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# The Practice of Hegemony by Lecturers of a Public University in Virtual Classrooms

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## **ABSTRACT**

The ability to control or influence others to follow instructions demonstrates hegemony, or power. In the context of education, the success of teaching and learning often hinges on the power the educators hold in the classroom. However, teaching methods must adapt to varying circumstances. In the era of technology, virtual-teaching platforms have supplanted traditional in-person classroom interactions. This paper aims to explore the challenges lecturers face during virtual classrooms and their strategies in asserting power to address these challenges. The study surveyed lecturers from UiTM Kedah using a questionnaire to gain insight into their experiences and strategies. The results indicated that respondents effectively utilized different bases of power to navigate the challenges of virtual classrooms. The findings also suggest that demonstrating power in a virtual classroom requires diverse and adaptable approaches to ensure the success of the teaching and learning process, ultimately benefiting all students.

**Keywords**: Hegemony, Power, Virtual classrooms, Challenges, Strategies



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The term hegemony originated from the Greek term hegemonia, which meant "dominance over", and was used to describe political relations and power. However, Italian politician and Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci widened the definition of hegemony and the word was later given a second perspective by the 19th century referring to the social or cultural influence wielded by a dominant entity over others of its kind (Torro et al., 2022). Generally, teacher's hegemony can be defined as an embodiment of power in influencing, which is sometimes even performed by means of coercion (Torro et al., 2022).

A teacher's presence in the classroom should ideally result in student obedience and cooperation, as the teacher holds authority over the students. Rahim and Afza (1992, p. 611) as cited in Basem Ali (2013), define power as "the ability of one party to change or control the behaviour, attitudes, opinions, objectives, needs, and values of another party." Failure to recognize and submit to a teacher's power in the classroom can lead to an ineffective teaching and learning process. Basem Ali (2013) emphasizes

that the key to maintaining classroom discipline lies in students' acceptance and adherence to the teacher's authority. In recent years, the balance of power dynamics and the importance of fostering a positive teacher-student relationship have been increasingly recognized. Gini-Newman and Case (2015) highlight that effective teaching involves not only asserting authority but also building trust and respect. This balance can prevent the misuse of power and create a more conducive learning environment. Furthermore, collaborative and student-cantered teaching methods, as suggested by Cornelius-White (2007), can help in maintaining discipline while encouraging student engagement and autonomy.

Recent studies have also emphasized the importance of relational dynamics in the classroom. According to Sutcliffe and Jackson (2019), fostering a positive teacher-student relationship can significantly impact student behaviour and learning outcomes. Additionally, a study by Jennings and Greenberg (2019) indicates that teachers who develop strong emotional connections with their students are more effective in managing classroom behaviour and promoting a positive learning environment.

Torro et al (2022) pointed out that a teacher must be authoritative, and at the same time, he or she is required to guide students in achieving learning competence through gentleness act. However, the teaching profession these days presents a challenge like no other. An excessive exercise of power can lead to power abuse, while inadequate use of power can result in the teacher losing authority. Toro et al. (2022) illustrated when the teacher presents himself as simple, students tend to ignore him; and if the teacher looks luxurious, the students sneer at him because working as a teacher is not identical with appearances.

Even in physical classrooms, lecturers already face various challenges in asserting their power over students, ranging from classroom management to dealing with problematic student behaviour (Smith, Brown & Jones, 2021). However, the year 2020 brought an unprecedented event with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, forcing all teaching and learning institutions to opt for online teaching. This global crisis forced all educational institutions to rapidly transition to online teaching and learning (Dhawan, 2020), presenting new challenges for lecturers in maintaining authority and managing the virtual classroom (Taylor, 2021). The field of education is evolving in tandem with advancements in technology and changing societal needs. There are new modes of learning being practised that challenge traditional educational paradigms. At Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), classes have expanded beyond physical meetings in classrooms. Lecturers are encouraged to implement blended learning, which combines face-to-face meetings with online classes (Graham, 2013). This hybrid approach allows for greater flexibility and accessibility in education.

In conducting the classes virtually, lecturers conduct online classes using various platforms such as uFuture, Google Classroom, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook. These platforms offer diverse tools and features to facilitate interactive and engaging learning experiences. Despite the benefits of blended learning, lecturers face significant challenges in asserting their authority and maintaining classroom management, particularly in virtual environments (Moorhouse, 2020). The shift to virtual classrooms required lecturers to adapt their teaching strategies and find new ways to assert their authority in a virtual context. The lack of physical presence and direct interaction posed unique challenges in maintaining student engagement, discipline, and motivation (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). Therefore, this paper aims to explore lecturers' perspectives on the challenges they face in virtual classrooms and the strategies they employ to assert their power and authority over students in this new learning environment.

Key areas of focus include the effectiveness of different online platforms, the impact of technological issues on teaching and learning, the role of communication and interaction in virtual classrooms, and the strategies lecturers use to manage student behaviour and ensure active participation. Additionally, the paper examines the balance between maintaining authority and fostering a supportive and collaborative online learning environment.

By understanding the challenges and strategies related to power dynamics in virtual classrooms, this study aims to provide insights that can inform best practices and support lecturers in navigating the complexities of online education. The findings can contribute to the development of guidelines and resources that enhance the effectiveness of blended learning and improve the overall quality of education at UiTM and similar institutions (Bozkurt et al., 2020).

The specific objectives of this study are:

- 1. To identify the main challenges faced by lecturers during online and distance learning.
- 2. To explore the strategies the lecturers, use to assert their authority and manage classroom dynamics in a virtual setting.

This paper aims to study the lecturers' perspectives on the challenges faced during VIRTUAL CLASSROOMS and how they assert their power over students in this context. Specifically, the research seeks to address the following questions:

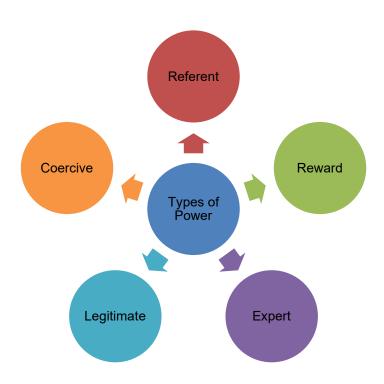
- 1. What are the challenges faced by lecturers in virtual classrooms?
- 2. How do lecturers assert their power to the students in virtual classrooms?

The findings from this study are expected to benefit lecturers and inform future research on effective teaching strategies in virtual classrooms.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The assertion of hegemony or power by a lecturer in a classroom is already difficult even during face-to-face interaction. Paramasivam (2007) stated that the exercise of power involves a hidden conflict and clashes of interest. In relation to this, Ozer et al. (2013) mentioned that the task of negotiating power between students and instructors affect how both parties choose to communicate and respond to each other. Wolff et al. (2015) drew a line between good versus successful teaching, specifying that the learning achievements of students are the main determinant of successful teaching.

Therefore, this study uses a framework by French & Raven (1959) that suggested the five bases of power as cited in Thomas (2014).



**Diagram 1** Five Bases of Power Framework

# Table 1 Power Explanation

Referent	Referent power measures how much the students like and respect the teacher. This can be developed through positive reinforcements such as love, care and motivation.
Reward	Reward power involves providing something positive (positive reinforcement) or removing something negative (negative reinforcement). Positive reinforcement is achieved by providing approval, privileges or other forms of compensation when the students demonstrate appropriate behaviour or do well in any tests or assignments.
Expert	Expert power deals with the extent the students see the teacher as competent and knowledgeable. When students can tell that the teachers know what they are doing, it gives the teacher some authority and the right to lead the students.
Legitimate	Legitimate power is related to mundane matters such as controlling the classroom time, determining what should be studied, regulating interaction and the like. This type of power does not last as the students start to become comfortable, the students will begin to test the teachers unless the teachers have expert and/ or referent power.
Coercive	Coercive power involves punishment if the students do not conform to the teacher's influence attempt, which in many ways is the opposite of reward power.

The five types of power remain relevant as they are widely used in studies on power by educators in recent times. A study by Ford (2003) found that reward, coercion, reference and expertise are used in classroom management, especially in dealing with students' behaviour. Another recent study that

looked at students' views of teacher power in college classroom found that referent, expert, and reward power are viewed as prosocial forms of power and are positively associated with cognitive learning, affective learning, and student motivation, while legitimate and coercive power are viewed by students as antisocial forms of power and are negatively associated with these same learning outcomes. A more recent study by Reid and Kawash (2017) added that prosocial forms of power have been the prosocial bases of power have been found to be positively associated with learning outcomes while the antisocial power bases have been negatively associated with learning outcomes.

Torry et al (2022) in their study found that the teacher's hegemony has a significant correlation with students' critical thinking skills; and the teachers are also fully responsible for students' learning at schools although teachers' hegemony is sometimes dominant. Torro et al. (2022) revealed that a study by Gunawan and Torro (2021:121-128) also showed that the hegemony of teachers at schools was in high category; and the high level of teachers' hegemony at schools is the consequence of teachers' democratic, authoritarian, and permissive leadership patterns and styles. Gunawan and Torro's (2021) descriptions of teachers' hegemony which are democratic, authoritarian, and permissive, are similar to French and Raven's (1959) framework of power which are legitimate, coercive and reward (positive).

Online learning offers a different set of challenges that can hinder the success of the teaching and learning process. From students' perspectives, Dube (2021) in the study to identify the challenges of Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) History students had to face in online classes during Covid 19, found the challenges include accessibility to university facilities and internet connection, heavy workload, individual learning, home distractions, lack of parental support and economic conditions. The challenges faced by the students are a challenge to the lecturers as well to assert their power over the students. In addition to that, Gilbert (2015) in Dube (2021) mentioned that there is no assurance at all that academics/online instructors apply the same rigour as they do with face-to-face learning, and if online learning does not maintain academic rigour, it might hinder teaching and learning.

Besides academic rigour, the quality of instruction is another issue that needs consideration when one talks about online learning. It is the responsibility of online instructors to ensure the quality of online teaching. Gurung (2021) included 430 respondents from various institutions in Maharashtra, India, to find out the challenges faced by teachers in online teaching. Gurung (2021) found 75.4% of the respondents reported difficulties to teach students in remote areas due to poor connectivity, lack of strong internet access, no electricity and no computer are the main difficulties faced by the teachers to reach students in remote areas via online, similar to the findings in Dube (2021). Another crucial finding by Gurung (2021) was the respondents reported that teachers cannot exercise physical control on the learners where 57.03% of the respondents agreed that monitoring discipline is the challenge faced by them while taking online classes.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

In carrying out the study, firstly, a pilot study was conducted to test the effectiveness of the methods of study. The pilot study only involved the lecturers of Akademi Pengajian Bahasa (The Academy of Language Studies) at UiTM Kedah Branch; and 12 respondents responded to the questionnaire. Nonetheless, the pilot study revealed the effectiveness of the methods as the respondents managed to understand the questions and responded well.

The study uses a quantitative method where respondents answered a questionnaire. The questionnaire was adapted from Reid & Kawash (2017). There were 29 questions which are a mix of multiple-choice questions and short-answer questions, testing the use of the five bases of power which are referent, reward, expert, legitimate and coercive to cater to the challenges the respondents encountered in virtual classrooms. The questions were typed in a Google Form.

The respondents of this study involved lecturers of UiTM Kedah Branch of different teaching backgrounds. They were approached to answer the questionnaire via official emails, WhatsApp group and personal accounts. The responses were later coded into Google Sheets/Excel to assist in analysing the data. Later, each of the responses was coded into SPSS to analyse the result. The data were run using the latest version of SPSS software.

# 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The objectives of this study are to identify the main challenges faced by lecturers during online learning and to explore the strategies that the lecturers use to assert their authority and manage classroom dynamics in a virtual setting. The respondents were lecturers of Universiti Teknologi MARA Kedah Branch from various educational backgrounds.

Questions 1 to 4 tested on the first research question, which was to identify the challenges that the respondents faced to assert power in virtual classrooms.

# Research Question 1: What are the challenges faced by lecturers in virtual classrooms?

Question 1: Do you have power over the students in virtual classrooms?		
No	24%	
Other	2%	

The first table illustrates responses to the question, "Do you have power over the students in virtual classrooms?" An overwhelming majority, 74% of respondents, affirmed that they do feel they have power over students in virtual classrooms. This suggests that despite the shift to a virtual environment, many lecturers still perceive themselves as maintaining a level of authority and control over their students. In contrast, 24% of respondents indicated that they do not feel they have power over students in this setting. This minority reflects a group of lecturers who may find the virtual classroom environment challenging in terms of exerting influence and maintaining discipline. The remaining 2% of respondents chose "Other," indicating perspectives that may not fit neatly into the categories of "Yes" or "No," possibly pointing to situational or conditional factors affecting their sense of power.

Question 2: Do you have less power over the students in the classroom than in physical classrooms?		
More	50%	
Same	43%	
Other	1%	

The second table addresses the question, "Do you have less power over the students in the classroom than in physical classrooms?" Here, 50% of respondents believe they have more power in virtual classrooms compared to physical ones. This finding is intriguing as it suggests that some lecturers find virtual settings more conducive to exerting control, possibly due to features like mute functions, controlled chat interactions, and the ability to monitor student activity more closely through digital means. On the other hand, 43% of respondents feel that their power remains the same in both virtual and physical classrooms. This group's response indicates a perception of consistency in their authority regardless of the teaching environment. Meanwhile, 6% of respondents feel they have less power in virtual classrooms, highlighting challenges such as engagement difficulties, technological issues, and the lack of physical presence that may undermine their authority. Lastly, 1% selected "Other," suggesting nuanced views on how power dynamics may shift depending on specific circumstances.

Question 3: Do you face challenges in virtual classroom?		
No	23%	
Other	2%	

For the third question, "Do you face challenges in virtual classrooms?" reveals that a substantial majority of lecturers, 75%, acknowledge encountering difficulties while teaching online. This indicates that despite the flexibility and technological advancements of virtual learning environments, most lecturers still find it challenging to manage and engage students effectively. Only 23% of the respondents reported not facing any challenges, suggesting that a minority have either adapted well to the virtual format or do not perceive the difficulties as significant. The remaining 2% of respondents selected "Other," indicating specific or unique challenges not captured by the straightforward yes/no options.

# Question 4: What are the challenges you face in virtual classrooms?

Students' attitude
Students' attendance
Students 'unavailability of devices
internet instability
Students' computer literacy
Students' lack of cooperation
Difficult to test students' understanding of lesson

The fourth question delves deeper into the specific challenges lecturers face in virtual classrooms. The responses highlight several key issues: student attitudes, attendance problems, unavailability of devices, internet instability, students' computer literacy, lack of cooperation, and difficulties in assessing students' understanding of the lessons. These challenges underscore the multifaceted nature of virtual teaching, where technical, logistical, and behavioural issues all intersect to impact the educational experience. The varied nature of these challenges suggests that solutions need to be equally diverse, addressing both technological infrastructure and pedagogical strategies to ensure effective online learning. Also, the responses from the respondents in Question 4 matched the findings of a study by Dube (2021) where it was found the challenges include accessibility to university facilities and

internet connection, heavy workload, individual learning, home distractions, lack of parental support and economic conditions.

The next set of questions; questions 5 to 29 tested on the second research question which was to identify the strategies that the respondents applied to asset power in virtual classrooms. Questions 5 to 29 used Likert Scale from 1 to 5.

Research Question 2: How do lecturers assert their power based on the different bases of power, to the students in virtual classrooms?

Questio	on 5:	
build rapport by relating to students in an open and approachable manner		
Disagree	1%,	
Neutral	11%	
Agree	47%	
Totally agree	41%	
Questio	on 6:	
I check in to ensure students under	stand what is expected of them.	
Neutral	3%	
Agree	46%	
Totally agree	51%	
Questio	on 7:	
I try to see the learning experience	from my students' perspective.	
Neutral	4%	
Agree	53%	
Totally agree	43%	
Questio	on 8:	
I am genuine and authentic who	en interacting with students.	
Neutral	2%	
Agree	44%	
Totally agree	54%	
Questio	on 9:	
I identify commonalities	shared with students.	
Disagree	2%	
Neutral	11%	
Agree	52%	
Totally agree	35%	

Question 10: I relate to students by sharing personal stories.	
Disagreed	6%
Neutral	26%
Agreed	36%
Totally agreed	28%

Questions 5 to 10 showed the application of referent power, where it can be developed through positive reinforcements such as love, care and motivation as Thomas (2014) suggested. The questions tested on the respondents' positive relationship with the students by building rapport in an open and approachable manner, showing care and understanding and by relating to students. The high percentages of respondents who agreed with the statements suggested they applied referent power in virtual classrooms.

Question 11:		
I publicly recognize students who exceed expectations in course performance.		
Disagree	4%	
Neutral	22%	
Agree	44%	
Totally agree	30%	

Question 12: I negotiate details like assignment deadlines with students.	
Disagree	2%
Neutral	4%
Agree	36%
Totally agree	57%

Question 13: I commend students when they demonstrate mastery of course material.		
Agree	47%	
Totally agree	47%	

Question 14:		
I give out compliments or praise to students who follow instructions.		
Neutral	3%	
Agree	41%	
Totally agree	56%	

Question 15: I reward students for complying with requests.	
Disagree	4%
Neutral	21%
Agree	45%
Totally agree	24%

Questions 11 to 15 showed the application of reward power. Reward power involves positive reinforcement or removes negative reinforcement (Thomas, 2014). Positive reinforcement can be shown via approval or other form of reward. Based on the high percentages of respondents who agreed with the statements suggested they applied reward power in virtual classrooms.

The next set of questions dealt with the respondents' expert power. Thomas (2014) mentioned expert power deals with the extent the students see the teacher as competent and knowledgeable and it gives the teacher some authority and the right to lead the students.

Question	16:
I ensure lessons and assignments are clearly organized and well delivered	
Agree	38%
Totally agree	62%
Question	17:
I demonstrate advanced knowledge/	expertise in course content areas.
Neutral	4%
Agree	40%
Totally agree	56%
Question	18:
I design lessons in a way that's	best for student learning.
Neutral	8%
Agree	40%
Totally agree	52%
Question	19:
I discuss current theory an	d research in courses.
Totally Disagree	1%

Based on the high percentages of the responses, the respondents largely suggested that they applied expert power in the classroom.

22% 42%

30%

Neutral

Agree Totally agree

The next strategy in the assertion of power in virtual classrooms is legitimate power and the next set of questions dealt with the assertion of this type of power.

Question 20: I communicate to students to never disobey instructions or ignore requests.	
Neutral	7%
Agree	48%
Totally agree	43%

Question 21:		
I communicate to students that teacher needs take priority over theirs.		
Totally Disagree	9%	
Disagree	11%	
Neutral	32%	
Agree	33%	
Totally agree	15%	

Question 22:		
I maintain formal and distant relationships with students.		
Totally Disagree	4%	
Disagree	13%	
Neutral	30%	
Agree	28%	
Totally agree	25%	

Question 23: I maintain complete and total control of the classroom.		
Disagree	6%	
Neutral	15%	
Agree	45%	
Totally agree	32%	

Question 24:  I draw attention to students if they do not perform up to expectations.	
Neutral	5%
Agree	56%
Totally agree	38%

For this set of questions testing on legitimate power, the responses suggested that the respondents applied legitimate power. Thomas (2014) mentioned legitimate power is related to mundane matters such as controlling the classroom time, determining what should be studied and regulating interaction. However, this type of power does not last as the students start to become comfortable, the students will begin to test the teachers unless the teachers have expert and/ or referent power.

The final strategy in the assertion of power in virtual classrooms is coercive power. Thomas (2014) mentioned coercive power is the opposite of reward power as it involves punishment if the students do not conform to the teacher's influence attempt.

Question 25:		
I assert my authority if students question or challenge course policy.		
Totally	5%	
Disagree		
Disagree	6%	
Neutral	24%	
Agree	43%	
Totally agree	22%	

Question 26:		
I put students on guilt trips if they hand in assignments late.		
Totally	11%	
Disagree		
Disagree	21%	
Neutral	28%	
Agree	23%	
Totally agree	17%	

Question 2:		
I punish students if they do not follow instructions.		
Totally	22%	
Disagree		
Disagree	21%	
Neutral	29%	
Agree	26%	
Totally agree	2%	

From the responses, the respondents did apply coercive power in virtual classrooms. However, it has to be pointed out that for question 2, the percentage of respondents who disagreed was actually higher than those who agreed. For question 27, respondents who totally disagreed and disagreed with the statement "I punish students if they do not follow instructions" is 43% while those who totally agreed and agreed is 28%. This finding matched Thomas (2014) description of coercive power which contradicts reward power. The respondents preferred to assert reward power more than their coercive power. Another question asked the respondents the form of punishments they use if they did punish the students for any kinds of misconduct. The respondents listed a range of punishments such as giving extra exercises/ tasks, and deducting marks to a softer approach by listening to their explanation and giving advice. The final question in the questionnaire asked for comments from respondents regarding the assertion of power by lecturers in virtual classrooms.

It can be summarised that asserting hegemony or power in virtual classrooms is difficult compared to face-to-face learning, therefore virtual classrooms should allow negotiation of power instead of asserting total power because it could lead to power abuse which could be detrimental to students as they do have difficulties having lessons online.

# **5 CONCLUSIONS**

The results of this study suggest different forms of challenges that the lecturers of UiTM Kedah had to face in the virtual classrooms due to the nature of virtual classrooms itself. To cater to the challenges, based on French & Raven's (1959) five bases of power as cited in Thomas (2014), the lecturers did assert all five forms of power which are referent, reward, expert, legitimate and coercive power. Based on the data provided, it can be concluded that lecturers face challenges in asserting their power in virtual classrooms. The majority of respondents (74%) indicated that they had power over students in virtual classrooms, but a significant portion (24%) felt they had less power compared to the physical classroom. This suggests a shift in power dynamics when teaching in an online environment. Additionally, the respondents reported various challenges in virtual classrooms, including poor student attendance, lack of cooperation, difficulty testing student understanding, and issues related to accessibility, workload, distractions, and support. Regarding the strategies employed by lecturers to assert power in virtual classrooms, the data revealed the application of different types of power. Referent power was observed through building rapport, relating to students, and sharing personal stories. Reward power was evident through recognizing students, negotiating deadlines, giving compliments, and rewarding compliance. Expert power was demonstrated by organizing lessons, demonstrating knowledge, designing effective learning experiences, and discussing current theory and research. Legitimate power was observed in communicating expectations and priorities, maintaining control, and addressing underperformance. Coercive power was also utilized to a certain extent, although respondents showed a preference for reward power over punishment.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study. Firstly, the data provided is based on self-reported responses from the respondents, which may be influenced by personal biases or inaccuracies. Additionally, the sample size and characteristics of the respondents are unknown, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the study primarily focused on the perspective of lecturers and did not consider the viewpoints of students or other stakeholders in a virtual classroom environment. Future research should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample, as well as incorporate multiple perspectives to gain a comprehensive understanding of the power dynamics and challenges faced in virtual classrooms.

In conclusion, the data suggest that lecturers face challenges in asserting power during virtual classrooms, and they employ various strategies to navigate these challenges. The application of referent, reward, expert, legitimate, and coercive power was evident to varying degrees. However, it is crucial to approach the assertion of power in virtual classrooms with caution, as excessive power assertion can lead to negative outcomes and potential abuse. Future research should further explore the complexities of power dynamics in virtual classrooms, considering the perspectives of both lecturers and students, in order to develop effective strategies that promote a positive and supportive online learning environment.

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# **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

All the authors have contributed to the paper meticulously.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interests.

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