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INTEGRATING OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AS A TRANSFORMATIVE SHIFT IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: The threat brought about by Coronavirus or Covid-19 had made a huge impact not only on the economic, tourism, and health sectors, but it also hardly hit the education system of the world at large. Specifically, this pandemic crisis has caused higher education institutions (HEIs) to abruptly shift to open distance learning (ODL) as a response to the call for continued education despite the global health threat.

Methodology: Using quantitative approach and purposive sampling that led to soliciting good responses from 320 respondents from both private and public HEIs in Melaka, this study explains the reality, the readiness and willingness of learners and lecturers have experienced in ODL.

Findings: Findings indicate that technology use in ODL teaching and learning offers a lot of opportunities for both learners and lecturers. The instructors and learners perceived that ODL is effective with the use of technology merging the old and the new. Three aspects were indicated from this study namely 1) interaction between learners or among themselves as peers and 2) technical support

and 3) pedagogical demands. Nonetheless, there were some challenges faced by both lecturers and learners such as; unreliable internet access, high costs associated with bandwidth, technophobia and inadequate pedagogical skills of online lecturers found from this study too.

Contributions: Thus, it is deemed important to identify and understand learners' experiences in an online education technology course facilitated through various digital platforms. It is time we accept blended learning if not ODL. Blended learning has grown in use across HEIs to replace traditional classroom learning.

Keywords: Blended learning, continuity, digital, open distance learning, fundamental shifts.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The emergence of new internet technologies has re-made how people communicate and interact with each other and how society creates and shares content with one another. The implications for education are also rather significant. The changing technological environment provides new opportunities for teaching and learning focused on the use of social networking sites to create better, and a more functional learning community. After battling with Covid-19 and the struggle continues, online teaching and learning are emerging as a growing trend in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and gaining wider popularity among Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Online teaching and learning in the context of this study, refers to a method of instruction and acquisition of knowledge that is carried out in ODL with the help of computer and technologies via internet. The use of technology offers wide range of opportunities in ODL including promoting the quality of interaction among learners, and instructors. It also provides access to an overwhelming of resources online. There are also many HEIs are on the verge of adopting the increased use of technology to an escalation of access and effectiveness of their ODL offerings. Thus, it is deemed important to identify and understand learners' experiences in an online education technology course facilitated through various digital platforms.

Learners and instructors are overwhelmed with online education and technology use only recently due to pandemic Covid-19 without realising that technology has been an aid in education system for a long period of time. According to Kim and Bonk (2006), technology

has played and continues to play an important role in the development and expansion of online education. So, it is high time education institutions to embed the use of technology in the process of teaching and learning as well as to integrated blended learning courses in a programme offered. Although HEIs have emphasised and still emphasising on the importance of using technology in education, and of course have been practicing ODL fully in the past two years, responses from instructors and learners were seen steering towards negativity. Even though many understand the way technology was used for teaching and learning which then has enhanced the education system and also proved to have a positive impact on the education process.

This adoption of technology has enriched the popularity for ODL among instructors and learners as it offers flexibility and accessibility. Similarly, ODL instructors also found the usage the technology can improve the interaction as well as collaboration among learners. Technologies assist in handling large number of students from different parts of the world and hence at an institutional level, learning using technologies may be considered as a cost-effective teaching method (Botham & Mason, 2007). Technologies can transform HEIs in many ways: Digital technology enables fundamental shifts in instructional methods, content, and assessment (West, 2012). The benefits of using technology for online teaching and learning are well documented in literature. These have been proven a long time ago, yet today, after a long stricken challenging route to achieve payoffs in the continuity of education during the pandemic, data collected as representational among instructors and learners were still holding to the fact that there was more negativity in conducting ODL rather than positivity in the process of teaching and learning. Such mindset or prejudices are deemed a blocked-out to achieve betterment and improvement in the education system. It also hinders the development and creates confusion as to the next step on progressing education system for many institutions world- wide. The question now is the opportunities for instructors and learners to come around and accept the fact that digital technology can help in achieving the learning outcomes and thus ensure successful learning can be continued in a long run achievable. Indeed excessive dependence on technology for language learning might lead to the lack of basic language skills and over dependence on applications or online resources without engaging in actual activities to practice speaking, writing, or reading might affect overall language competence. By integrating digital resources with conventional methods like attending physical classes, participating in face-to-face conversations, and reading physical books, learners can efficiently bridge the gaps in language acquisition. Nevertheless, this study emphasised to identify and understand instructors' and learners' experiences in an online education technology course

facilitated through various digital platforms. External factors must be investigated to allow more study to be conducted to minimise the adversities in conducting ODL and thus, supports the implementation of blended learning in the near future to language learners to efficiently bridge the language acquisition gap.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Covid-19 has indeed given a significant impact to the educational sector (Rahardjo & Pertiwi, 2020). The instantaneous shift of the traditional and conventional method of teaching and learning to online teaching and learning process has forced the instructors and learners to adapt almost instantly to a new environment (Carolan et al., 2020). Many, both instructors and learners, view this dramatic transformation as positive development but some perceive this as a disaster because they encounter many barriers along the way too (García-Morales et al., 2021). Problems like not having suitable devices, conducive spaces for teaching and learning, internet accessibility and stability, instance feedback are some of the drawbacks reported by some instructors and learners whilst engaging with online learning process. This is because, learners' performance will differ greatly according to their desired learning styes. Besides, Tang et al. (2021) claims that we know little about the students' readiness to embrace online learning. Nevertheless, various suggestions and aids offered such as trainings on technology literacy and pedagogical shift, utilising simpler but effective engagement platform between the learners and instructor and counselor guidance to both parties, has resulted in an encouraging yet not perfect solutions to the barriers occurred (Efriana, 2021).

Over the two years of experiencing online learning in such of a sudden phase, many researchers have conducted studies on the perception of the learners on online learning. Mixed perceptions among the students are recorded depending on the various external and internal factors that significantly affecting the students. These satisfaction results are very important in determining the success of the teaching and learning process since this can be the benchmark to make online learning relevant and effective.

A study conducted in Canada on a group of students from a college in Northeastern North America reveals that respondents are eager to return to normal face-to-face interaction in class prior to the pandemic situation. Though the transition to online learning environment was successful in terms of academic achievement and instruction, many students reported they suffer from anxiety, stress, and the inability to concentrate on their studies. Responses such as too many assignments to complete and the absence of real human face to face interaction made students feel uncomfortable when dealing with online learning. However, the negative

reactions do not affect the students' encouraging academic performance outcome (Lemay et al., 2021). This study also concurs with Song et al. (2004) whereby the students embraced the online learning method but issues like technology efficiency and pedagogical designs were still being in questioned.

On another positive note, Elshami et al. (2021) found that students are pleased with the online interaction amongst them and term it as flexible and convenient. However, their satisfactions are compromised a little by the stability of the technology. Thus, flexible, and convenient communication have co-relation with the positive satisfaction of the students in the online learning process (Cole, Lennon, & Weber, 2021). Laili and Nashir (2021) also believe that online interaction between two parties, the learners, and the instructors, are made easier and meaningful at any time during the online learning process. Thus, this encourages especially the reluctant learners to be more engaged in the process of learning.

Chiu and Lim (2020) suggest that in order to encourage more learners and instructors to gain more satisfaction on online learning, the issue of technology equity and justice must be addressed across the spectrum of the demographic locations of learners and instructors. This is because many studies are mainly conducted in urban areas rather than in the rural areas. As a result, the findings are biased. This study agrees with the findings of Adnan and Anwar (2020) whereby learners and instructors from developing countries agree that online learning is not effective because of inadequate technological support and monetary issues. Not only that, Chiu et al. (2021) suggested, pedagogical aspects must meet the needs of the learners so that they will be motivated and engaged in the online learning process.

As for instructors' perceptions towards online learning, instructors have long utilized flip class strategies, various online applications and programs in teaching and learning process (Daniel et al., 2014). However, come this unprecedented pandemic state, many were caught surprised by the situation. Some were adaptable and had a smooth sailing journey, but some were left helpless. The pandemic really pushed the instructors to be "techno savvy" overnight. Whether they like it or not, the teaching and learning process must go on. Burgin et al. (2022) report that instructors are instantaneously adapt to the emergency and their transformation ability shows their effort to meet the students' needs though supports are needed in terms of pedagogical methods for the transformation to happen (Hodges et al., 2020).

Asaad Hamza Sheerah et al. (2022) on the other hand, reported that instructors' perceptions on online learning are positive in terms of flexibility as the online learning offers flexibilities in terms of interactions between two parties, the academic performance of the students are not being compromised and online learning methods are preferable than the

traditional way. Thus, this can conclude that more and more promising trend starting to emerge from the online learning process especially in terms of technological, pedagogical, and interactional methods.

This study addresses the implementation of digital resources with conventional methods in language acquisition, aiming to achieve successful integration by setting clear objectives which benefits both digital and conventional approaches. This needs an ongoing use of digital resources, as well as face-to-face interactions and structured instruction from conventional sources. As a result, instructors can utilise technology that offers personalised learning experiences, such as adaptive language learning tools or platforms that monitor progress and change content based on specific needs. Furthermore, learners will have the ability to compare and choose good digital resources that are in line with their learning goals. This process includes carrying out research on analysis, wanting recommendations, and establishing the reliability of online materials hence fostering the development of lifelong learning abilities. Integrating blended learning can greatly improve the quality, flexibility, and relevance of education in Malaysian HEIs, aligning with global trends in education while catering to the specific needs of diverse learner population.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study involves 320 undergraduate English language learners as well as instructors from Melaka's private and public HEIs. The study used quantitative methods and purposive sampling to collect responses from respondents on tertiary teaching and learning experiences in face-to-face and online contexts. In order to provide a high level of reliability, a sample size of 278 is required for this study, taking into account that the total population of learners and instructors is approximately 1,000. This sample size is determined based on a 95 percent confidence level and a margin of error of less than five percent. According to Arikunto (2010), purposive sampling is the process of selecting sample by taking subject that is not based on the level or area, but it is taken based on the specific purpose.

Purposive sampling allows selecting the people who give the information. Creswell (2017) recommends selecting respondents who can provide information about the phenomenon being studied. The main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest, which will best to answer research questions. Purposive sampling methods are often used in quantitative research studies so that the respondents have experience in the phenomenon being studied. For this study, the respondents were lecturers and

learners who use technology for ODL, and this sampling strategy serves the purpose of the study.

Quantitative methodology was used to collect and analyse the data obtained from all the respondents in this study. The researchers developed the questionnaire and finalised it before being distributed to the specific group of respondents. The development of questionnaire items has been determined by several criteria and considerations pertaining to the technological aspects of online learning in current practises of ODL. The tool, consisting of ten items and utilising a 5-point Likert scale, has undergone content validity assessment by two experts in the field of education (Hoo et al., 2022). Simultaneously, the assessment of reliability yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.875, indicating high internal consistency. Few sections on the questionnaire were designed specifically to address research objectives in regard to ascertain and gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of both instructors and learners who are involved in an online education technology course that is delivered through several digital platforms. The analysis of external factors that may necessitate additional inquiry is crucial in order to address issues associated with the implementation of ODL. This, in turn, will facilitate the eventual acceptance of blended learning in the foreseeable future. with the willingness and readiness of the respondents to integrate the use of technology in the process of teaching and learning effectively in HEIs. Therefore, the questionnaire was distributed to obtain the data from the respondents.

Upon completion of the data collection, the study findings were analysed by interpreting the data based on mean and standard deviation (SD). All data were interpreted based on the interpretation table by Limson (2016). The questionnaire was developed to assess the perceptions of the instructors and learners on the interaction between learners or among themselves as peers, technical support, and pedagogical demands.

The response option of the questionnaire items was represented with a 5-point Likert type scales (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Moderate, (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly Agree) (Limson, 2016). The data collected was summarised by using descriptive analysis to explain the findings based on respondents' feedbacks. Reliable data are dependable, genuine, trustworthy, sure, unfailing, authentic, and reputable (Mohajan, 2017).

Based on the Table 1, the mean interpretation was adapted from Limson (2016). In determining the level of functionality of the system, the data retrieved from the respondents was treated with the Average Weighted Mean (AWM). The mean range between 4.20 to 5.00 was considered as very high because it implies respondents' high capabilities to manage the three spectra of options as mentioned above while involved in ODL session and rating between

1.00 to 1.79 was interpreted as very low as it implies the lowest capabilities among respondents managing the three spectra of options in ODL. The ratings between 2.60 to 5.00 is considered as functional because it implies the respondents are satisfied with the three spectra of options while a rating between 1.00 to 2.59 is interpreted as not functional and need more refinements in managing the three spectra of options.

Table 1: Mean Value interpretation adapted from Limson (2016)

Mean Range	Interpretation
4.20 – 5.00	Very High
3.40 – 4.19	High
2.60 – 3.39	Moderate
1.80 – 2.59	Low
1.00 – 1.79	Very Low

4.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Technology integration nowadays has gone through innovations and transformed our societies that has totally changed the way people think, work and live and with the current pandemic situation that has been creating havoc around the world, it is deemed even more important. This could be seen clearly as technology has been used extensively to aid in the education system world-wide in a way to overcome the inadequacy to continue education during the pandemic Covid-19. The changing technological environment provides new opportunities for teaching and learning to be focused on the use of social networking sites to create better more functional learning communities. Due to the popular rising on both the ODL and technology tools, it seems logical and relevant to incorporate both to ensure an effective teaching and learning process to continue hence to allow maximum performance and experience on both the learners and instructors to achieve the best results and performance in the education sector.

Table 2: Instructors' responses

Open and Distance Learning (Technology Factor)				
No.	Items	Mean	SD	Level
C1	ODL is effective for me in terms of technology use.	3.79	.743	High
C2	My institution is helpful in offering resources in teaching and learning from home on ODL.	3.05	1.018	Moderate
C3	I often have a one-to-one online discussion with students/ teachers on ODL.	3.19	.878	Moderate
C4	I often interact with my colleagues/ classmates on ODL.	3.57	.844	High
C5	I am motivated to stay on time with the academic schedule given on ODL with enough technology infrastructures.	3.45	.992	High
C6	I often procrastinate work due to problems with technology on ODL.	2.64	1.226	Moderate
C7	I am motivated in teaching and learning on ODL with sharing gadgets to complete work depending on the household size.	3.21	1.026	Moderate
C8	I am willing to stay in (any residence) for teaching and learning with enough use of technology on ODL.	3.34	1.315	Moderate
C9	I often move around (places to places/ spaces in the same place) in teaching and learning to be able to access to internet on ODL.	2.60	1.419	Moderate
C10	I often move around (places to places/ spaces in the same place) in teaching and learning to be able to use suitable gadgets in completion of work on ODL.	2.64	1.346	Moderate

In Table 2, the results of the study can be categorised to three spectra of options by which instructors perceived that ODL is effective with the use of technology merging the old and the new. Instructors believed that technology use could encourage 1) interaction between learners or among themselves as peers and 2) technical support too helps to promote higher order thinking skills whilst setting assessments or question types and 3) pedagogical demands.

The C1 item "*ODL is effective for me in terms of technology use*" is of the highest score of (mean=3.79, SD= .743). Instructors do not find any issues or problems to conduct ODL and they seem to be comfortable using technology to assist them in the teaching and learning process. A general interest has developed in student-centered pedagogies during ODL which has shifted to the use of social media tools as a replacement of traditional teaching and learning tools in order to enhance students' learning and it is perceived as effective especially with the recent pandemic Covid-19 that hits the world globally. The integration and use of social networking technology as a distance learning platform seems to hold promise (Brady et al., 2010).

The remaining two items (C4 and C5) that have a high score of (mean=3.57, SD= .844) and (mean=3.45, SD= .922) also indicated that instructors were feasible to interacting with

colleagues on ODL as well as motivated to stay on time with the academic schedule given on ODL with enough technology infrastructures. Perhaps, since all of them are adult distance learning instructors, the social networking tool has helped in some ways to increase social interaction among peers or colleagues thus, it does not seem to be an issue for interaction to be done online. Their interactions with peers or colleagues were important in helping them make sense of the subject matter, especially by discussing the assignment questions and topics, and the experience of interacting through cyberspace extended their teaching beyond simply reading from a textbook. The discussion on activities and assignments presented were always descriptive and often asked open-ended questions that encouraged peers or colleagues in the same field of expertise to read and to comprehend "off the textbook" content in order to form more challenging questions in the process of teaching.

Besides that, motivation to stay on time with the given schedule can also be deemed as important for the instructors if accompanied with a complete infrastructure to do so. The three key emergent themes such as Social Interactivity and Connectivity, Cooperative Learning, and Appreciation of Differences of Opinion further supports previous studies on the promise of integrating and using social networking technology as a distance learning platform (Veletsianos & Navarrete, 2012). The social connectivism pedagogy perhaps can be used as a guide when applying social and digital technology tools to create learning communities that facilitate more interaction between students to gain knowledge. The untold beauty of incorporating social media tools is that the flexibility and immediacy makes this form of teaching and learning more appealing to present-day learners, both the "digital native" and the "digital immigrant".

Nevertheless, results in Table 2 have indicated that instructors viewed peer interaction is at the moderate level (mean=3.19, SD= .878) for the item C3 "*I often have a one-to-one online discussion with students/ teachers on ODL*". The respondents show a moderately favourable attitude or encounter when it comes to engaging in online interactions with learners and instructors within the framework of ODL. In addition, it is worth noting that a few respondents may have had varying degrees of familiarity with one-to-one online discussions. The difference in experience levels could have contributed to the moderate range of scores observed, indicating a general tendency among respondents to show agreement with the given statement. The results (mean=3.05, SD=1.018) for the item C2 "*My institution is helpful in offering resources in teaching and learning from home*". This shows that technical support provided to assist instructors were deemed limited and it has resulted in moderate achievement among instructors to be able to perform their best in the teaching process. Thus, indicated that instructors were flexible in conducting assessments, assignments, reports, and online

discussions thus manageable on interaction. Hence the question on interest and sense of responsibilities of the online instructors while performing ODL. This has also resulted in instructors to have high interest to commit in their work as they would not dawdle with the work which can be seen in the low moderate level with (mean=2.64, SD=1.226) for the item C6 "*I often procrastinate work due to problems with technology on ODL*" even though the limitation of technical support provided. This is in line with the various suggestions and aids offered such as trainings on technology literacy and pedagogical shift, utilising simpler but effective engagement platform between the learners and instructor and counselor guidance to both parties, has resulted in an encouraging yet not perfect solutions to the barriers occurred (Efriana, 2021).

Besides that, pedagogical demands in Table 2 also suggested adequate condition in spaces availability to access internet and sharing of gadgets which were also considered as low in the moderate level with (mean=2.60, SD=1.419) and (mean=2.64, SD=1.346) for both the item C9 "*I often move around (places to places/ spaces in the same place) in teaching and learning to be able to access to internet on ODL*" and item C10 "*I often move around (places to places/ spaces in the same place) in teaching and learning to be able to use suitable gadgets in completion of work on ODL*". Instructors were motivated with spaces availability to access internet or limited the drive to provide learners with the appropriate teaching materials or conducting classes at all. This study also concurs with Song et al. (2004) whereby the students embraced the online learning method but issues like technology efficiency and pedagogical designs were still being in questioned.

Table 3: Learners' responses

Open and Distance Learning (Technology Factor)				
No.	Items	Mean	SD	Level
C1	ODL is effective for me in terms of technology use.	3.45	.912	High
C2	My institution is helpful in offering resources in teaching and learning from home on ODL.	3.42	.899	High
C3	I often have a one-to-one online discussion with students/ teachers on ODL.	3.07	1.007	Moderate
C4	I often interact with my colleagues/ classmates on ODL.	3.57	.971	High
C5	I am motivated to stay on time with the academic schedule given on ODL with enough technology infrastructures.	3.39	.846	Moderate
C6	I often procrastinate work due to problems with technology on ODL.	3.19	1.005	Moderate
C7	I am motivated in teaching and learning on ODL with sharing gadgets to complete work depending on the household size.	3.05	.961	Moderate
C8	I am willing to stay in (any residence) for teaching and learning with enough use of technology on ODL.	3.36	1.007	Moderate
C9	I often move around (places to places/ spaces in the same place) in teaching and learning to be able to access to internet on ODL.	2.74	1.246	Moderate
C10	I often move around (places to places/ spaces in the same place) in teaching and learning to be able to use suitable gadgets in completion of work on ODL.	2.79	1.207	Moderate

In Table 3, the item C4 "*I often interact with my colleagues/ classmates on ODL*" is of the highest score of (mean=3.57, SD= .971). This has indicated that learners have no issues in communicating with peers during ODL. The use of different digital platforms does not hinder the process of communication thus has proven that physical separation that could create isolation can be decreased by building communication channels among learners. Interaction is important in a learning environment. It can enhance learning and promote individual growth. The communication channels also allow the learners to ask questions anytime about the course and assignments which will then also reduce stress in the process of learning. As stated by Keengwe and Kidd (2010), the focus of online learning is not only on the online contexts but there are numerous computer-based learning platforms and delivery methods such as multimedia, education programming, games and of course the new media on fixed and mobile platforms in various disciplines. ODL has expanded communication options used by traditional classroom learning. As there is a variety of modes of communication available, learners have the freedom to select the type of mode to use. Although distance learning may lack face-to-face interaction, many institutions have established various other modes of communication to increase interaction. With the use of current technology, distance learning has a greater variety

of modes of communication than the traditional classroom learning. Hence, distance learning is not lacking in communication. In fact, learners in distance learning programs have more communication options to select from.

This is supported by the evidence on the item C1 "*ODL is effective for me in terms of technology use*". The learners valued high on this item with (mean=3.45, SD= .912). This argument is established through which learners were able to perform well in their studies and do not have any problems at all with the use of technology in ODL. Though blended learning is quite common, full force ODL is still relatively new in Malaysia in both private and public HEIs. In this era of globalisation, one cannot deny the significance of online learning but the knowledge in using the hardware, software and the Internet is also the primary requirement in ODL (Ventayen et al., 2019). This study has reflected the learners' perception in the use of technology to continue with their education. Despite not having face-to face learning process, but with the various digital platforms available, learners show assurance and self-reliance to perform ODL effectively.

Moreover, learners also deemed item C2 "*My institution is helpful in offering resources in teaching and learning from home*" as high in value with the (mean=3.42, SD= .899). The learners agreed that instructors were able to supplement the face-to-face mode with online learning using web-based materials or Open Education Resources (OER) available on the Internet or structured materials in the form of self-instructional materials (SIM) usually parked in a Learning Management System (LMS) or some home-grown LMS or bespoke system developed locally by the institutions as practised in most distance learning institutions. In this study, the findings suggest that instructors should often communicate with their students provide an easy way of accessing the platforms (Lee et al., 2011), hence showing it is important for students to have technical support from the institutions to ensure effective process of teaching and learning done in ODL. Furthermore, equipped with the necessary 21st century technology skills are necessary for both the instructors and learners to overcome or reduce technophobia amongst them. Hence, understanding the stakeholders' acceptance level towards technology helps to determine the issues in online learning and allow institutions as well as instructors to explore possible solutions to ensure ODL can be implemented successfully and effectively.

However, this study reflects the learners' perceptions on the item C3 "*I often have a one-to-one online discussion with students/ teachers on ODL*" as moderate with (mean=3.07, SD=1.007). The learners' perceptions on engaging in one-to-one online discussions with learners and instructors within the context of ODL are of a moderate level. In relation to the

responses scale, a score of three commonly signifies a state of neutrality or mild response. On average, learners exhibit a neutral attitude towards the statement, with neither a strong agreement nor a significant disagreement. This highlights the finding that, on average, learners tend to hold moderate or neutral attitudes regarding one-on-one online discussions with learners and instructors within the context of ODL. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that there exists a moderate degree of variability in these impressions among the learners, indicating that certain individuals possess more significant viewpoints or experiences in this particular domain. The aforementioned findings offer valuable insights into the perceptions and behaviours of learners when it comes to participating in one-on-one online discussions within the framework of ODL. The fact that in the process of online teaching and learning instructors and learners may have limited physical contact has thus posed a challenge for doing regular follow up and cause difficulty in interaction between them. Consequently, the reason above affects motivation among the learners to stay on time with the academic schedule given on ODL as in item C5 "*I am motivated to stay on time with the academic schedule given on ODL with enough technology*" with the value of (mean=3.39, SD= .846).

Additionally, pedagogical demands in Table 3 as surveyed hold the learners' perceptions that spaces available for the learners to access internet were valued as moderate with (mean= 2.74, SD=1.246) and (mean=2.79, SD=1.207) with both the item C9 "*I often move around (places to places/ spaces in the same place) in teaching and learning to be able to access to internet on ODL*" and item C10 "*I often move around (places to places/ spaces in the same place) in teaching and learning to be able to use suitable gadgets in completion of work on ODL*". This suggest that learners have no perplexity to access internet or with space distress to complete the process of ODL. Perceptions reflect that learner were able to manage knowledge; how to find, analyse, evaluate, and apply knowledge as it constantly shifts and grows. Chiu et al. (2021) suggested, pedagogical aspects must meet the needs of the learners so that they will be motivated and engaged in the online learning process.

Today's students grew up in a world where technology is a natural part of their environment. Their expectation is that technology is used whenever appropriate to help them learn, develop essential informational and technological literacy skills, and master the fluency necessary in their specific subject domain. Learners found the affordability of internet was not a major concern for online learning or challenges such as slow internet or limited availability of internet were not the main reasons that contribute to the state of inability to perform well in the process of learning through ODL.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study examined to identify and understand instructors' and learners' experiences in an online education technology course facilitated through various digital platforms in the context of Malaysia HEIs. Findings indicate that technology use in ODL teaching and learning avail a lot of opportunities for both learners and lecturers. The instructors and learners perceived that ODL is effective with the use of technology merging the old and the new. Instructors believed that technology use could encourage 1) interaction between learners or among themselves as peers and 2) technical support and 3) pedagogical demands.

While it is acknowledged that the use of technology produces good results and that it promotes well-being while practicing ODL, there are some challenges faced by both lecturers and learners such as; unreliable internet access, high costs associated with bandwidth, technophobia and inadequate pedagogical skills of online lecturers. The use of emerging technologies such as videoconferencing, social media, and virtual classrooms, Wikispaces, Schoology and Skype were also recommended by the respondents for the enhancement of ODL offerings.

This is one reason blended learning has grown in use across HEIs and the reasons some are now exploring a "flipped classroom" approach to learning to replace traditional classroom learning. A solution that combines several different delivery methods such as collaboration software, web-based courses, and computer communication practices with traditional face-to-face instruction. Blended learning is also used to describe learning that mixes various event-based activities, including face-to-face classrooms, live e-learning, and self-paced learning. The successful implementation and use of blended learning the understanding of the strengths of the different mediums, how students engage in this type of learning process and how they use information from each different medium as well as how they could handle online and traditional teaching methods in a combined form.

Blended learning has been defined in different ways by the authors, and still new definitions are evolving. It is beneficial to the institutions, like minimizing costs of class room space, parking area, faculty etc. Students are kings when it comes to blended learning for the liberty it endows on them. They can attend the classes according to their desired place and convenient time. They are released of clock bound classes. Studies can be taken as part of the game now as they are much comfortable with their apps and androids. Books and libraries are obsolete things for them. But studies also reveal a much-shadowed aspect of blended learning. Participating in a blended or hybrid course (the term is a "hybrid" referring to courses that mix face-to-face instruction with distance delivery systems) requires students to be self-motivated

and sincere. But this is a high expectation from the present generation. It is found that majority of the students are unable to show proper concentration and punctual participation in this method of learning. It has created a new generation which is debt-ridden; debt of catching up with timely work load. Majority of faculty is still counting on the face-to-face teaching. But change is the spirit of life. It is time we accept blended learning if not ODL.

However, in order to effectively implement blended learning in Malaysian HEIs, careful planning, infrastructure support, instructor training in online pedagogy, and ongoing evaluation of the efficiency of blended learning are every aspect that is required. One of the limitations of this study is the accessibility to technology or internet connectivity, both of which are necessary for blended learning. It is possible for learners who have little resources or who are located in certain places may have a more difficult time maintaining a consistent learning environment. Further research can be done by conducting an analysis of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the access of technology for educational and instructional purposes. Investigate the ways in which the transition to blended and remote learning during the pandemic has either increased or resolved the access gaps that were already present.

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