

A Thematic Analysis Investigating the effect of Pandemic Covid-19 and Implementation of MCO Towards Taekwondo Activities and Programs in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Sporting events at international, regional and national levels have either been postponed or canceled due to the coronavirus outbreak across the globe. The sports industry has been heavily impacted and, in many ways, paralyzed by the pandemic. However, sports and recreational premises or facilities can still carry out certain operations limited to management and maintenance only; quarantine-based centralized training programs by the National Sports Council and camp-based training by state sports councils in Malaysia. The goal of this presentation is to answer questions and provide beneficial information to help increase understanding of the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on sports activities. The pandemic has in a way put a certain degree of a halt to sports

activities that require body contact or direct physical touch. This is what martial art is all about and most of the activities are restricted during the outbreak due to the nature of the sport itself. This paper reports the results of interviews done with those who are involved directly in the martial art sports of Taekwondo. The combination of deductive and semantic approaches of the Thematic Analysis method is used to analyze explicit opinions expressed in interviews done. The findings showed the responses of what has been anticipated by the researchers based on prior knowledge and the current situation. In addition, the suggestions given by the informants could be considered as the basis of innovative ways and strategies to alleviate the impact of Covid-19. More research could be done in future as part of the contribution to the new knowledge and solution of the ever-existing hardship during the pandemic.

Keywords: Covid-19, sports activities, martial arts, MCO, Taekwondo

INTRODUCTION

Most countries have implemented Movement Control Orders (MCO) from March 2020, which means all martial arts activity must cease till then. Malaysia is one of the nations that has been hit hard by the outbreak of the disease. There has been a significant influence on martial arts in Malaysia since the establishment of MCO. All martial arts-related activities, including tournaments, training, and friendly matches, must come to a halt. This is how the covid-19 virus is being contained in Malaysia. As the virus spread, local governments and sports organizations ramped up their efforts to contain [1]. Many people's lives were drastically altered as a result of the government's sudden and unprecedented lockdown restrictions, tightening of Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), social distancing, and announcement of a movement control order (MCO) for the whole country during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of this, some sports leagues and federations have decided to cancel all of their remaining games and tournaments [2]. The sickness has had a huge influence on organized team sports[3]. These situations have affected the attitudes and spirits of athletes and coaches[4]. Many people have been socially isolated as a result of the disease. The fact that athletes have been infected with COVID-19 since the outbreak has prompted concerns about athlete health. COVID-19 has also been connected to major health risks other than the time delays it causes in training and competition[5]. The future performance of athletes will be harmed if they don't get enough training now. When athletes are isolated for 2-4 weeks, their performance starts to deteriorate[6].

Taekwondo has been affected by the Covid-19 virus epidemic and the introduction of MCO. Taekwondo has become a global sport that exemplifies Korean sports culture, with over 60 million practitioners spread over 182 countries [7]. As a consequence, it has grown to be a global sport with a burgeoning international following and an official Olympic Winter Games event. Functional and even psychological issues interrupt the athlete's Taekwondo training and physical activities during the COVID-19. As a consequence of the government trying to tighten the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), social distance, and the declaration of a national movement control order (MCO) for fighting and contact sports, this condition is referred to as detraining, and it happens[8]. This is one of the main causes of the decline in the number of athletes in the country (detraining). The detraining syndrome may strike athletes for several reasons, such as injury, a change in the season, or overtraining. Many elite and non-elite athletes have experienced a loss in status (detraining) syndrome during the Covid-19 period while training in many countries and branches of the armed forces. Athletes with this illness see changes in max VO₂ and overall endurance, with the greatest losses occurring in special conditions and

coordination [9]. The more time athletes spend away from training as a result of the pandemic, the worse the adverse effects will be for them. Those who have been out of training because of Covid-19 for a lengthy time may begin to suffer mood swings, psychological variables, headaches, anorexia, insomnia, exhaustion, and mental issues[1]. Since many teams have changed their training regimens to include online components, this adjustment has been made to better encourage athletes while still complying with social distancing laws and lockdowns in their communities. A competition like this can't substitute "real" rivalry in socially isolated situations[10]. Even yet, only a small number of Taekwondo students returned to class when the lockdown was lifted. There might be a drop in numbers since parents and children are still afraid about contracting COVID-19 [11].

Several taekwondo clubs have incurred financial losses as a result of health and safety rules imposed by the federations on club facilities and training sites. Teams in the professional sphere face several difficulties, including negotiating advertising and sponsorship agreements, broadcasting games, and losing money from ticket sales. The possibility of losing advertising and sponsorship contracts is also a serious concern. According to [12], due to health concerns, demand for gyms with membership systems such as Taekwondo, Karate, Gymnastics, and Fitness halls has fallen, and many of these gyms have closed, as per Covid-19, a critical public health problem throughout the globe. It is up to the point that they were unable to pay their current rent, employees, and fixed expenditures, several clubs suffered financial losses. For various reasons, several bars and nightclubs had to decrease or even shut their doors. Because the prior study has not shown an influence of the covid-19 pandemic and the implementation of MCO on taekwondo activities, it is critical to do empirical research to have a thorough understanding of the phenomena. Since we don't know how the covid-19 pandemic and MCO implementation would affect taekwondo activities yet, we need to do the study on a sample of clubs in Malaysia that practice martial art. These findings were aimed at assessing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Malaysia's taekwondo community and the implementation of MCO in the country.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Numerous taekwondo events were unable to be conducted as a result of the pandemic, and some were converted to virtual. Additionally, the regulations were altered to reflect the appropriateness of the soup given by the health ministry and the National Security Council (NSC). According to the Taekwondo Malaysia (TM) website, seven major yearly events were postponed due to the covid-19 epidemic, as well as annual university and international competitions such as Majlis Sukan Universiti Malaysia (MASUM) and Asian University Game (AUG), which were mainly conducted online and some were rescheduled due to the Covid-19 outbreak. Numerous taekwondo clubs have suffered financial losses due to the federations' health and safety regulations in club buildings, training grounds, stadiums, and private club sports areas. Professional teams have many challenges in advertising and sponsorship deals, game broadcasts, and revenue loss from spectators. Additionally, the danger of advertising and sponsorship deals being terminated is significant. According to [12], Covid-19, an essential public health issue worldwide, has decreased demand for gyms with membership systems such as Taekwondo, Karate, Gymnastics, and Fitness halls owing to health concerns, and many of these gyms have closed. Numerous clubs sustained financial losses to the point that they could not pay existing rent, personnel, and fixed costs. Numerous clubs were forced to reduce or close their doors due to economic difficulties.

Since the impact of pandemic covid-19 and the application of MCO on taekwondo activities have not been found in previous research studies, it is extremely important to do empirical research on this phenomenon to get complete knowledge. Therefore, to gain a new understanding and a clear image of how the pandemic covid-19 and the implementation of MCO would affect taekwondo activities, we need to research with the sample from Taekwondo clubs in Malaysia. Thus, this study was aimed to review the effect of pandemic covid-19 and the implementation of MCO towards taekwondo activities and programs in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)

Malaysia has strict regulations in place for sporting activities throughout the pandemic. The National Security Council (MKN) and the Ministry of Health (KKM) are the two major bodies in charge of advising the government on actions that can be carried out. Combat sports such as Taekwondo have been impacted in Malaysia start with the implementation of the Movement Control Order (PKP). This is due to the physical distance that all Malaysians must adhere to. In addition, the most important preventative measures are frequent handwashing and keeping at least one meter apart from each other [13].

Taekwondo practitioners and athletes will enjoy a little respite when the government relaxes SOPs during the Recovery Movement Control Order (PKPP). Training can be carried out under stringent SOPs such as 1) no-contact training; 2) no match play; and 3) no tournament organization. This includes keeping a physical distance and always sanitizing the equipment and training area after usage. Some Taekwondo organizations and gyms required their students to bring a face shield with them to training. However, the practitioners' participation is not as good as it was before the pandemic.[11] stated that parents and students are still fearful and cautious with the conditions of Covid-19.

Malaysia has recently moved to a National Recovery Plan (PPN) with four phases introduced by the government. According to[4], the fourth and final phase of PPN will allow the economic and social sectors to reopen entirely. In the case of Taekwondo, the new SOPs will only help the practitioner after the states reach the third phase. Unfortunately, only *poomsae* categories in individuals and teams are permitted to practice and compete, while sparring events must wait until the states progress to the final phase[14].

Government practices towards taekwondo activities during pandemics and MCO

The Malaysian government realizes how essential it is for the sports and recreation sector to be open to the public. The Covid-19 issue, as well as the government's demanding efforts to control illness transmission, have a severe influence on the public's mental health and well-being [15]. The previous study also supported those sports and recreational activities can reduce people's stress and anxiety during pandemics [16-18].

The necessity of elite athletes being competitive during the pandemic has compelled the government to develop solutions. 'Road to Tokyo 2020' was one of the first government-approved plans to establish a coordinated training camp for athletes. A Covid-19 screening was performed upon registration, and athletes must quarantine for 30 days or equal to two incubation periods. Athletes are not permitted to leave the program and must take the Covid-19 test before the training camp ends[19]. These SOPs can be used as a guideline for Taekwondo Malaysia (TM) to train elite athletes for the Sea Games 2021 after failing to qualify for the Olympic Games in 2020, as well as to plan for future competitions.

Concentrating solely on elite athletes without considering initiating activities with other taekwondo practitioners would undoubtedly reduce ability, skills, and performance. According to [20], after a long period of detraining, fencers' ability to alter direction decreased. According to these data, 31 weeks of interrupted training resulted in a reduction in some training gains gained during the competition season. There is a loss of neuromuscular and cardiovascular efficiency, which leads to a decrease in strength and endurance as well as an increase in the risk of injury from detraining [21].

The Malaysian government has established 'sports bubbles' in the hope that all sports communities and supporters would embrace the new normal that will be implemented for sports [22]. As of present, there are no clear instructions from the Youth and Sports Ministry (KBS) or adequate SOPs from the TM on when the nations would begin taekwondo activities when they enter the third phase of the PPN. After getting clearance from the KBS, the competition may begin to be organized, with general SOPs to be followed Youth and Sports Ministry, 2021.

Effects of COVID-19

Coronavirus disease or known as COVID-19 cases steeply increase and announce as pandemic as the virus was spotted throughout the world in early 2020. There are limitations on businesses and activity after the pandemic COVID-19 hit whereas only essential business can operate at a restricted time, shopping for food and medicine, and physical activities limited to one person. [23] stated that this pandemic has impacted practically every element of human existence, including sports, and has set off a chain reaction. Falling in income generation from several industries due to the reduction in demands and supply has been reported by governments internationally after the outbreak [24]. [25] added that every reduction of 100,000 tourist arrival all over the world will impact the decrease of 0.46 billion USD in the tourism industry in the first year. Moreover, the consequences of this loss are not limited to individuals, but also influence a significant aspect of society as a whole [26]. The influence of COVID-19 also has a big impact on restaurant revenue as customer demand drops and everyday operations are disrupted according to the current scenario [27]. [28] found that a negative relationship between the decrease in physical activities and increase in food intake can lead to the development of non-communicable diseases during the pandemic. [29] added that individual that completed their quarantine shows symptoms of acute stress disorder.

Martial arts activities

Martial arts training is beneficial as a branch of activity in youth work and youth organizations because it engages young people from all walks of life ([30]. For millions of practitioners, martial arts provide beneficial and satisfying exercise. Higher general health and balance, as well as a better sense of psychological well-being, reduces depression and anxiety are all advantages of this exercise[28]. Due to the pandemic, people are being forced to accept the new norms and that is the biggest challenge for the martial art activities to be conducted. [31] stated that sports events such as Olympics and Paralympics games, tournaments, and even training have been halted in most countries during this pandemic of COVID-19. In this case, it can increase the number of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and chronic stress among practitioners since they may spell the end of their professional careers and affect their source of income [32]. [33] added that this isolation or movement control order (MCO) can decrease the practitioners' performance since they cannot go to the gym and have proper training with

the professional or their mentor which will lead to an increase in body fat and low quality of sleep. Furthermore, a study of Taekwondo athletes discovered that when the detraining group stopped training, their speed and intensity reduced, resulting in a performance reduction. [34]. In addition, according to [35], the stress levels of the competitors competing in the World Sambo Championship were influenced by the mood disruption caused by the worry of the COVID-19 pandemic and female athletes were more anxious than male athletes.

[36] found that student-athletes stand to lose a lot in terms of how cancelled competition seasons affect their athletic careers as campus activities need to be stopped. According to [23, 25], the area for activities for young people has been limited since the pandemic happened. Additionally, [37] stated that during the first COVID-19 restrictions, the largest number of physically inactive, frustrated and depression are among practitioners and unmarried people. This happened due to the academic challenge, the closing of the fitness centre and the cancellation of all structured team and individual physical activity. Considering movement control order (MCO), most practitioners also are concerned about losing their fitness and skills since their time training needs to be cut [38]. However, a previous study also found out that practitioners who have good connections with their teammates will have less stress and be able to maintain fit and active during this pandemic [39-41]. In addition, practitioners who got greater support and felt more attached to their teammates reported less breakdown of their athletic identity and in most cases, it can improve mental health and well-being[36].

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Approach to Data Collection

Consistent with [19], this study used thematic analysis in an open-ended way to investigate how participants experienced the effect of pandemic covid-19 and implementation of MCO towards taekwondo activities and programs. The researchers employed a purposive sampling strategy whereby they engaged with taekwondo instructors (service providers) who deliver training to students as part of their ongoing professional development.

Interview Process

Participant interviews occurred online through Google Meet on a prearranged and mutually agreed day. Interviews were semi-structured; a guide provided a loose structure within which to explore the topics of interest. The interviewer prompted participants to expand on relevant and interesting responses.

Informant

Five Martial Art Taekwondo instructors who are willing to be an informant from different Malaysian states were interviewed to present the findings.

The first informant is Encik Mohammad Kamarul Nizam, an instructor from Selangor with almost one thousand students. This academy has many branches including Perak, Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, and Perlis. The second informant, Encik Ahmad Adli Hadi Bin Rosli, an instructor which the academy located in Selangor, with 70 students. While the third informant, Encik Juana Ahmad, an instructor from Selangor, handles 50 students.

Informant 4 is Encik Ahmad Fahmy Al-Haqim Bin Harun, coaching for 200 students in Terengganu, and finally, informant 5 Encik Che Muhammad Tarmizy bin Che Ismail who is working at Selangor Taekwondo Academy handles 200 students. All of them are working as part-timers at the taekwondo academy, except Encik Muhammad Tarmizy who works as a permanent instructor.

Data Analysis

This study used thematic analysis [19]. This required the transcription of interview recordings through Google Meet and followed coding stages. Initially, the researchers read and re-read transcripts to identify potential themes. The second level of analysis involved the authors reviewing these initial codes with details elaboration how the effect of pandemic covid-19 and implementation of MCO towards taekwondo activities and programs in Malaysia in participants' lives informed this process. At the third stage, analysis conducted will identify quotes that were congruent with the themes. Next, the researchers reviewed articles before defining and naming them. Finally, once themes were finalized, the authors' write-up of the report began.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The pandemic does affect many organizations, including the Martial Art Academies. These results are proven through the findings from the instructors interviewed:

Profit and income – all informants have been affected since there is less new enrollment. The yield of the academies is also affected because it depends on the registered students. Lack of students' registration means less income generation which shows the lousy signing. Moreover, some existing students refused to continue the class as their parents' income was also affected. Consequently, the academy is unable to pay reasonable remuneration to the staff. The informant still needs to sustain a low pay rate at the workplace since the academy still runs the class with few students. The same statement also has been discussed by [12].

Lack of Student's Participation – The majority of the informants are aware of the lacking of students' registration since MCO 1. The implementation of MCO dragged the academy into a red zone where students are not interested in online learning when joining Taekwondo classes. They believe these martial art skills should be practiced through physical activities. This also brings another problem caused minor attraction to potential students. This is the same as [10] study on the dropping numbers of students' registration and participation because of the impact of parents' income and the fear of getting infected by the Covid-19 virus.

No physical Activities and Championship Tournament – The response from informants 3 and 5 show the disappointment when the MCO has crippled the activities of martial art and championships tournaments, which lead to the most challenging evaluation for students' performance. Most of the assessment depends on the high level of interactivity. This circumstance is supported by [42], and [4] stated that many martial arts activities need to be canceled and affect the morale of instructors and students. Furthermore, all the training and competition schedules which bear a high cost need to be delayed.

Lack of Infrastructures to Implement Online Learning – According to informant 5, the branches have been confronted with a lack of online learning infrastructures. It is challenging for the academy to purchase the equipment and infrastructures needed for all branches during MCO due to financial constraints.

While to answer the second objective, the analysis had produced three themes:

Enrollment, Class, and Evaluation Assessment Implementation during MCO

Since the implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO), all classes have been conducted online. All informants need to be ready mentally and physically in conducting the online classes. However, informant 4 needs to conduct both online and physical classes, yet there are no interactivity exercises, but they still adhere to the proper SOP. The students have been divided into small groups for easier supervision. However, all informants complained about the toughness of online class evaluation. They need to change the way of evaluation to suit the situation. However, the evaluation of individual and team such as *poomsae* categories are permitted to be practiced and completed with sparring events Youth and Sports Ministry[43].

Hope for the continuity of Taekwondo Martial Art activity despite the prolong of MCO

Informant 1 stated that there is no hope for the activities to continue. Many students are showing less interest in joining Taekwondo classes during the pandemic because of the online learning engagement. Sooner or later, the academy has to be shut down. While informant 2 and 3 believe there is still hope for continuous martial arts activities if the Ministry of Youth and Sports is being pro-active by producing more championships and giving full support to execute more martial arts events even during MCO. In the meantime, informant 4 mentioned there is still hope for continuing the martial art activities either online or offline. This is very important to ensure that martial art such as Taekwondo could withstand any transformation in its execution. Online learning could at least give ideas to students in learning more new techniques and strengthen the knowledge that has already been gained before. Through YouTube videos and recording, they could learn many techniques and prepare for physical activities once the MCO ended. Lastly, informant 5 mentioned the running of the martial art academy could be continued if the government have the schools re-open by organizing many taekwondo activities and events with proper SOP.

The Perspective Approach to Establish Taekwondo Martial Art Academy if the MCO Prolong

From the informants' point of view, there are many approaches in order to have the academy operates continuously:

Informant 1 suggested that a holistic vaccination program for students immediately be imposed so that schools, universities, and academic institutions could have held the classes with proper Standard Operation Procedures (SOP). This will increase the registration of new students. While Informants 2 and 3 suggested that the committee of Taekwondo Malaysia Club needs to be replaced with the extrovert person consists of the younger generation who are pro-active, competitive, and possess a clear mission and vision. On the other hand, informant 3 also suggested:

- Provide extra training to upgrade taekwondo skills and techniques to the instructors.
- Parents should give support and encourage their children to enroll in martial arts sports such as Taekwondo.
- The media should play significant roles in promoting Taekwondo as one of the beneficial and famous Martial Art of Physical Sport.

In the meantime, Informants 3 and 5 agreed that during the implementation of MCO, the Ministry of Youth and Sports should instruct for classes to be held with no body contact activities (a strict SOP) yet actively organized e- championships. In addition, they also need to support the online learning martial art classes to sustain students' momentum. Therefore, it is suggested that physical tournaments can be replaced with e-tournaments.

LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study's limitations include just a few studies on taekwondo activities that have been discovered. This is because of concerns about the practitioners' safety since the World Health Organization (WHO) discovered new Covid-19 variants that are more lethal than the initial outbreak. Furthermore, future studies should study new mechanisms and acceptable approaches for performing taekwondo activities like grading and tournaments in this new normal. Finally, studies should look at the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic and the application of MCO to other combat sports or activities (e.g., Silat, Muay Thai, or Mixed Martial Arts).

CONCLUSION

Overall, the result from this study shows that the pandemics have a terrible impact on martial arts academies in ensuring the continuity of this sport. It affects the organization's performance, the staff, and students in terms of mental and physical health besides financial aspects. This would cause instructors' disappointment in hoping for a championship tournament and students' frustrations of hoping for physical training. The discrepancies of online infrastructures would cause the failure of mission and vision achievement would jeopardize the organizations' reputations. The secondary objectives were the survival of Martial Art Taekwondo Sports activities. It could be continuous if the online learning approach gets fully supported by the Ministry of Youth and Sports with active and attractive activities. As mentioned, the ideas could be implemented with proper channels and SOP. Even though the participation is getting slow, with the new norm and engaging in the attractive activities permitted by MYS, it could attract back students' attention through famous Martial Art, Taekwondo. This chapter discussed the findings of research objectives in general. Five questions were asked to the Taekwondo coaches from different clubs in Malaysia. Two issues were discussed in the literature review. First, on how Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) affected the martial arts activities. Second, what are the government practices towards taekwondo activities during pandemics and MCO? These two issues were then brought to the taekwondo coaches for them to give their feedbacks.

Based on the responses and feedbacks given by the instructors, it can be concluded that despite the Covid-19 outbreak, most taekwondo clubs are continuing the activities of training and practices related to the martial arts, especially Taekwondo via online classes. Those clubs had to stop all physical activities due to the MCO restrictions by Majlis Keselamatan Negara (MKN) to contain the pandemic. This has led to the reduction of students' engagement in the activities since it is quite unusual for the students to practice

taekwondo online. The direct impact of these changes can be seen almost immediately when the clubs can no longer make any profit out of student fees and payments. This has led to monetary problems for the clubs. Some of the instructors had to do other jobs to survive during the pandemic era.

Despite all of these difficulties, most clubs are still having high hopes that the Taekwondo sports and activities can still be saved and able to continue with the help and support from the government. A specific Standard Operation Procedures (SOP) should be introduced especially by the Ministry of Youth and Sports to ensure the survival of Taekwondo.

Based on the instructors' perspectives, tournaments and practices still can be done through the online platform. With the help of a vaccination program too, tournaments are also possible to be held with proper SOP. The mass media can also play their roles in increasing the awareness and publicity of the taekwondo activities in the country during the pandemic.

Recommendations

The study has shown that most of the instructors are hoping that there will be solutions developed to preserve and ensure the survival of the martial arts activities even during the pandemic, especially for Taekwondo.

There are a few recommendations that have been mentioned by the instructors. In order to help the martial arts sport to continue, it is highly recommended that the Ministry of Youth and Sports pay greater attention to martial sports like the other sports too. Furthermore, the introduction of new guidelines, regulations and SOP should be implemented to make sure the safety of those who are involved in the activities. Other than online classes, it is also recommended that video recording in teaching is also used to enhance the current teaching styles. The teaching and practices should be continuously carried out as this could assist the instructors and clubs to survive on difficult days like this. To help the industry, in future research, researchers might also increase the number of respondents to increase the generalizability of the study. This study can also be widened to any other martial arts sport such as silat, karate, wushu, and many more.

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