ensure all other activities fall in line with this change in the teaching-learning mode.

2.0 LOOKING AT THE FUTURE OF AIU'S TEACHING-LEARNING STRATEGY

In response to the Movement Control Order (MCO) due to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic announced by the Prime Minister of Malaysia on 16th March 2020 and the announcement of the extension of the MCO, we need to do a Comprehensive Academic Plan (CAL) for AIU that involves short-term, mid-term and long-term plans.

Figure 1 : Short, Mid and Long Terms Goals
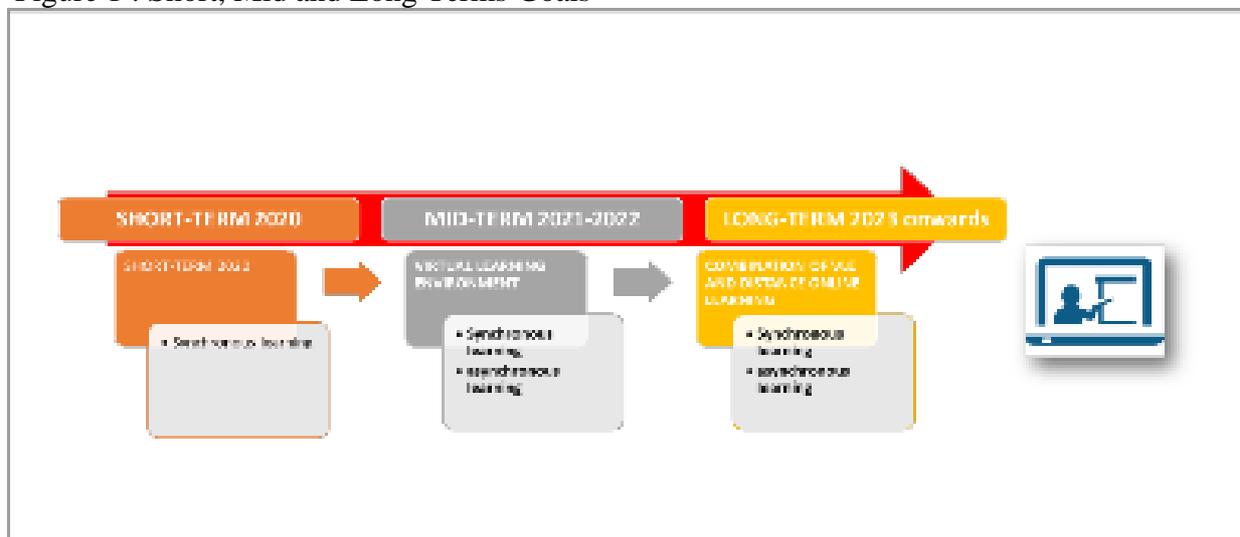
For the mid-term we should be ready to go into full Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). VLE uses modern e-learning systems that make good use of different graphic tools to produce interactive exercises imitating real life events. In today's world, it is important not just to gain theoretical knowledge but also to apply it and feel confident about oneself.

Overall, modern e-learning systems can provide opportunities for people to share both knowledge and experience. In addition, online courses can be individualized and offer a way to give and receive feedback. We can also have track records of all students' progress and achievements. All these facilities make modern e-learning highly effective and demonstrate the advantages of a

virtual classroom over a traditional one but it is still undeniable that we need that human touch of a teacher!

For the long term perhaps, AIU may want to look into the possibility of a 1 + 1 + 1 study mode. The first year can be done as a distance learning, the second-year face to face and the final year in the industry. Perhaps this could be our niche in the future.

3.0 SHORT TERM MEASURES

However, the pressing matter now is in the short-term. This is due to the advise of the Health Director General to avoid any form of gathering of more than 6 people for at least six months. Due to the MCO, lecturers and employees were asked to work from home and students to remain in hostel. And coupled with the advice of the Health Director General even after the withdrawal of MCO, we may not be able to conduct normal classes; instead, online classes will be the norm. This is our effort to improve social distancing and protect the well-being of our staff and students in the wake of the Pandemic.

Albukhary International University (AIU) implemented the Online Learning Teaching beginning 18th March 2020. We are still finding a comprehensive online teaching and learning approach that hopefully will involve a virtual learning environment (VLE). This is a set of teaching and learning tools designed to enhance the students' learning experience by including computers and the Internet in the learning process. Nonetheless, it must be remembered that our programmes were approved by MQA as face to face programmes as such we cannot migrate totally to Distance Education as a total online education service provider.

Some public universities such as IIUM and UKM chose to defer their semester while others like UPM, UUM, UTM and Taylor's University use online means to move on with their teaching. At AIU, since we have 2 long semesters and 1 short semester, we basically cannot afford to defer as our semester breaks are short.

3.1 Synchronous and Asynchronous Online Learning

What we are trying to do now in this period of MCO and post MCO is to fully utilise the online learning and later use VLE for the benefits of virtual learning environments for students and teachers. For students, a VLE allows them to benefit from self-paced learning. In order to create the VLE, we need to break learning activities into short, video-based modules, build extracurricular learning paths, promote lectures' collaboration; perhaps with some gamification and encourage students' feedback. For the short-term, synchronous learning (real time online learning) will be mostly used. However, due to Internet issues (speed and signal) some components will be asynchronous in nature (not real-time interaction).

3.2 Capability of AIU Academic Staff

The academic staff is an important equation in our effort to promote online learning. They are the frontliners for Online Learning, if they fail, the system would also collapse.

About 54% of the lecturers are being challenged technologically and they truly desire technical training for them to operate online teaching (42%) efficiently and effectively. In terms of computer and Internet readiness in campus for students, the lecturers commented that about 42% of the students have problem following their online classes. This is mainly due to computers facilities (42% based on survey) in campus as well as slow Internet connection (30%). Most of the lecturers agreed that there should be similar method of assessment for off-campus and in-campus students (72%). Almost all the lecturers were ready to convert their course contents to online mode (80%) and also to engage the students via online platforms (88%).

At the end of the day we believe that online learning and teaching are feasible provided that:

a. on-campus infrastructure is upgraded and ready with: stable and strong Wi-Fi connection, sufficient number of computers/laptops and its accessories for students' usage and good ICT maintenance on equipment and software;
b. lecturers are continuously trained, retooled and updated with e-learning, pedagogy, materials, platforms, content and assessment;
c. students also receive training in IT literacy and instruction;
d. AIU updates its policy, SOP and guidelines to Good Practices (GGP) for online learning and teaching; and
e. a specific policy is established on plagiarism, publication and IPR for online course content, task/assignment and assessment.

For more information please view;
- **Appendix B: Slide Results of Academic Staff T&L Questionnaire**
- **Appendix E: AIU Lecturers e-Learning Experience**

3.3 Capacity of AIU Internet Facility

On the 20th of March 2020, the ICT technical team upgraded the bandwidth of distribution point (DP) with TM Malaysia from 100 Mbps to 300 Mbps. The maximum capacity per user on-campus has also been increased from 4 Mbps per person to 30 Mbps. This seems like a major increase. However, based on the daily assessment after increasing bandwidth, this network speed is still not satisfactory. We still received many complaints from students especially in the student hostel area.

There are several possibilities for such a situation;

a. Internal networks especially in student accommodations experience congestion due to the fact that the number of Wi-Fi routers are unable to accommodate the number of students using Wi-Fi at one particular time.

b. There are also equipment problems such as network filters, firewalls and network switches that are outdated and do not function properly.

We're working very hard to improve the situation and we're confident we can resolve the problem in the near future. As such we are recommending that an overall assessment of the campus network be carried out to produce a fast and capable network that can reach a large number of users at a time.

For more information please view;
Appendix A: Slide Results of IT Personnel Online T&L Questionnaire
Appendix D: Slide Results T&L during MCO

3.4 AIU Students' Experience in using the Online Learning

We found that a majority of the students possess a handphone (more than 98%) and/or laptop (about 74%). Although the majority of students are ready to explore the online teaching and learning concept (about 92%), they are not happy with the computer facilities in campus (about 56%) and, a large portion of the students (almost 72%) are not happy with the very limited and slow Internet connection. The students are also not satisfied with the online course contents (about 79%) which have been provided by the lecturers.

One of the students commented (verbatim):
In my view some of student do not have a good cell phone and laptop's capabilites to donwload or to open the materials by online and also student center is not open 24 hours everyday so my suggestion is University could borrow a good tools to do online course for those who do not have

a good cell phone's capabilities and University can take a friendly price for that if university want it, and another suggestion is University can allow student to use Lab and study hall 24 hours everyday to do online course but with the highest control or university can assign one of security to handle it.

For more information please view Appendix C: Slide Results of Students T&L Questionnaire

3.5 The Process of Online Learning

As mentioned earlier the COVID-19 situation came too quickly that not only universities but even the nation was caught unprepared. Yes, we struggle but we are using this as an opportunity rather than a curse. We quickly set up a group of people which include our experts in IT Technology, Prof. Rizal dan Prof. Hafiz, the deans and directors and we came up with the following guidelines:

3.5.1 Learning will Proceed

We are trying to keep things as normal as possible. There are so many uncertainties with the COVID- 19 pandemic; as such it is better for us to continue and start the teaching and learning session immediately before it is too late to catch up. Our aim is to rescue Semester 2 and the remaining semester for 2019/2020 and we may even have to continue with Semester 1 2020/2021.

a. Students and Access to Internet

We have contacted every student (including those off-campus) to establish their ability to access the internet or even data service to at least be able to communicate using WhatsApp and Telegram. Lecturers have been requested to prepare their lectures to suit the lowest bandwidth. We hope every student will be able to continue with their programme with minimum distraction this semester. Students are also encouraged to have virtual study groups. This way they can help each other if they missed any of the classes.

b. Assignments and Coursework
Lecturers will update the teaching plan for Semester 2 and will remind their students during live classes and other forms of communication. We need to make sure that all students label their assignments properly as all submissions will be done online. It is the students' responsibility to request for acknowledgement from their lecturers as evidence of submission and receipt.

c. Changing Course Assignments and Assessment Components

We know that during the COVID-19 period and the MCO restrictions, it will be almost impossible to have Face to Face (F2F) activities. Therefore, in anticipation of this problem all assignments will be given and submitted online. There is a real possibility the COVID-19 issue will not be cleared when the final exams come. So, it has been decided that all final exams will be converted to coursework. Most public universities are doing the same, therefore, we, MQA and other professional bodies are in agreement on this, as long as we make sure the change does not affect the attainment of the learning outcomes. All learning materials must be put in the Google Classroom for the moment until further notice.

3.5.2 Off-Campus Students

There were a number of local students who left campus after their final exam for home. These students could not return due to the MCO. However, they too need to be catered to in the Online Learning process.

a. Returning Students

NO, at the moment, we are not allowing any student to return until we know how to deal with the situation. However, students must still follow their classes from home and complete all assignments and coursework as scheduled.

b. Travel Plans

Although we are aiming for the third week of July for the third semester for students who have returned home to be able to come back to campus, our advice to the students is not to make any travel arrangements just yet. There are still many uncertainties surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. We will try to give sufficient notice for the students to make their travel arrangements.

c. Communication

We are in constant contact with all the off-campus'students through WhatsApp and emails. Initially we had some problems contacting them, but we have managed to do so now. They have informed us they are following the classes. Some have to use their mobile data and it is expensive for them.

d. Study Group

We have encouraged our students to create their own virtual study group and they now have study groups for all courses with their friends in campus so that they are not left behind. They also share their study groups and WhatsApp group with lecturers.

3.5.3 While in Campus

The students also need to know what to do while in campus. It is after all a new experience for everyone. Fortunately, they have very comfortable residential quarters that should at least soften some of the discomforts. Nonetheless, we are not leaving things to chance and have come up with following measures:

a. Duration in Campus

How long the students need to be in campus would depend on the instruction of the Malaysian Government and the policy and rule they decide.

b. Product-Based Assignments

Product-based assignments that need students to go out of campus must now be reassigned with assignments and coursework that do not need them to leave the campus.

c. Food Supply

As students are not allowed to go out of the campus ground, we need to source for food for them. There are four main groups; those that order through the Student Affairs Department; those that make their own arrangement; those that depend on bread and those that receive aid from the Sarawak State. Those that receive the aid make their own arrangement and it is paid directly by the State to the caterer. Initially we had some problems with the main caterer as they were stopped by the police due to the MCO. However, we have managed to sort it out. We are trying to get Gardenia bread to be delivered directly to AIU as the amount is quite big. Our Student Affairs staff have to canvass all over Alor Setar to obtain enough supply for our students.

d. Non-Academic Activities

At the moment we do not allow any form of contact games such as football or gathering of more than 6 students at a time in close proximity. This has been strictly enforced by the Student Affairs Department and wardens. Instead we encourage study groups and chat groups with people who share the same interest. It has not been easy for young people to be curbed like this but the situation demands it and their health is our major concern right now.

e. Quarantine of Students

At the beginning of the implementation of MCO we had a scare when a student's father contracted COVID-19 (in Thailand). As she had gone back to her family earlier, we could not take any chances. We immediately quarantined her and after finding ways and means to test her, we finally managed to take her to KKM where she was tested negative for COVID-19. Nonetheless, we quarantined both her and her roommate for 14 days. These are new things our staff are learning to deal with, and they have done very well thus far.

3.5.4 Learning Reinforcement

As our students are new to the online learning mode some may fall behind. We cannot allow this to happen. As such we have inserted the learning reinforcement programme totally coordinated by the instructor of the individual course.

a. Rectifying Weakness in Online Learning

There may be weaknesses in the online learning mode that need to be resolved to ensure all learning outcomes are being met. The respective lecturers will decide together with students as June approaches.

b. Preparation for Reinforcement

Based on the suggestion of the individual lecturers, a schedule and other needs will be prepared for this purpose.

For more information on this section please view Appendix C Slide Results of Students T&L Questionnaire

3.5.5 Assessment

Assessment is a key component of learning because it helps students learn. When students are able to see how they are doing in a class, they are able to determine whether or not they understand the course materials. Assessment can also help motivate students. There are three basic purposes of assessment; assessment to support learning; assessment for accountability; assessment for certification. Now with COVID-19 and the MCO, we cannot conduct our traditional final assessment.

a. Final Exam Conversion to Coursework

We have agreed that all final exams will be converted to 100% coursework. If there is special request, all final exam will be conducted online. We will allow the school and lecturers to decide the time and flexibility of the online assessment.

b. Information Regarding Exam

We expect that different programmes will make different progress so we need to communicate regularly with the lecturers and the School. They will advise the students on the online examination matters if there is one.

c. **Grades and Results**

  ▪ **Calculation of Grades**

    We have decided that we will maintain to use grades so that students CGPA can be calculated as usual.

  ▪ **Semester Results**

    The second semester may be delayed depending on the amount of time we have to extend the second semester.

3.5.6 SEMESTER 3 – 2019/2020

It looks that our semester may need to be shifted slightly and adjusted accordingly.

a. **Delayed 3rd Semester**

  The 3rd semester may be delayed a few weeks to sort out the second semester issues.

b. **Online Learning**

  We have decided (for now) that the 3rd semester too will use the online learning mode. We hope by then we would be able to rectify all of the shortcomings based on the findings of the survey we did.

c. **E-Learning Platform**

  We are working towards developing a more comprehensive online learning platform that is integrated to a set of interactive online services that provide lecturers, learners, and others involved in the students' education with information, tools and resources to support and enhance education delivery and management. We also hope to improve on our LMS.

4.0 Online Teaching-Learning Implementation Issues

On the general implementation of online or e-learning, the majority of the lecturers conducted their lectures and tutorials through virtual meetings. Several modern approaches such as Problem Based Learning (PBL) and flipped classroom were utilised by some of our lecturers.
Almost all of the lecturers prefer Google Classroom as their main platform in delivering instructions to the students. Some delivered their lectures through video conferencing software such as Zoom and Google Hangouts / Google Meet.

For some reasons, none of the lecturers are using the University's LMS. Perhaps they were recommended to utilise education related online applications because of its reliability, ease of use, flexibility, and do not use much internet traffic. Several commonly used platforms are being utilised by the lecturers including Google products, Padlet, WhatsApp, and YouTube. A very minimal number of lecturers have explored and tried out other platforms that could diversify and enhance the students' online learning experience. Ease of use, comfortability, and reliability are the major reasons why lecturers prefer to use these platforms.

4.1.1 Attendance and Fulfilment of Course Requirement

Thus far attendance in all classes is always almost complete. The submission of requirements seems not a problem for the lecturers. Although some of the lecturers have not required any assessments from the students yet, they nevertheless are quite positive with regards to the on-time submission.

4.1.2 Students' Response to E-Learning

A larger number of students gave positive feedback with regards to the use of e-learning. The following are some of the lecturers' assessments:

- students find it very engaging
- very motivating for them because it is a new learning platform
- they find it an advantage because they are learning new skills
- students are exploring new online platforms for T&L
- they find it useful and practical, even though there were a few hiccups along the way
- students' participation is very good
- most students are committed and responded well
- students enjoyed the class especially the flexibility of lessons

However, a few students provided negative feedback on the implementation of e-learning. Some of these negative responses are as follows:

- some students struggle with using the platform as this is their first experience
- not able to focus on the online lecture due to the very poor internet connection in the hostel
- one or two are lagging due to no access to personal computer/laptop - had to borrow/share other's
- some do not have the devices to join the e-learning mode and are feeling left behind

4.1.3 Online Challenges for Students and Lecturers

Lecturers have identified the challenges that students encountered since the implementation of the online learning. The majority claimed that poor Internet connection and inadequacy of computers result in the poor transmission of learning materials and delivery of instruction. Minor challenges include *"not used to being independent"* and *"low level of student buy-in, and suddenness of transition".*

Similar to students' challenges, a lot of lecturers claimed that unreliable Internet connectivity is their main hurdle as well. They find the conduct of their lectures inefficient once the number of students increases. Some of them prefer to upload materials at night when fewer people are using the Internet which makes the connectivity faster.

Tasks related concerns emerge when the lecturers started marking students' output. They find it hard to mark non-printed assessment materials. Also, maintaining students' motivation is one of the challenges raised.

Verbatim comments from a lecturer;

1. *I upload my notes and assignments and students access it - I use google classroom*

2. *So far my students and I have no major problems except when I upload video which is sometimes part of my lecture.*

3. *Every time they lockin to access the notes they must leave their name, id number. So far my students have responded well and they help each other out. When one or two said they cannot access so others will help out.*

4. *So far I have given two assignments and they have return on time.*

5. *No major problems except internet slow at times. They communicate directly via email or WhatsApp if they have questions on the lecture topics or on assignments*

6. *So far I do not face major issues as I practise a give an take policy with the students. If you have problems and issues get back to me, if I cannot resolve as it is issues pertaining to internet or assessing classroom get your friends to help. So far it helps both the students and me work together well.*

7. *My class is on Thursday 9-12, but my notes are normally up by late Wednesday nite or early Thursday and I allow them to access it anytime and they need to lock in their id and name. Flexibility is important as times like this we need to allow them that cos if everyone is going into e-classroom at same time thats when we get complains they cannot get into the classroom. Important to me is you do your assignments on time as it reflects your seriousness on your studies and for me to grade you. I might be wrongly doing it but end of day they are graded base on their assignments and attendance, when or how is not an issue in times like these thats my opinion. As long as my assignments dateline are strictly followed by the students.*

Currently none of our academic staff are using LMS. This is mainly because not the online registration is not ready as such the students are not automatically registered in the system. If they used it students need to be given individual ID for every course they registered plus there also other limitations.

All choose to use the web apps. These are software programs that runs on a web server and they must be accessed through a web browser. Some of the popular educational app are; Kahoot, Google Classroom, Teach Learn Lead, Seesaw, Slack, Remind, Additio, Classtree etc. Most of our AIU Staff uses Google Classroom or Edmodo. AIU subscribed to Google Suite which means we have access to all the Apps including the Google Classroom; as such we have decided that Google Classroom would be the best option for standardization purposes.

Working from home and being online means our staff need to have good connection. Unfortunately, their home's Wifi are currently very slow and unstable. Our staff have resorted to using their mobile data. They have used it for video conferencing, uploading files and managing the students' coursework and assignments. They are using about 2-3 gigs per day for this purpose which means they need about 40-60 gigs per month. Currently Celcom prepaid Data Plan for 25GB is RM80.

For next semester we are working to have eModules for all our courses and we will work out a common template for this without compromising on creativity of the academics. We also need to relook at class scheduling as too many big classes at the same time are causing traffic congestion. In order to avoid this congestion, we are also using remote and asynchronous learning.

We have all agreed that the final exam will be converted to coursework and DVC A has to write to the VC as the chairperson of the Senate to obtain his consent and approval.

5.0 CONCLUSION

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper it is important that we have a Strategic Plan for Online Teaching-Learning not only for the short-term but also for the mid and long terms. However, what is urgent at the moment is to sort out the current situation. With all the shortcomings and the suddenness of the change in scenario we believe we have adapted rather well and timely. This is not to say that we have suddenly become experts and our system is perfect. It is far from perfect and we still have lots of room for improvement both at capability and capacity levels.

Sometimes in order to get online we need to be on the ground. There are many capacity issues that need to be done on the ground and that could not be done for as long as we are in a MCO situation. So, for now we will do our best to ensure that the capability level is enhanced.