2021

INSIGHT JOURNAL

UiTM Cawangan Johor

International, Refereed, Open Access, Online Journal

Volume 8
Issue 3 : Sept/2021

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INSIGHT JOURNAL
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA CAWANGAN JOHOR

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Insight Journal
UiTM Cawangan Johor

Volume 8   **September 2021**   **eISSN: 2600-8564**
Issue 3

Human Resources Management in the Pandemic Age: Hr Practices and the Impact on Employee Motivation

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ABSTRACT

Human resources management is vital to the development of human capital and ensuring the increased productivity from employees. The sustainability of employees' productivity has presented huge challenges to HR departments in establishing morale and motivation among staff, who are dealing with pressures of working from home and parenting. Hence, this study investigates on the influence of training and development, career development and working environment on employee motivation. A total of 136 employees from private organizations were selected to fill out a survey. This data was gathered and analysed through the Partial Least Square (PLS) method. The findings indicate that training and development and career development have no significant impact on employees' motivation whereas working environment significantly influences the motivation of staff. These results show that employers should prioritize ways to improve and address working environment concerns in order to evolve with the present shift in working norms.

1.0 Introduction

The sustainability of human capital is consistently aligned with the human capital training and development programs, policies, and practices in the organization. The important to sustain the human capital is to resolve any issues of work flow, staff composition, and human resource management. Most of the organization has struggle to sustain their human capital to confront with the changes of the working environment and competitive with the rival (Ali & Anwar, 2021). Hence, the roles of Human Resource Management are critical to ensure that the human capital are competent and flexible to adapt with the challenges. One of the significant human resource management roles is being responsible in providing training, development and maintaining healthy working conditions. The adequate of training and healthy working conditions could encourage the employee motivation to give their commitment and contribute to high work productivity as the outcomes (Ali and Anwar, 2021).

Most of the studies related to the employee motivation found that when employees' feelings are fulfilled, they will be motivated to carry out their duties. As a result, an employee's performance is heavily impacted by their motivation levels, and it would be wise for organizations to maintain these motivation levels in their workforce. According to Farhad, Mohammad Reza, Mostafa, Ghorban, & Somayeh (2011), motivation is a mental process which can be broken down into the elements of stimulation, route and finally the choice of actions which aim towards the accomplishment of a goal. Motivational tools or programs are vital to organizational success. The presence and fulfilment of motivational tools will drive employees to carry out their duties effectively. Referring to Alsuwaidi, Alshurideh, Al Kurdi, & Salloum (2021), the effectiveness of a rewards-based system in improving employee motivation concluded that the more appealing the reward, the greater the level of employees motivation. However, the obstacle of poor training and development provided in their organizations cause a frustration and dissatisfaction that will affect employee's performance. When the employee sees that there is a failure or inadequacy in training and development, they will become demotivated and dissatisfied. Similarly, the potential for career development at the firm is a strong factor in ensuring employee commitment. An effective human resources manager should clarify and encourage the employee's plans for their future within the organization. Additionally, a conducive working environment is also vital in offering encouragement and positivity in order to help employees reach organizational goals (Awan & Tahir, 2015). Working conditions are crucial in improving and maintaining employee motivation. A negative working environment will induce stress, frustration and demotivation. Thus, the current

study aims to predict the significance of the human resources practices of training and development, career development, working environment and the impact of these factors upon the employee motivation of 136 private sector workers.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Training and Development

Training involves various programs or courses intended to provide participants with specific skills, knowledge and capabilities that will help them successfully execute their job scope. Comprehensive training can contribute to enhanced worker performance, and guide an employee towards accomplishing individual objectives. According to Sousa and Rocha (2019), training is the growth of skills, knowledge and approaches which ensures that a person can execute a task with efficiency and effectiveness. Training not only helps develop the capacity of new employees, but also to polish and improve those of senior workers. Hamed and Anwar (2018) also support the influence of training significant on employee's motivation. Training offered by the organization can include education on soft skills as well. The need for training sessions may differ according to the requirements of a particular employee or the wider changes occurring in the market. Following a training program, the employee's performance can be evaluated in order to see the extent to which their work has improved. Additionally, training can lead towards promotions and rewards for employees (Abdullah & Anwar, 2021). Training and development are significant elements in helping a company reach its goals. Sharma and Shirsath (2014) prove that a positive relationship exists between training and motivation among bank employees in Kayseri, Turkey. Gullu, Sahin and Kiziloglu (2018) also state that there is a significant influence on employee's motivation and training of employees in the banking sector at Kayseri in Turkey. The results of the study indicate that training and development courses have a positive influence on employee motivation among workers in banking. Literature strongly supports the connection between employee motivation and training. As such, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Training programs have a significant influence on employee's motivation.

2.2 Career Development

Career development is the progress of an employee from basic worker to upper-level positions while navigating personal development and leisure with

the intention of growth for the future (Armstrong, 2009). In other words, career development is the evolution process of an employee as they progress through the organization, gaining more knowledge and getting higher in ranks. Research by Pillay, Dawood and Karodia (2015) indicates that career development has a significant connection to employee motivation. Companies must take career development and motivation into account when considering the future sustainability and performance of the firm as a whole. Strong employee motivation can also provide a company with competitive advantage. Armstrong posits that simply the availability of avenues and resources for learning and professional development can improve workers' motivation levels.

When an organization neglects the importance of opportunities for career development, this can compromise employee motivation and performance. If organizations provide the means to learn new skills, knowledge and technologies that will contribute to enhanced performance and potential promotions, employees will feel appreciated and consequently show stronger motivation. A lack of avenues for career development will be reflected in poor motivation and performance among employees. Career development capacity in a company can enhance a worker's vital skills and knowledge, allowing the organization to not only attract high-performing employees but also ensure that these workers are retained. According to Obeidat, Alrowwad, Alshurideh, Masadeh, & Abuhashesh (2021), employee motivation and career development has significant relationship towards employee's motivation in any company, no matter its location, sector or size. The research results showed that the bulk of workers in the refinery sector agree that potential career advancement contributes to their motivation. However, promotions must be offered wisely by the firm, prioritizing employees who are dedicated, motivated, effectively managed and consistently upgrading their skills. The literature supports career development as a key factor in employee motivation. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Career development has a significant influence on an employee's motivation.

2.3 Working Environment

A conducive and comfortable work environment is vital in improving and maintaining employee morale, increasing their commitment and productivity. When at the workplace, the employee can find motivation when they are given a sense of purpose and fulfilment in carrying out their tasks. Access to the necessary supplies, clean working areas, functioning amenities and other resources will help

workers deliver strong performances. In addition, Appel-Meulenbroek, Steps, Wenmaekers, and Arentze, (2021) state that negative working environments, which can include poor hygiene, bad ventilation, noise pollution and lack of basic supplies can cause anxiety and frustration among employees, thus decreasing motivation and productivity. It is important for organizations to understand that income is not the only motivating factor for employees. The working environment itself is crucial in inspiring employees to perform well. Bushiri (2014) asserts that there is a strong relationship between employee performance and working environment, adding that organizations which show concern for the comfort and accessibility of the workspace can enhance job performance among their workers. Nakpodia (2011) discovers that a good working environment has significant relationship with the employee's motivation when the employees feel that all accommodations and supplies, they need to carry out their duties have been made available. According to Ajala (2012), the work environment has significant to employee satisfaction, as each firm offers a different experience and environment. Organizations must fully grasp how the working environment influences employee performance, overall productivity and even the company's competitive capacity. A positive and conducive working environment will enhance employee motivation along with their performance and productivity. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3: Working environment has a significant influence on an employee's motivation.

3.0 Research Methodology

A quantitative study was carried out to explore the factors which impact employee motivation in small group of 250 of employees from the private organizations within the Klang Valley. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the estimated of sample size was 150 and the return rate was 100 per cent completed. The data was then analysed through the Partial Least Square method, or PLS. The majority of research which employ PLS attempt to discover the causal relationship that exists between constructs and also predict factors which significantly impact the variables. For the purpose of this study, purposive sampling technique used to the targets with a specific subset of persons, as all study participants are chosen based on their profile. To employ the purposive sample technique, this study conducts a straightforward sampling procedure. If the individuals in the sample do not meet a certain profile, the sample will be discarded during the sampling procedure. Furthermore, the two stages of analysis in PLS are the structural model and the measurement model. The measurement model functions to analyse the constructs

for discriminant validity and convergent validity. In this stage, every indicator is tested on composite reliability, factor loading and values of average variance extracted. This is done in order to determine the existence of discriminant problems among constructs. Next, bootstrapping analysis is applied to test the hypotheses and assess the path coefficient. The obtained p- values and t- values reveal the significance of results and thus validate the hypotheses. PLS is also carried out in order to determine the extent of a construct's relevance within the model.

The items for measurement were derived from past literature. The eight items of training and development were adapted from Masood (2010). The six items for working environment were adapted from Bushiri (2014), while the six items of career development were derived from Mark and Nzulwa (2018). Finally, the five items of employee motivation were adapted from Warr, Cook and Wall (1979). All items were tested according to the 5-point Likert scale, where 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, and 5= strongly agree. Table 1 shows the items used in this study.

Table 1: Item Measurement

Item Coding	Statements	References
TD1	Our organization conducts extensive training and development programs for employees.	Masood (2010)
TD2	Employees at each job usually go through training and development programs every year.	
TD3	Training needs are identified through a formal performance appraisal mechanism.	
TD4	There are formal training programs to teach new employees the skills they need.	
TD5	Training and development helped reduce employee turnover in an organization.	
TD6	Training and development have resulted in high motivation in the organization.	
TD7	Training and development helped to improve work efficiency	
TD8	Training and development have resulted in higher productivity and financial returns for the organization.	

CD1	I have a personal career plan that I review every year with specific action plans, steps and timelines.	Mark, & Nzulwa, (2018)
CD2	The organization provides career advisory services that determine competencies and interests of its employee.	
CD3	The organization has in place a career development plan for their employee	
CD4	The organization has both internal and external programs that develop its future employee positions.	
CD5	The organization offers excellent opportunities for promotion of employees after training.	
CD6	The chance for me to advance my career in an organization is very high.	
WE1	Office building space influences you to stay in the office comfortably.	Bushiri, (2014)
WE2	A good relationship with fellow workers influences your motivation.	
WE3	I have a good relationship with my supervisor	
WE4	Feedback received from my supervisor/superior influences my motivation.	
WE5	Job security in the organization affects the motivation to complete the task.	
WE6	The hygiene maintenance in the organization affects my comfort in the office.	
M1	I have a sense of personal satisfaction when I do this job well.	Warr, Cook, & Wall, (1979)
M2	My opinion of myself goes down when I do this job poorly.	
M3	I feel unhappy when my work is not up to my usual standard	
M4	I try to think of ways of doing my job effectively	
M5	I like to look back on the day's work with a sense of a job well done.	

4.0 Findings and Discussion

The analysis of demographics factors revealed, 24.3 percent of the respondents were male, while 75.7 percent were female. This is derived from a total number of 136 respondents. Employees aged between 21 to 25 years old were the highest age group to respond with 52 individuals, followed by 50 employees in the 26 to 30 age group. Respondents aged 31 to 40 years old numbered 30 people. The smallest age-based respondent groups are those between 41 to 45, and those under 20 years of age, recording 2 respondents per category. The majority of employees who responded hold non-executive positions in their organizations, at 64 percent or 87 persons. Respondents in executive positions tallied at 45 persons, or 33.1

percent, while respondents in managerial positions numbered only 4 individuals or 2.7 percent. Further details indicate that 53 individuals out of 136 respondents have held their current jobs for 1-3 years, followed by 32 persons who have worked for 3 to 6 years. The remaining respondents make up the smallest group of employees with under 6 months of experience.

4.1 Measurement Model

The measurement model analysis is applied in order to investigate the convergent validity, including the average variance extracted (AVE), indicator loadings and composite reliability (CR). Hair, Hult, Ringle and Sarstedt (2014) recommend an indicator loading of more than 0.5, where a value less than 0.5 means the indicator should be removed. Table 2 shows the four items of career development that were eliminated, CD2, CD3, CD4 and CD5 which exhibit lower factor loading values. Additionally, 1 item under motivation is deleted, which is M5. Several items were also removed from training development and working environment, namely TD1, WE3, and WE4. Then, the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were assessed. As suggested by Hair et al., (2014), the AVE values must exceed 0.5, and the CR value must be greater than 0.7. The findings indicated that career development (CR=0.73, AVE=0.579), motivation (CR=0.819, AVE=0.532), training and development (CR=0.86, AVE=0.556), and working environment (CR=0.806, AVE=0.515) were reliable and applicable constructs to this study.

Table 2: Measurement Model

Constructs	Item Coding	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
Career Development	CD1	0.859	0.73	0.579
	CD6	0.649		
Motivation	M1	0.767	0.819	0.532
	M2	0.68		
	M3	0.771		
	M4	0.695		
Training and development	TD2	0.522	0.86	0.556
	TD3	0.785		
	TD4	0.821		
	TD5	0.774		
	TD6	0.787		

Working Environment	WE1	0.66	0.806	0.515
	WE2	0.55		
	WE5	0.807		
	WE6	0.819		

Following convergent validity, the discriminant validity was tested. It was evaluated by examining the correlations between possibly overlapping constructs, according to guidelines set out by Fornell and Larcker (1981). As shown in Table 3, this study shows that the square root of AVE values is greater in all cases compared to the off-diagonal elements in their corresponding row and column. This indicates that that the necessary discriminant validity has been reached. In total, the measurement model established satisfactory convergent validity and discriminant validity.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity

Constructs	1	2	3	4
1.Career Development	**0.761**			
2.Motivation	0.257	**0.729**		
3.Training	0.395	0.331	**0.746**	
4.Working Environment	0.219	0.616	0.365	**0.718**

4.2 Assessment of Structural Model

The primary evaluation in the structural model is the R2 values, which assess the coefficient of determination along with the path coefficients and the extent of their significance (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019). For this study, the results reveal the R2 value to be 0.401, indicating that 40.1 % of the variance in employee motivation can be explained by the constructs of training and development, career and development and working environment. The path coefficients of the structural model were measured through bootstrap analysis, with z resampling of 500 carried out to measure the statistical significance of the path coefficients. These values are laid out in Table 4. The results revealed the values of training and development ($\beta = 0.099$, $p > 0.05$) and career and development ($\beta = 0.086$, $p > 0.05$). In contrast, the result of the work environment ($\beta = 0.563$, $p < 0.05$) was statistically significant in its influence towards employee motivation. The effect size of the work environment was larger, at f2 was 0.455, as suggested by Cohen (1988). Thus, H1 and H2 were not supported while H3 was supported.
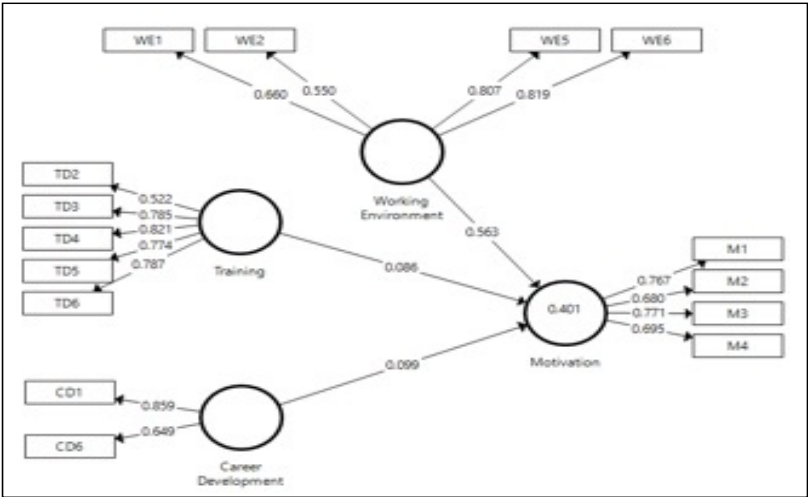
Figure 1: Measurement Model

Additionally, predictive relevance analysis was carried out through the technique of predictive sample reuse, also referred to as the Stone-Geisser's Q2, which can be applied as a condition for predictive relevance along with examining the magnitude of the R2 (Ramayah, Ling, Taghizadeh, & Rahman, 2016). Based on the blindfolding procedure and the assumption that Q2 values should be greater than zero, the results indicate that training and development, career and development and working environment show predictive relevance for the employee's motivation (Hair et al., 2011). Therefore, the Q2 of employee's motivation (0.198) verifies that the research model has excellent predictive relevance.

Table 4: Structural Model

Path Coefficient	Beta values	SE	t-Values	P Values	F Square	2.50%	97.50%	Result
Career Development -> Employees' Motivation	0.099	0.078	1.269	0.206	0.014	-0.071	0.233	H1: Not Supported
Training -> Employees' Motivation	0.086	0.085	1.019	0.309	0.01	-0.075	0.277	H2: Not Supported
Working Environment -> Employees' Motivation	0.563	0.069	8.213	0	0.455	0.386	0.666	H3: Supported

5.0 Conclusion and Implication

The purpose of this study was to examine the human resource practices, specifically training and development, career development, and work environment, and to predict the effect on the motivation levels of 136 private sector employees. The findings indicate that while the work environment has a substantial impact on employee motivation, training and development and career development do not. The consequences of these findings strongly recommend that human resource management departments must employ effective and appropriate techniques that boost employee motivation through the conditions of their work environments. To accommodate today's changing work environments, it is critical for firms to promote employee motivation in order to guarantee that employees feel valued and safe. Employees in a motivated work environment understand what is expected of them. Employees' objectives should be consistent with the company's strategic plan. As a result, it is anticipated that a more stimulating work atmosphere will stimulate employees and increase employee engagement. Employees can contribute to their employers' success by their dedication, engagement, and productivity.

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Intervention Programme: The Implementation of Buddy System Programme amongst Civil Engineering Students

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ABSTRACT

The Buddy system is a peer-to-peer assisting and monitoring system where a group of individuals (peers) work as a team collaboratively to reach the desired outcome. Due to the constant high failure rate attained by the students in one of the fundamental engineering courses; Fluid Mechanics, the School of Civil Engineering, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Pasir Gudang Campus have introduced various initiatives or interventions, including the introduction of the Buddy System Programme to overcome this problem. The purpose of this research is to analyse and compare the performance of a group of diploma students before and after the implementation of the Buddy System Programme for two semesters (September 2017 - January 2018 and March 2019 – July 2019). The findings revealed that the percentage of the failure rate for semester September 2017 – January 2018 dropped when the student-centred approach was implemented. Meanwhile, for semester March 2019 – July 2019 when the teacher-centred approach was used, the percentage of failure rate showed a slight decrement from the previous semester without the implementation of the Buddy System Programme. The results conveyed an initiation in the teaching method to motivate students towards independent learning culture and keeping students with average performance occupied for the whole semesters by interacting continuously with the mentors.

Keywords: *Peer, Teacher-Centred, Student-Centred, Independent Learning, Failure Rate*

1.0 Introduction

The history of co-operative learning in higher education can be traced back thousands of years ago when the Talmud recommended "learning partners" for understanding the legal codes and when Socrates engaged students in the "art of discourse" (Johnson et al., 1998). The co-operative learning process today involves students working in groups to reach learning goals where they talk, debate and build their understanding. The lecturers also observed that the students were more interested in studying with their mentor or peer rather than studying alone or using the student-lecturer technique (Mukundan et al., 2011).

The majority of studies shows that buddy system efficiency has a substantial and positive impact. For example, Johnson et al. (1998) confirmed that the student-centred and cooperative learning approach is valid for the academic performance of students, relations with peers and teachers, and the position towards the academic life. Several comprehensive reviews and implementations have been released on this topic by multidisciplinary organizations and universities, for instance; academic issues (Goldstein et al., 2018), health education (Ringby & Duus, 2017), special education (Adams, 2016; Goodman et al., 2008), environmental education (Stavrianos, 2016), Mathematics and Sciences education (Aina et al., 2015; Balan, 2015; Mukundan et al., 2011; Vaninsky, 2017) and e-learning (Varadarajan & Ganz, 2009).

Generally, the buddy system is a programme in which students initially worked in pairs. This concept is based on the principle that friends would be able to help each other rather than compete. This experience also encouraged students to access concepts, understanding and resources that were shared in another course that was part of the programme and which, in turn, would have improved their study (Espitia Cruz & Kwinta, 2013). The buddy system is one of the student-centred approaches; with classrooms designed, implemented and evaluated by students. More work will be done on them by involving the students in these decisions, which can be a great thing. Teachers support student-centred learning by encouraging students to cooperate in decisions, be aware of their ability to develop, and remember how they feel about learning (Wright, 2011).

Peer support can be described as social interactions between similar groups of people. The programmes help to develop their academic and social skills by the constant interactions between both parties which will break the barrier and boost their confidence level (Thalluri et al., 2014). The mentor may communicate with their mentee either on a one-to-one session or in small groups by transferring

learning abilities, sharing study skills, resolving specific or engineering problems and promoting active learning. Students prefer casual environment and generally feel more comfortable referring to peers rather than to lecturers about certain subjects. Student engagement in answering questions, discussing and thinking can improve their performance in the critical subject (Barnett, 2008).

This article aims to analyse the performance and efficiency of the buddy system technique. The Teacher-centred approach which contributes to pedagogical modifications needs lecturers to get involved in the process of teaching and to learn with the same techniques they use. In other words, to "understand deeply, teachers must learn about, see, and experience successful teacher-centred and student-centred teaching practices" (Dole et al., 2015). This approach of teaching applies the strategies used by teacher-centred and student-centred learning. The students will get information better from the learners than from the information given by the lecturer. This method encourages the students to find more information rather than waiting for the lecturer to provide it. As such, research evidence on teaching approaches maintains that this teaching method is effective in improving students' academic performance (Ahmed & Ain, 2013).

2.0 Methodology

The Fluid Mechanics course focused on students' ability to acquire and apply basic knowledge of fluid mechanics, as well as the ability to identify, formulate and solve engineering problems such as flotation, stability, fluids under static conditions, concepts on continuity, momentum principles and common flow measuring devices. Due to the constant high failure rate obtained by the students for this particular course every semester, the Buddy System programme was introduced and conducted for two semesters (September 2017 - January 2018 and March 2019 – July 2019) with two different methods.

For the intake of September 2017 - January 2018, the Buddy System programme was conducted whereby the students were divided into small groups and assisted by one mentor. The mentors were identified and selected among students beforehand based on their academic achievement and performance in the classroom. The programme began with a brief introduction given by a lecturer which focused on tips for answering questions and comprehensive explanations of all the topics involved. The assigned mentors then were responsible for assisting the other group members to answer the questions provided by the lecturers for the Fluid Mechanics course throughout the programme. The mentors, however, were highly encouraged to continue their role as a mentor and assisted their mentees every time

and everywhere they were needed until the end of the semester.

For the intake of March 2019 – July 2019, this programme had been conducted and facilitated by five lecturers to assist the students throughout the sessions. The lecturers acted as facilitators to deliver comprehensive conclusions, provide the materials and be prepared to answer any questions related to the designated topics. The session began with a brief introduction and overview of the topics covered for the Fluid Mechanics course. The questions based on each of the topics were prepared beforehand, and students were given the opportunity to study with different lecturers for each topic during the session. This method was used to expose the students to different approaches and teaching methods by different lecturers. Besides, students were given a chance to study the related topics with the other lecturers during the sessions and enhance the bilateral relationship between lecturers and students. A summary of the techniques implemented for the Buddy System programme is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Methods used in Buddy System

Semester Intake	Implementation of Buddy System	Method
Dec 2016 - April 2017	No	Not applicable
Sept 2017 - Jan 2018	Yes	Student-centred
Sept 2018 - Jan 2019	No	Not applicable
Mar 2019 – Jul 2019	Yes	Teacher-centred

3.0 Results and Discussion

The result was analysed and compared based on the percentage of failure rate before and after the implementation of the Buddy System programme for four semesters. The findings as shown in Figure 1 revealed that the percentage of failure rate for semester September 2017 – January 2018 plummeted from 26.03% to 16.21%. The decrement of 9.82% resulted from the continuous guidance and assistance from the mentors appointed amongst students throughout the semester. In comparison to semester March 2019 – July 2019 where several lecturers were appointed as a mentor, the percentage of failure rate shows only a slight decrease with 0.47% from the previous semester (September 2018 – January 2019) without the implementation of the Buddy System programme.
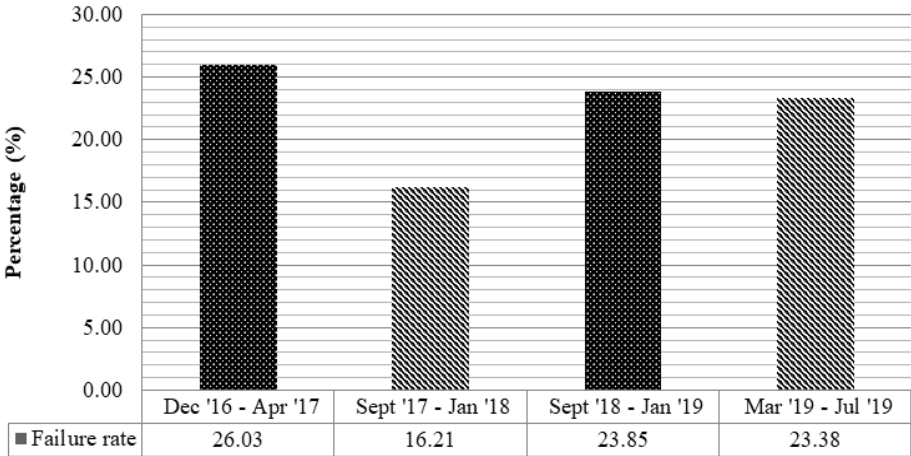
Figure 1: Percentage of failure rate according to semester

Figure 2 shows the detailed segregation of students' achievement based on grades obtained according to semesters in percentage. Students are considered to fail in the subject taken if they obtained less than 50 marks of total assessment (grade C-, D+, D, E and F). Meanwhile, the other grades are considered as distinction (grade A+, A and A-), credit (grade B+, B and B-) and pass (grade C+ and C).
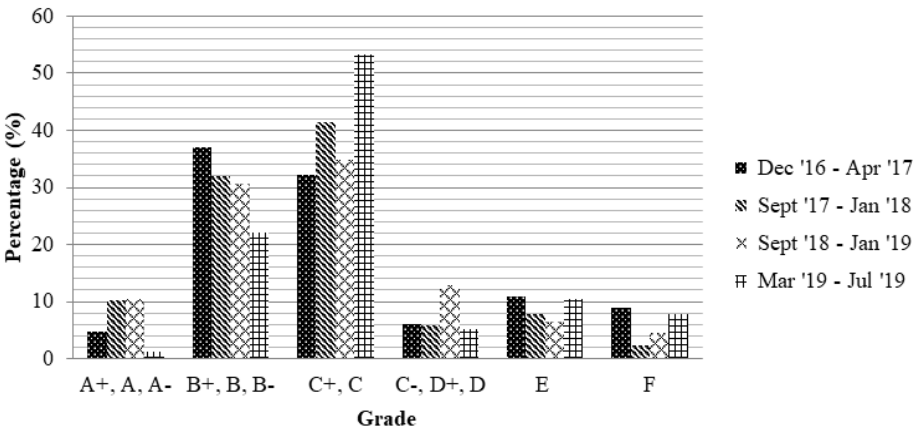
Figure 2: Percentage of students' achievement according to grade

For the semester September 2017 – January 2018, the mentors were selected based on their academic performances from the previous semesters. Based on the findings, the implementation of the Buddy System Programme with mentors appointed amongst students show that the peer influence may contribute to the

similarity of academic behaviours of the mentors and mentees. The studies on academic socialization revealed that youth are more likely to seek out peers with similar academic achievement and that these peer affiliations also influence their achievement over time (Goodwin et al., 2012; Laninga-Wijnen et al., 2018). With the help and guidance from excellent peers and virtuous surroundings, the average students that require assistance were able to work and overcome problems related to this particular course together with the mentors.

Appointing lecturers to be their mentors can also be similar to having an extended face-to-face interaction in a physical classroom, but with a non-conventional approach. Having lecturers mentoring the students, paving their curiosity with fundamentals, showing them the way to find additional resources and answers to their questions may expand and broaden their knowledge more compare to having students as mentors. However, studying with mentors appointed among lecturers can be restricted due to time constrain and coping with their individual time. Instead of finding a suitable time for both parties with limited time available, students tend to seek help from their peers to revise together. The amount of study time spent among them was unlimited compared to the time spent studying with lecturers appointed as a mentor (semester March 2019 – July 2019). Nevertheless, students need to be observed to ensure they are still on track so that the aims of the buddy system programme can be achieved.

A positive learning environment is important to create a value participatory in teaching and learning processes. The behaviour and attitude of the students in front of lecturers are frequently different compared to when they are among themselves. In the classroom, the students might keep themselves from asking questions due to low self-esteem, shyness and having difficulty in forming the question. The gap in the lecturer-student relationship might also hinder them from asking questions, and hence, risk them losing valuable academic information.

By appointing mentors among peers, it can be seen that direct interaction between students encourages an active learning process. Students tend to discuss and cooperate with each other to solve the given problems rather than simply listen to the solutions given when lecturers as their mentors. Besides, students who communicate a similar discourse will provide a better understanding. Mentors can explain difficult jargon and expressions by using words that fellow students can understand. It does not only create a less formal mean and comfortable learning environment but also benefits in increasing the motivation for studying for both mentors and mentees. Students engaged in active learning result in higher attainment, more positive feelings from the students about each other and

improved academic self-esteem contrast in individualistic learning (R. T. Johnson & Johnson, 2008).

4.0 Conclusion

This study has shown that the implementation of both Buddy System methods has improved the percentage of failure rate for course Fluid Mechanics. The result shows higher improvement when the Buddy System programme was assisted by mentors appointed amongst students compared to lecturers appointed as mentors. Students find it comfortable to team up amongst themselves and can open up discussing the courses. Buddy System programme should be considered as an extensive series of initiatives to help average students in certain courses achieve better understanding, develop strong peer support and create an effective long-term outcome. Buddy System programme is in line with the university's efforts in equipping students' independent learning culture and keeping averagely performance students occupied for the whole semester by interacting continuously with the mentors. This programme is one of the alternatives focusing on a supportive network facilitated by committed mentors and a quality module. However, improvement of the results may be influenced by some uncontrolled factors such as the difficulty level of exam questions and the capabilities of the students.

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Measuring Perceived Stress and Burnout Level among Undergraduates during ODL Sessions in UiTM Tapah

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted nearly every industry including educational institutions. The change from traditional learning to online learning methods has created a new learning environment. Students need to adjust to a new norm of attending online lectures, connecting with lecturers and classmates virtually, and chasing deadlines for submitting work while also scheduling time for self-revision. This situation can create another issue for students which are stress and burnout during Open and Distance Learning (ODL) sessions. Hence, the purpose of the study is (1) to assess the level of perceived stress and burnout among accounting students during ODL sessions; and (2) to determine the relationship between accounting students' perceived stress and burnout during ODL sessions. An e-survey was used to deliver a set of questionnaires to accounting students on their perceived stress and burnout experiences, with a total of 314 respondents in the final sample. Perceived Stress Scale and Maslach Burnout Inventory Student Survey (MBI–SS) were used to measure the perceived stress and burnout respectively. According to the findings, in terms of student burnout, 50 percent of the respondents had burnout from never to practically every week, while the other 50 percent experienced burnout from every week to every day. In terms of perceived stress, the results showed that 50 percent of the respondents felt from never to sometimes for specific perceived stress identified, while the other 50 percent felt from sometimes to very often. A substantial positive association between perceived stress and burnout was found, implying that the higher the perceived stress, the more burnout the students will feel during ODL sessions.

1.0 Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has hit almost every country worldwide, with no exception to Malaysia. The Movement Control Order (MCO), which was proclaimed by Malaysia's Eight Prime Minister, Tan Sri Dato' Haji Mahiaddin bin Md. Yasin, on 18 March 2020, was adopted to control the pandemic outbreak. Apart from the restrictions imposed by the government, all schools and both public and private higher education institutions have been closed. Alternatively, the schools and institutions employed home-based learning, and student's performance is evaluated through continuous assessment scores. To address this scenario, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) has switched all classes to Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode as of 13 April 2020. It provides students with a flexible learning environment in which they can engage in online lectures, tutorial discussions, and even take tests and final assessments from wherever they are.

Online learning is a type of distance learning in which students and lecturers are in different locations but may still communicate over the Internet (Bartley and Golek, 2004). Instead of providing a flexible teaching and learning environment, online learning, on the other hand, has several challenges that students encounter. Hussin et al., (2020) reported that moreover half of the students had poor internet connections, which was highlighted as the most significant barrier to ODL implementation. According to the findings, 53 percent of those who have bad internet connections live in the cities. The study was later reinforced by the findings of Adnan and Anwar (2020), who discovered that rather than a terrible technical issue, a monetary issue was also causing difficulty in accessing online learning. For students, a lack of self-motivation is also a concern (Azmi and Lai, 2021). They further explain that the dissatisfaction with ODL is also because of the inability to adapt to the new learning environment, hence, it requires time for them to adapt to the new experience. In addition to a poor internet connection, financial difficulties, and a lack of self-motivation are the issues that need to be dealt with. In their study, Aldulaimi et al., (2021) discovered that the workload has piled up significantly on students because they are asked to complete study tasks and post them to the internet, which adds to the stress for all and takes a long time due to the complexities of technology. Responding to those issues that develop among students, educators must be aware of students' conditions, such as motivation and adequate internet connectivity, to participate in online learning and engage with educators effectively (Musa et al., 2020).

More researches have recently focused on the perceived stress experienced by university students during open and distance learning, which was suddenly executed in response to the Covid-19 outbreak. Perceived stress is described by Lazarus (1990), as referenced in Kausar, (2010) as a subjectively experienced condition in which an individual recognizes an imbalance between demands addressed to him/her and the resources available to meet the demands. Academic pressure, separation from school, fears of contagion on the physical and physiological health of college students and worry for family members' health are characteristics that were found to be predictors of institution students' perceived stress (Yang et al., 2021; and Kostic et al., 2021). During the early stage of the Covid-19 pandemic, Simegn et al. (2021) determined that stress was significantly associated with first and second-year female students in Ethiopian University when they did not believe Covid-19 was preventable, the presence of confirmed Covid-19 patients in the town they were living in, and a lack of access to reading materials about Covid-19. The other study on medical students made by Woon et al. (2021) discovered that after the first movement control order (MCO) was lifted, frustration from loss of daily routine and study disruption, as well as having pre-existing medical, depressive, and anxiety disorders, were resulted to increased depressive symptoms.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, when education transitioned to online mode and distance learning, prolonged time spent in front of screens, tablets, and smart gadgets increased stress and burnout (Mheidly et al., 2020). Yang (2004) defines student burnout as "a state of emotional weariness, a predisposition to depersonalization, and a sense of poor personal success displayed by students in the learning process due to course stress, course load, or other psychological factors." While the concept of student burnout has gained popularity, Schaufeli et al. (2002) developed the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS). It has now been referred to be the most widely used as a measurement to survey burnout among students (Wickramasinghe, 2018; Portoghese et al., 2018). Sugara et al. (2020) proposed that burnout harmed the quality of life, and discovered that both health and relative, which are categories that characterize the quality of life, had a negative relationship with burnout. This explains that the higher the quality of life, the lower the burnout level of students and vice versa. In Malaysia, a comparison of Bachelor Accounting students from private and public colleges was conducted. The findings indicated that students from private institutions are more stressed than those from public institutions. The findings also suggest that academic environments such as assessment format, academic load and subject difficulty, could be the sources of stress (Mohd Nor et al., 2019).

According to the literature, there is a need to address the issue of stress and burnout

among university students to find the necessary solutions. Perceived stress and burnout were extensively discussed by Malaysian researchers. In response to the current situation, in which most educational institutes throughout the world have transitioned to e-learning because of Covid-19, this study aims to fill in this gap to acquire a clearer insight from the students' perspective, particularly in Malaysia. Thus, the objectives of this study are:

- To assess the level of perceived stress and burnout among accounting students during ODL sessions; and
- To determine the relationship between accounting students' perceived stress and burnout during ODL session.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 includes previous literature on the level of perceived stress and burnout among students. Section 3 describes the research methodology that includes data and samples. Section 4 presents the empirical analysis and discussion on the findings and section 5 provides the conclusion, limitation and recommendation.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

The concept of ODL is not a new term as it has been introduced in the late 1800s whereby the University of Chicago became the first university in the United States (US) implemented distance education which teachers and students located in different locations (Ghosh et al., 2012). After the development of radio and television in the 1950s, the concept of ODL started to be widely used as people found the new delivery system outside the traditional classroom. In these modern days, with the introduction of the internet, online learning has become one of the choices to replace face-to-face classes especially during the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. According to American Association for Distance Learning (UDSLA), ODL means "the process of acquiring knowledge through a variety of media used to transfer education and information, including all types of technology and various forms of education for distance learning." Recent research by Md Saidi et al., (2021) mention that ODL is one of the most suitable strategies that integrate virtual technology that will allow the continuation of the teaching and learning process. In today's global knowledge-based society, ODL may be conducted in various forms such as online learning or e-learning as well as MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses). Singh and Thurman (2019) defined online learning as learning experiences either in synchronous or asynchronous

environments through different technologies so that students can learn and interact with teachers anywhere and share their ideas with their friends simultaneously. Meanwhile, Osman et al., (2009) defined online learning as course materials that are delivered via the internet.

2.1.1 ODL Mechanism

Because of the rapid changes in technologies, a variety of tools or methods can be used to conduct the ODL including chat applications (WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), video conferencing (Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Cisco Webex) and Learning Management System (LMS) such as Google Classroom, Ufuture/i-Learn, Schoology, Moodle, Quizziz, Kahoot, Padlet and Jamboard. A study done by Kurok et al. (2020) found that 100 percent of the respondents, consisting of 173 teachers from two educational institutions in Russia, used the ZOOM application as a communication tool during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another study done by Md Saidi et al. (2021) claimed that 95 percent of respondents who are educators and students in public and private universities in Malaysia preferred Google Meet in conducting their live meetings and 97 percent of them preferred Google Classroom and WhatsApp as their tools in conducting ODL.

The educators' approaches in the ODL must be consistent with the approach or mode in which they desire to connect with students, whether synchronous or asynchronous. The Synchronous method means that all classes are held in real-time, with teachers and students present at the same time (Abdul Rahim et al., 2021). Therefore, educators are required to schedule the meetings and conferences in an appropriate calendaring system and the data system logging needs to keep track of the system so that all members would be alert on updated announcements or information (Ghosh et al., 2012). Under the asynchronous approach, the lecture notes are given to students and they are free to go through their notes at their own time without any real-time communication with educators (Abdul Rahim et al., 2021). Asynchronous mode is more complex which requires a special and careful designation of the database to store the information of the participants' online behavior (Ghosh et al., 2012). Regardless of the advantages and disadvantages of the above approaches, however, it is suggested to include the combination of both approaches in conducting ODL so that greater flexibility for students to learn at their own time (Oye, 2012).

2.1.2 Benefits and challenges of ODL

ODL can provide numerous benefits to both educators and students. According to Ghosh et al. (2012), ODL may provide benefits in terms of; 1) improving the knowledge and skills of educators, both in higher education and educational agencies, 2) using in out-of-school programs where it is able to educate children and youth who are unable to attend ordinary schools due to disabled, suffering long-term illness, living in a remote area or living oversea and 3) playing an important role for the human development especially in providing online hands-on training in the field of technical and vocational education. Besides that, Roqobih et al. (2019) as cited by Abdul Rahim et al. (2021) mentioned that online learning was able to increase student's creative thinking skills. The flexibility of online learning that includes the element of gamification also has enhanced the student's engagement towards the course as well as improved the students learning as students started to feel enjoy learning on certain subjects or courses (Poondej, 2019; Hartt et al., 2020). Other than that, the physical lecture by the educators could be improved through the inclusion of the audio in the lecture slides (Roqobih et al., 2019). This can give benefits to students where it can help students to have a better understanding of the topics' content. By referring to the previous studies, it is no doubt that ODL can give positive effects and provide assistance in the teaching and learning process especially during the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite the effectiveness of ODL, there are also some challenges faced by the educators as well as students. Girik (2020) highlighted some issues in ODL such as the availability of internet access, financial issues and also the problem with online learning applications. O'Doherty et al. (2018) stated that the main barriers to online learning were time constraints, poor technical skills, inadequate infrastructure, absence of institutional strategies and support as well as negative attitudes. A recent study by Sugilar (2021) identified four factors as students' barriers to participating in online tutorial classes namely (1) lack of information about online tutorials, (2) lack of student motivation, (3) technical barriers and (4) lack of support services for students. Bashitialshaaer et al. (2021) have mentioned the important obstacles that hinder distance learning such as shortages of educators, the need for training and experience in using the internet, lack of technological infrastructure at some universities other than lack of direct interaction and communication between educators and students.

2.2 Perceived stress

Stress is a normal phenomenon suffered by anyone due to various factors of the stressor. According to Yang et al. (2021), two appraisals were triggered when someone was confronted with stressors namely primary appraisal which an individual evaluates potential threats or harms; and secondary appraisal that refers to the ability to change the situation and control negative emotional reactions. The present study will focus on perceived stress due to its crucial role in the attribution-secondary appraisal coping relationship. Lazarus (1990, as cited in Kausar, 2010) defined perceived stress as a condition subjectively experienced by an individual who identifies an imbalance between demands addressed to him/her and the resources available to encounter these demands. Kausar (2010) revealed that academic workload predicted university students' perceived stress. Consistently, a study conducted on 199 university graduates and undergraduates in Rawalpindi and Islamabad further confirmed that course load, sleep problem and social activities were the major source of perceived stress (Talib and Zia-ur-Rehman, 2012). According to Mohd Nor et al. (2019), the nature of accounting courses that require students to master highly technical and quantitative subjects as well as to adapt to the rapidly changing environments on accounting, auditing standards and taxation regulations also imposed stress on the accounting students. Other than previous factors, Worku et al. (2020), reported that the financial constraint, pressure to maintain a good grade and high parental expectations contributes to the perceived stress among undergraduate health science students at Arsi University Oromia, Ethiopia. However, when students see stress positively, it can motivate them to take action to be their success factors. The study done by Gabre and Kumar (2012) found that there is no significant relationship between perceived stress and academic performance of accounting students because students will perform best under moderate amounts of stress. Another study conducted by Ozveren (2021) showed a negative relationship between self-efficacy and perceived stress which indicates that students with a relatively high self-efficacy level can control stress better than students with a low self-efficacy level.

Stress, if not well managed, may give rise to feelings of fear, incompetence, uselessness, anger, and guilt, which in turn can cause physical and mental health problems (Eva et al., 2015). These worrying circumstances should be addressed promptly because they can lead to poor quality of life and overall dissatisfaction in life (Opoku-Acheampong et al., 2017). Further, unmanaged stress also may expose people to the risk of self-harm and suicide (Stewart et al., 2019).

Concerning financial matters, all self-financing students and almost all of the students who received a scholarship claimed that they experienced stress. This could be due to the pressure to complete their study and maintain a good grade to secure continuous sponsorship (Mohd Nor et al., 2019). In contrast, Worku et al. (2020) found that there was a statistically significant association between perceived stress and students' age and year of study among undergraduate health science students.

Recently, an increasing number of studies have focused on the perceived stress suffered by university students during ODL that was suddenly implemented due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Yang et al. (2021) carried out research to explore the mediating effect of perceived stress on the relationship between academic workload, separation from school, and fears of contagion on college students' physical and physiological health. Findings revealed that all the variables are a predictor of college students' perceived stress, which in turn, affect their health. Since students live with their parents, Kostic et al. (2021) found out that expressing concern for the health of family members during the Covid-19 outbreak predicted higher levels of perceived stress. Thus, the present study implies that ODL conducted during the pandemic contributes to the perceived stress among diploma accounting students.

2.3 Burnout

Herbert Freudenberger was the first to describe burnout in 1974 (Heinemann and Heinemann, 2017). Since that, burnout received extensive attention from the researcher to explore the factors that triggered the syndrome, its consequences and ways to cope with it. The World Health Organization has revised the definition of burnout as a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed (WHO, 2019). Not limited to the professions such as teachers, medical practitioners, lawyers, security agents, secretaries or psychologists, university students are also vulnerable to burnout syndrome (Salami et al., 2017). Yang (2004) has defined student burnout as burnout in the learning process, because of course stress, course load or other psychological factors, display a state of emotional exhaustion, a tendency to depersonalization, and a feeling of low personal accomplishment. Rahmati (2015) pointed out that students with low self-efficacy become easily burnout and have less ability to adapt to the syndrome when facing academic assignments, hard tasks and exhausted subjects. Other than the pressure on course load, university students are also faced with social and professional pressures related to the financing of higher education, academic performance, and poor relationships with colleagues and educators that make them more vulnerable to the development of this syndrome (Salgado and

Au-Yong-Oliveira, 2021). As the education shifted to online mode and distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, prolonged time facing screens, tablets, and smart devices also lead to an increased level of stress and burnout (Mheidly et al., 2020).

A higher level of burnout can lead to higher absenteeism, lower enthusiasm to complete the course work, higher percentage of dropout and eventually affect overall student's academic achievement (Yang, 2004). Burnout causes students to feel strain, overwhelmed, and exhausted. This in turn gives a bad impact on student performance, satisfaction and decreasing productivity in learning (Norez, 2017; Sugara et al., 2020). However, students with high levels of emotional intelligence are associated with lower levels of burnout due to their ability to cope with environmental demands and pressures (Cazan and Nastaza, 2015). Another study conducted by Abuaddousa et al. (2021) found that major academic satisfaction for accounting students has a significant negative impact on burnout. Besides that, Salgado and Au-Yong-Oliveira (2021) highlighted that academic involvement, intrinsic motivation, social support and resilience are factors that seem to protect students from experiencing burnout. Thus, universities should educate students about coping strategies to manage their emotions, to be more flexible, and to express their emotions in a proper way in order to combat burnout syndrome. In terms of health, burnout leads to an increased rate of mood disorders such as depression and anxiety and a plethora of physical problems including increased inflammation biomarkers and cardiovascular disease, metabolic syndrome, sleep disturbances, changes in appetite, fatigue, lowered immunity, headaches, and gastrointestinal distress (Norez, 2017). To conclude, the negative effect brought by burnout will affect the overall quality of life (Sugara et al., 2020). Turning to demographic elements, Yang (2004) found that male students have a higher level of burnout than female students. In contrast to the earlier study, no statistically significant result was found between age, gender and gross monthly income with the levels of burnout (Abuaddousa et al., 2021; Salgado and Au-Yong-Oliveira, 2021). Based on the above argument, this present study assumed that ODL conducted during the pandemic contributes to burnout to the diploma accounting students.

3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 Population and sample size

The population of this study is accounting students in one branch of a public university in Perak, Malaysia. This is the university that has the largest number of accounting students as compared to other branches. Therefore, data in

this research represent a large population of Accountancy diploma students as a whole. A set of e-survey in Google Form was distributed to all students through Group WhatsApp since it is the best medium to reach students who were at their own home during ODL due to the pandemic of Covid-19. The data were collected from August to October 2020 with a total population of students of 1,545. There were 314 responses received which is approximately 20 percent of the total population. According to Roscoe (1975), as cited by Sekaran and Bougie (2013), the sample size in a study should be between the ranges of 30 to 500. Thus, the sample size of 314 is considered to be sufficient for this study.

3.2 Survey Instrument

This study uses an e-survey that consists of three sections. The first section, Section A requests the respondents to complete their demographic profile such as age, gender, parents' employment status, parents' monthly income, parents' monthly income is affected by the pandemic crisis of Covid-19, family residence, total online classes enrolled, current semester, student accommodation, types of internet access during ODL, as well as their academic performance. The student's academic performance was measured by their Cumulative Grade Points Average (CGPA). Section B asks about the respondents' perceived stress. There are 10 questions adapted from Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale that are used to measure perceived stress during open and distance learning. The respondents are requested to choose between the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = never, 2 = almost never, 3 = sometimes, 4 = fairly often and 5 = very often. The final section, Section C consists of 15 statements adapted from Maslach Burnout Inventory Student Survey (MBI-SS) that measure burnout during open and distance learning. The respondents are requested to tick one out of seven scales provided where 1 = never, 2 = a few times a year, 3 = every month, 4 = a few times a month, 5 = every week, 6 = a few times a week and 7 = every day.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) software. Descriptive statistics was used to find out the mean scores for perceived stress and burnout. Meanwhile, the correlation analysis was performed to investigate the existence of a relationship between the two independent variables (perceived stress and burnout). Before this analysis took place, the reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha was conducted. The results in explaining the distribution of the data will use median (Med) value to central value and interquartile range (IQR) to explain the variability of the data.

4.0 Results and Discussion

A demographic profile has been collected from the participants. The profiles included gender, family residence, student's accommodation, parent's monthly income, internet access and the family being affected by pandemic crisis of Covid-19.

Table 1 below shows that the respondents are represented almost by females compared to males. There are 65 males (20.7 percent) and 249 females (79.3 percent) in the sample giving a total of 314 respondents. According to the Family Residence variable, it was found that the majority of the respondents are from the Urban areas (65.9percent) compared to the Rural areas (34.1 percent). Meanwhile, for a parent's monthly income, it shows that the respondents are taken across all income levels which reflects the socio-economic status of their parents. Majority of the respondent came from B40 group where their parent's income is between   RM1,000 to RM5,000 (52.5 percent), followed by income range RM 5,000- RM10,000 (24.5 percent), less than RM1,000 (11.1 percent), RM10,000 - RM15,000 (8.6 percent) and over RM15,000 (3.2 percent). The respondent has also been asked about their internet access during the ODL session on the kind of internet access that they mostly used. The result shows that 49.4 percent of the respondents used their mobile phone internet, followed by fixed internet line/ broadband/home Wi-Fi (49 percent) and another 1.6 percent is free accessible Wi-Fi. The study also found that 62.1 percent of the respondent's parent's monthly income are not really affected by the pandemic crisis of Covid-19, the remaining 37.9 percent are very much affected by this pandemic crisis.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondent

Variable	Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	65	20.7
	Female	249	79.3
Family Residence	Rural	107	34.1
	Urban	207	65.9
Students Accommodations	Stay with parents	304	96.8
	Stay with older siblings	3	1
	Stay with guardians (other than parents and siblings)	5	1.6
	Others	2	0.6

Parent's Monthly Income	Less than RM1,000	35	11.1
	RM1,000-RM5,000	165	52.5
	RM5,000-RM10,000	77	24.5
	RM10,000-RM15,000	27	8.6
	Over RM 15,000	10	3.2
Internet Access	Fixed internet line/ broadband/ home WI-FI	154	49
	Free-accessible WI-FI	5	1.6
	Mobile Phone internet	155	49.4
Affected by Pandemic Crises	No	195	62.1
	Yes	119	37.9

The findings of the survey have been represented in Table 2 and Table 3 below. Table 2 shows that the respondents' perceived stress levels during the ODL session. Based on the findings it shows that 50 percent of the respondents feel from 'never to sometimes' (Med=3) as they felt unable to control the important things in their life (IQR=3 to 4), they were confident about their ability to handle their personal problems (IQR=3 to 4), things were going their way (IQR=0), they could not cope with all the things that they had to do (IQR=3 to 4), they been able to control irritations in their life (IQR=3 to 4), they were on top of things (IQR=2 to 3) and difficulties were piling up so high that they could not overcome them (IQR= 3 to 4). Other than that, the respondents felt fairly often (IQR=3 to 4). Another 50 percent of the respondents feel and think from 'sometimes to very often'. Furthermore, the findings also show 50 percent (Med=4), as they feel from 'never to fairly often' on being upset because of something that happened unexpectedly (IQR=3 to 4), they felt nervous and stressed (IQR=3 to 5) and been angered because of things that were outside of their control (IQR= 3 to 4). Other remaining respondents experienced from fairly often to very often.

It could be said that the perceived stress during ODL with the median score of 3 (Sometimes) could be due to the reason that students were staying with parents. They might have to abide by rules and regulations from parents or even high expectations from parents for them to be involved in household matters and at the same time concentrating on their ODL sessions. These findings are supported by Worku et al. (2020) as they stated that high expectations from family members could lead to a high level of perceived stress. Other than that, since ODL sessions are conducted due to the pandemic crisis of Covid-19, the rising number of infected patients is one of the worrying issues that will somehow increase the level of stress among students. Kostic et al. (2021) found that expressing concern for the health

of family members has predicted a higher level of perceived stress. Another factor that might lead to this finding is students were having financial resources constraints as the majority of students comes from a lower range income family. In addition to the rising level of stress could be due to the model of ODL sessions, where students have no physical interaction opportunity with their friends, students were actually separated from their normal face-to-face life with friends in university. Yang et al. (2021) claimed that separation from school leads to perceived stress.

Table 2: Respondents' Perceived Stress during ODL session

Item	Median	IQR	Interpretation
In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	4	1	Fairly Often
In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	3	1	Sometimes
In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?	4	2	Fairly Often
In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?	3	1	Sometimes
In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?	3	0	Sometimes
In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?	3	1	Sometimes
In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?	3	1	Sometimes
In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?	3	1	Sometimes
In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?	4	1	Fairly Often
In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	3	1	Sometimes

The findings in Table 3, has shown that during ODL sessions, 50 percent of the respondents were experiencing burnout out from 'never to every week' (Med=5), as 'they feel emotionally drained by online distance studies' (IQR=4 to 6), 'burned out from their online distance classes' (IQR=3 to 6), 'they felt tired of getting up in the morning and have to face another day in online distance classes' (IQR=3 to

6), 'the belief that they can make an effective contribution to the online distance classes attended' (IQR=3 to 6) and the 'feeling of stimulated when study goals are achieved' (IQR=4 to 6). Another 50 percent are from 'every week to every day'.

The 3: Respondents' Burnout during ODL session

Item of the survey	Median	IQR	Interpretation
I feel emotionally drained by my online distance studies	5	2	Every week
I feel used up at the end of a day at university	4	2	A few times in a month
I feel burned out from my online distance studies	5	3	Every week
I feel tired when I get up in the morning and I have to face another day in online distance classes	5	3	Every week
Studying or attending an online distance class is really a strain for me	4	3	A few times in a month
I have become less interested in my studies since my enrollment in the online distance classes imposed by the university	4	4	A few times in a month
I have become less enthusiastic about my online distance studies	4	4	A few times in a month
I have become more cynical about the potential usefulness of my online distance studies	4	3	A few times in a month
I doubt the significance of my online distance studies	4	3	A few times in a month
I can effectively solve the problems that arise in my online distance studies	4	2	A few times in a month
I believe that I make an effective contribution to the online distance classes that I attend	5	3	Every week
In my opinion, I am a good student	4	3	A few times in a month
I have learnt many interesting things during the course of my online distance studies	4	3	A few times in a month
I feel stimulated when I achieve my study goals	5	2	Every week
During the online distance class, I feel confident that I am effective in getting things done	4	2	A few times in a month

Instead of felt burned out weekly, 50 percent of them experience burnout from 'never to a few times' in a month (Med=4). An item such as that stated they feel used up at the end of a day at university (IQR= 4 to 6), studying or attending an online distance class is really a strain for them (IQR= 3 to 6). Other than that, they also become less interested in their studies since their enrollment in the online distance classes is imposed by the university (IQR=2 to 6), enthusiastic about their online distance studies (IQR=2 to 6). They also become more cynical about the potential usefulness of their online distance studies (IQR=3 to 6) and doubt the significance of their online distance studies (IQR=3 to 6), stating that they are a good student (IQR=3 to 6), have learnt many interesting things during the course of their online distance studies (IQR=3 to 6) and feel confident that they are effective in getting things done (IQR= 3 to 5).

The level of burnout is considered high. These students were at an early age to be experiencing a high level of burnout. ODL sessions lead to this as students are now shifted from traditional face-to-face learning to fully lending their attention to watching and listening to online lectures, either live or pre-recorded. As students estimated to take a minimum of 4 codes in a semester (12 credit hours) to a maximum number of 8 codes (24 credit hours), more hours were taken for online learning. Mheidly et al. (2020) highlighted that prolonged screen time will increase the level of burnout. The study found that ODL burnout causes these students to feel strain, overwhelmed, and exhausted to face another day online session. These effects will have a negative impact on students' future performance (Sugara et al., 2020). This study suggests that educational systems should make an effort to revise the curriculum and assessments from face-to-face based to ODL based, as the method of delivering lessons and conducting assessments online alone are insufficient. A comprehensive ODL based curriculum is important to alleviate the level of burnout among students in this pandemic.

Table 4: Reliability Test

Dimension	Items	Cronbach's Alpha coefficient
Perceived Stress	10	0.767
Burnout	15	0.883

Table 4 above depicts Cronbach's Alpha score for the dimensions. The reliability test was conducted to check the internal consistency of the scales. The reliability coefficients of the two dimensions' exhibit consistency: Perceived Stress factor with 10 items yield a coefficient value of 0.767 and Burnout factor of 15 items exhibit coefficient value of 0.883. Therefore, the reliability for all dimensions studied was considered high. The scores above 0.70 are consistent with Sekaran

and Bougie (2013).

Table 5: Correlations

			TOT_PS	TOT_BO
Spearman's rho	TOT_PS	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.543**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	314	314
	TOT_BO	Correlation Coefficient	.543**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	314	314

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 above illustrates spearman's Correlation coefficient significant value between Perceived Stress and Burnout during ODL session. The result showed that there was a moderate positive relationship between perceived stress and burnout during ODL with a correlation coefficient of (0.543) and significant at the 0.01 level (p=0.000). It can be concluded that the more perceived stress they experienced during the ODL sessions, they will face a higher level of burnout. The finding of this study is consistent with a recent study by Deemah et al. (2020), who found that the majority of their participants showed moderate to high levels of stress, which would later induce burnout amongst students. All the ODL issues such as the curriculum, assessments, educators-students interaction and others need to be addressed well by universities as a prolonged experience of a high level of stress and burnout, will affect the academic performance of students.

5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study found that students were experiencing moderate to high level of stress and burnout experiences. Students experienced with a high level of stress were associated with feelings of burnout during ODL sessions. The presence of stress may motivate the feelings of burnout to become more visible to students. Hence, this issue should be given outstanding attention in order to find the best mechanisms and techniques in controlling the situation. The study believes that the educational system should consider students' academic life in the time of the current severe pandemic. The center of attention should be on integrating a comprehensive ODL-based curriculum. As for parents, there is a need to address and acknowledge students' feelings during ODL sessions to show support to them. There are several limitations found in this study. The main limitation is reporting bias resulting from the respondents' interpretation of the questions. Factors such

as gender, internet connectivity and financial resources were vary for each student and these might have affected their way of interpreting all the questions. In addition, the study took place only from one university which may set a limited perimeter of generalizing the results. Therefore, for future research, it is suggested to explore a comparison of perceived stress and burnout level of students among different courses during the ODL sessions, from different universities, with a view of extending and examining in a relative and integral way for better results.

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Online Learning Readiness, Online Learning Performance, and Academic Achievement in An English Language Course Among Undergraduates During an ODL Semester

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ABSTRACT

Online Distance Learning (ODL) has now been broadly implemented worldwide at almost all education levels due to the Covid-19 pandemic, though its effectiveness varies. This study looks at the online learning readiness, online learning performance, and academic achievement in an English Language subject among undergraduates in UiTM Melaka, Jasin Campus. Data on online learning readiness was collected through a questionnaire on a sample of 104 Bachelor of Computer Science and Bachelor in Plantation Technology and Management semester three students, at the beginning of the semester. However, only 76 students answered the online questionnaire within the two weeks' time given (response rate =73.08). Meanwhile, data on online learning performance and academic achievement were retrieved from English lecturers who were teaching the sample. It was found that 1) both online learning readiness and online learning performance are positively correlated and predict academic achievement in an English language course conducted online, and 2) Bachelor in Computer Science students performed better in their online learning compared to their peers in Bachelor in Plantation Technology and Management. Overall, this study contributes empirical data regarding learning readiness, online learning performance, and academic achievement in English Language subjects

among undergraduates during an ODL semester in a local setting. Another implication is online learning literacy must be mastered by university students nowadays to cope with the fast development of the online learning industry.

Keywords: *Online Learning Readiness, Online Learning Performance, Undergraduates, Public University, Online Distance Learning (ODL)*

1.0 Introduction

Due to the current global situation, education, specifically the process of learning is rapidly evolving and experiencing significant paradigm shifts to keep abreast. Technology has now become the core in almost every aspect of life. Before, learning has always only been through the medium of face-to-face interaction across every level of education, but the Covid-19 pandemic has powerfully changed the way we teach and learn, from physical classes and interaction to almost everything done through Online Distance Learning (ODL). According to Widodo et al. (2020), ODL is the way technology is being fully embraced to maximize education. Though online learning is not a foreign medium of teaching and learning as it was already embedded as supplementary teaching materials in tertiary levels across Malaysia, the sudden change due to the pandemic, however, has made both tasks more challenging, not only to the lecturers but also to the students (Mahmud & Mahmud, 2020).

1.1 Statement of Problem

In the past, students had options either to learn using the Internet or face-to-face; however, those two options are now seeming to be more like a privilege to a few, as many students are left with only the option of learning through ODL. The most mind-boggling question to many researchers when it comes to ODL is how ready our local university students are when it comes to ODL. Even if students are not prepared, will it somehow affect the students' learning performance? If ODL affects the way students learn, will it directly or indirectly impact their academic achievement?

When it comes to learning English, undergraduate students are faced with the same questions. Students are so used to going for physical classes and meeting lecturers for lectures, as well as having face-to-face communication with classmates when completing assignments and assessments, and to have to forgo all of that for ODL is not a welcoming change.

This study thus seeks to aid further understanding of the new norm and challenges

undergraduates' students face when learning English, specifically with ODL, with the hope that it opens myriad opportunities for improvement and betterment.

1.2 Research Questions

RQ1: What is the level of students' online learning readiness (OLR)?

RQ2: What is the level of students' online learning performance (OLP)?

RQ3: Are there any statistical relationships between OLR and academic achievement as well as between OLP and academic achievement in English language subject?

RQ4: Can OLR and OLP predict academic achievement in English language subject during ODL setting?

RQ5: Is there any significant difference between OLR and OLP in terms of faculty?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Online Learning Readiness (OLR)

Saintika, et al. (2020) stated that though many factors are contributing to successful learning when it comes to ODL, the key contributing factor is students' readiness. The online learning readiness level was based on the E-Learning Readiness Scale, consisting of five notable dimensions, namely computer self-efficacy, self-directed learning, learner control, motivation for learning and online communication self-efficacy (Torun, 2020). Hung et al. (2010) revealed that it is crucial for universities to continuously discover and develop newer means in measuring the level of readiness towards online learning to ensure that students do not feel left out. They further claimed that due to the nature of ODL being more student-centred rather than teacher-centred, it is pivotal for students to be more engaged in their learning progress, which directs us to the importance of measuring students' readiness. Torun (2020) defined Internet self-efficacy as the massive amount of faith a person with a computer has when connected to the world wide web. Chung et al. (2020) stated that since the foundation of ODL is using technology, students must know how to fully optimize the computer and the Internet. To be online ready, students also need to be independent learners or self-directed learners. According to Rajadurai, Alias, Jaafar and Wan Hanafi (2018), the method of delivery across tertiary education has become student-centred aided by technology and the Internet as compared to the conventional method of previous deliveries where students attend physical classes and participate in face-to-face interaction with lecturers. They need to be actively involved in-class activities as well as other forms of class management (Chung et al., 2020) to ensure their learning goals are achievable.

When students can learn independently, this independent learning skill will directly show links to higher control of their learning ability, thus showing a positive influence on their learning performance (Hung et al., 2010). With the drastic change from conventional learning to ODL, the role of the students also shifts from merely being knowledge recipients to being builders or creators of knowledge (Rajadurai et al., 2018). According to Taipjutorus et al. (2012), for online learning to be successful, students need to be in control of the essential skills demanded from ODL. Only when they can motivate and push themselves will they be able to minimize any feelings of insecurities and anxiety they may have towards learning with ODL. Online communication self-efficacy is another aspect in measuring the level of OLR as ODL is seen as able to help those students who are uncomfortable with face-to-face communication. Asking questions and having a discussion become more bearable behind the screen of the computer. McVay (2000) stated that when using the Internet, it is important to encourage active communication and to have no-barrier communications between students and lecturers and agreed by Roper (2007) that online classes should open more rooms for intellectual discourse, be it with the lecturer and with other students (as cited in Hung et al., 2010).

2.2 Online Learning Performance (OLP)

When students are not able to shoulder the responsibilities independently and are still held back with conventional methods of learning where teacher-centred was the fundamental of teaching and learning, students' attainment, and performances are adversely affected. Taipjutorus et al. (2012) elaborated that even when students are familiar with computers, it does not necessarily mean that they have more advantages with regards to ODL. Hung et al. (2010) claimed that students' learning performance is significantly impacted by their catalyst as it pushes students to learn the subject of interest. The higher the curiosity, the more intrigued they are to learn, and even if they might not be comfortable using the computer initially, the inner motivation will overcome it. Sun et al. (2008); Chen; Lambert and Guidry's studies (2010, as cited in Rajadurai, et al., 2018) agreed that to enhance performances, there are many aspects involved in boosting students' interest, such as the quality of testing methods, the testing variations, the course content, the teaching aids as well as the in-depth discussion and discourse. All these factors co-exist in easing students' learning experiences, and when students are at ease, their OLP will improve. When OLP positively increases, Kauser and Shaw (2004 as cited in Rajadurai, et al., 2018) believed that nothing can stop students from achieving their academic goals.

Boardman, et al. (2020) found that both ODL or face-to-face, do not ensure success or failure when it comes to learning performances. Philips (2005) as cited in Boardman, et al., 2020) further claimed that though students are comfortable with ODL, they would likely opt for ODL to be additional or secondary classes and still want face-to-face classes as the primary method of learning. This is also supported by Nenagh and Rachel (2014) who claimed that when it comes to spoken or communication-related activities, students prefer face-to-face classes but when it is writing activities, they would opt to have it online as ODL allows them more time to write (Boardman et al., 2020). Students feel that ODL classes give them more freedom to explore and discover a course thoroughly at their own pace as compared to conventional method where time is a constraint and thus affect students understanding of the subject as they must multitask, for example taking notes and at the same time having to listen to the lecturer (Boardman, et al., 2020). One of the aspects in ensuring positive online learning performance (OLP) is the quality of delivery. A successful class with quality content ensures students are fully engaged and inspired; thus, motivates them to do well as they enjoy the class very much. An excellent lecturer with high sensitivity towards the needs and limitations of their students during ODL will encourage the students to perform better as they feel more connected (Gopal et al., 2020). Sanderson (1995) claimed that it is important for the quality of the instructor and the course content to be monitored as these elements ensure students' performances improve (as cited in Gopal, Singh and Aggarwal, 2020). Jahng et al. (as cited in Van Zyl et al. (2012) confirmed that the performances shown by students studying using ODL are better than those who do not. Students actively participated in the class discourse and social interactions.

2.3 Students' Achievements in ODL Setting

Lin (2007) stated that students participate in ODL because of a sense of belonging, attention from the lecturer, students' life experiences, communication, the way they learn and the determination for success. Davis and Graff (as cited in Boardman et al., 2020) claimed that even being actively involved in discussion and class activities during ODL does not significantly show better academic results than those who are not active. This is further justified by Torun (2020) who stated that in conventional face-to-face learning environments, the achievements' attained by students have no major difference to ODL as what matters is the students' level of readiness, regardless of which medium of teaching is being used. Triastuti (2016) expressed those students need to grasp the importance of realizing the link between having the high motivation and the ability to learn independently to ensure positive

achievements academically. Of course, the higher the interest to learn, even with ODL, the better the impact of their learning on their results.

In ODL, the learners play an important role in maximizing their full potential to achieve the best results. The relationship between the learners, ODL and academic achievement is highly dependent on the learner, as proven by findings of previous research by the likes of Greene and Azevedo; and Cho and Shen (as cited in Torun, 2020). Unlike OLR and OLP, where there is much literature discovered, research on the connection between students' results and its ability to foresee the academic achievement of the students are few as concluded by studies of Keramati et al.; and Cigdem and Ozturk (as cited in Torun, 2020).

3.0 Methodology

This descriptive and correlational study aims to examine the relationship between online learning readiness and online class performance among Bachelor's degree students towards their academic achievement in an English language course during ODL setting. Thus, the quantitative research design was employed in the study.

The sample of this study was semester three Bachelor's degree students in two programmes: Bachelor in Computer Science and Bachelor in Plantation Technology and Management at Jasin campus, UiTM Melaka. The sampling technique adopted was convenience sampling. 104 semester three Bachelor's degree students from four classes were involved in the study: two Bachelor in Computer Science classes and two Bachelor in Plantation Technology and Management classes.

Two instruments were used to collect data in this study: an online learning readiness survey that was answered by the students and an online class performance survey answered by the English language lecturers who were responsible for teaching ELC501 to the students. Meanwhile, students' academic achievements (English language competencies) were obtained from their ELC501 grade which is the final English language subject taken in their Bachelor's degree study plans, when the study was conducted. Students who scored A+ (90-100) was classified as very high competent, A (80-89) was classified as highly competent, A- and B+ (70-79) were classified as moderate competent, B and B- (60-69) was classified as low competent and C+ and C (50-59) was classified as very low competent.

The students' survey questionnaire was adopted from Online Learning Readiness Survey (OLRS) by Hung et al. (2010). The survey contains five dimensions which are computer/internet self-efficacy, self-directed learning, learner control

in an online context, motivation for learning in an online context, and online communication self-efficacy. Meanwhile, the lecturer's survey contains four dimensions which are online class participation, online class attendance, quality of assignments and punctuality in the submission of assignments. Both surveys employed 5-Likert scale items.

The students' survey questionnaire was distributed to the sample via Google Form at the beginning of the semester. The students were given two weeks to answer the survey. 76 students answered the online questionnaire within the two weeks' time given (response rate =73.08). Meanwhile, the lecturers were given online class performance surveys to be filled in after the 14 weeks of the compulsory academic lecture has ended and all their students have finished taking the final test for ELC501. They were given one week to fill in the surveys. All the lecturers returned the completed survey after one week.

The collected data was later analysed using SPSS. Mean and standard deviation was calculated to answer the first and second research questions. To determine the level of online learning readiness and online learning performance, scores were divided into three different levels. Scores below 1.33 indicated a low level of online learning readiness and online learning performance, scores between 1.34 and 3.32 indicated a moderate level of online learning readiness and online learning performance, and scores above 3.33 indicated a high level of online learning readiness and online learning performance.

Meanwhile, the third and fourth research questions were answered via calculation of Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression respectively. As for the fifth research question, an independent sample t-test was conducted to answer it. To determine the degree of strength or magnitude of the relationship in the current study, Cohen's rule of thumb (1988) was used. Table 1 indicates the interpretation of correlation coefficients.

Table 1: Cohen's rule of thumb

Pearson coefficient (r)	The strength of relationship
0.10-0.29	Weak relationship
0.30-0.49	Moderate relationship
0.50-1.00	Strong relationship

4.0 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Level of Students' Online Learning Readiness (OLR)

RQ1: What is the level of students' online learning readiness (OLR)?

Table2: Mean Score of Online Learning Readiness (OLR)

Dimensions	N	Mean	SD	Level
Internet Efficacy	76	3.87	.610	High
Self-Directed Learning	76	3.65	.550	High
Learner Control	76	3.37	.553	High
Online Communication Self-Efficacy	76	3.52	.693	High
Motivation for Learning	76	3 62	.592	High
Overall Total Mean Score	**76**	**3.61**	**.513**	**High**

*1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree

Overall, the students were found to have a high online learning readiness level (M=3.61, SD=0.513). This shows that the students who were involved in the study generally are ready enough to study in a fully online distance learning (ODL) semester amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. As these students are undergraduates in semester three, they have been exposed and managed to acquire all the necessary skills that can be utilized in online learning during their previous two semesters. Their first semester (September-January) was a normal face-to-face semester. Meanwhile, their second semester (February-August) was a hybrid semester that adopts the combination of face-to-face and online learning approaches due to the implementation of Movement Control Order 1.0 2020. Therefore, they experienced using U-Future (UiTM's official e-learning platform), though not every week as it depends on the structure of a course and the lecturer's teaching approach. In this platform, students participated in various kinds of online learning activities such as engaging in academic discussion, uploading their homework to be marked by the lecturer, downloading notes given by their lecturers, and answering quizzes.

Apart from that, from 2020, UiTM students are provided with Microsoft 365 and Google for Education accounts. These accounts enable them to access and use productivity software such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint, One-Drive, Microsoft Teams and SharePoint as well as Gmail, Google Drive, Google Meet and Google Classroom. Furthermore, starting from 2020, six blended learning sessions have been implemented by language-based courses to enhance students' fluency and competency in language via online learning. Thus, learning an English language

course online during a fully online distance learning (ODL) semester is not so challenging for these students.

Furthermore, the students also scored high level in all five dimensions: computer/ internet self-efficacy (M= 3.87, SD=.610, self-directed learning (M=3.65, SD=.550), learner control in an online context (M=3.37, SD=.553), motivation for learning in an online context (M=3.62, SD=.592), and online communication self-efficacy (M=3.52, SD=.693). Based on the findings, it can be seen that internet self-efficacy scored the highest mean. Meanwhile, learner control scored the lowest mean out of five dimensions, albeit it is still in the range of high level. Similar findings can be found in Chung et al. (2020).

Currently, we are in a digital era that centres around the Internet and computer. Through an internet connection, the latest news, a wide range of information, and various electronic tools from all around the globe can be accessed easily. In line with this, the students are well-versed in using the Internet for multiple purposes, not only limited to learning only. Thus, they agreed that they have high internet self-efficacy.

As for learner control, students agreed they tend to be distracted by other online activities while learning online. With lots of interesting games and videos available online, the students felt tempted to play games and watching videos while doing the online learning task assigned by the lecturer. They also agreed that they face difficulty in directing and monitoring their learning progress. They felt lost and unsure whether their online learning progress is good, bad or mediocre. Thus, constant feedback, encouragement, and communication initiated by lecturers from time to time were important to help students feel that they were on the right path and had done a great job in following the online learning sessions.

4.2 Level of Students' Online Learning Performance (OLP)

RQ2: What is the level of students' online learning performance (OLP)?

Table 3: Mean Score of Online Learning Performance (OLP)

Dimensions	N	Mean	SD	Level
Participation	76	3.54	.501	High
Attendance	76	2.78	.419	Moderate
Quality of tasks submitted	76	2.93	.524	Moderate
Punctuality of task submission	76	2.93	.249	Moderate
Overall Total Mean Score	**76**	**3.05**	**.293**	**Moderate**

*1= Strongly disagree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Overall, the students have moderate online learning performance level (M = 3.05, SD = .293). This shows that they were not committed to their online learning for ELC501 course, which is the context of this study.

The only dimension that the students scored high level is participation (M = 3.54, SD = .501). The students scored moderate level in the other three dimensions: attendance (M=2.78, SD=.419), quality of tasks submitted (M=2.93, SD=.524), and punctuality of task submission (M=2.93, SD=2.49). Lecturers agreed that most of the students in this study actively participated in the asynchronous and synchronous learning session when they were present. They tried their best to respond to the discussion posted by lecturers on the learning platform as well as respond to the questions asked by the lecturer during online lectures either verbally or in the chat box.

Nevertheless, in terms of quality and punctuality, the students need to improve as there were students who submitted not only subpar tasks and assignments but also submitted way later than the actual deadline. When probed by the lecturers regarding their late submission and unsatisfactory quality of their assignments, poor Internet connection and computer problems were the two most common excuses given by students. Likewise, the same excuses were also given when the students were absent from the synchronous and asynchronous learning session conducted by the lecturers. The lecturers emphasised with the students and were aware that not all of the students have well-equipped online learning facility and stable Internet connection at home; but, at the beginning of the semester, Student Affairs Department has informed the students that for those who do not have sufficient online learning facility and stable Internet connection at home, they are recommended to stay in the hostel for a comfortable online learning session.

4.3 Online Learning Readiness (OLR) and Academic Achievement

RQ3: Are there any significant correlation between OLR and academic achievement as well as between OLP and academic achievement in an English language course?

Table 4: Correlation Between Online Learning Readiness (OLR) and Academic Achievement in An English Language Course

		Online Learning Readiness	Academic Achievement
Online Learning Readiness	Pearson Correlation	1	.309**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.007
	N	76	76
Academic Achievement	Pearson Correlation	.309**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	76	76

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5: Correlation between Online Learning Readiness Dimensions and Academic Achievement in An English Language Course

	Internet Efficacy	Self-Directed Learning	Learner Control	Online Communication Self-Efficacy	Motivation for Learning
Pearson Correlation	.306**	.254*	.285*	.271*	.206
Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	.027	.013	.018	.074
N	76	76	76	76	76

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows a positive, moderate, and significant relationship between online learning readiness (OLR) and academic achievement in an online English language course (r =.309, p =.007). Out of five dimensions of online learning readiness, only four were positively correlated with academic achievement in an English language course. The analysis depicts 1) a positive, moderate and significant relationship between internet efficacy and academic achievement (r =.306, p =.007), 2) a positive, weak and significant relationship between self-directed learning and academic achievement (r =.254, p =.027), 3) a positive, weak and significant relationship between learner control and academic achievement (r =.285, p =.013), and 4) a positive, weak and significant relationship between online communication

self-efficacy and academic achievement (r =.271, p =.018).

4.4 Online Learning Performance (OLP) and Academic Achievement

RQ3: Are there any significant correlation between OLR and academic achievement as well as between OLP and academic achievement in an English language course?

Table 6: Correlation Between Online Learning Performance (OLP) and Academic Achievement

		Online Learning Performance	Academic Achievement
Online Learning Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.392**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	76	76
Academic Achievement	Pearson Correlation	.392**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	76	76

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7: Correlation Between Online Learning Performance Dimensions and Academic Achievement in An Online English Language Course

	Participation	Attendance	Quality	Punctuality
Pearson Correlation	.191	.238*	.401**	.219
Sig. (2-tailed)	.098	.039	.000	.058
N	76	76	76	76

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 shows a positive, moderate, and significant relationship between online learning performance and academic achievement in the English language. (r =.3.92, p = .000). Out of four dimensions of online learning performance, only two were positively correlated with academic achievement in an online English language course. The analysis depicts 1) a positive, weak and significant relationship between attendance and academic achievement (r =.238, p =.039), and 2) a positive, moderate and significant relationship between quality of tasks submitted and academic achievement (r =.401, p =.000).

4.5 OLR, OLP, and Academic Achievement

RQ4: Can OLR and OLP predict academic achievement in an English language course during ODL setting?

Table 8: OLR, OLP and Academic Achievement in An English Language Course

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.475a	.226	.204	.91478

a.   Predictors: (Constant), OLRS and ODLP

ANOVA^a

	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	17.794	2	8.897	10.632	.000b
Residual	61.087	73	.837		
Total	78.882	75			

a.   Dependent Variable: Academic achievement in English language subject
b.   Predictors: (Constant), OLRS and ODLP

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B.	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.761	1.266		2.180	.032
	ORL	.538	.207	.269	2.597	.011
	OLP	1.266	.362	.363	3.498	.001

a.   Dependent variable: English Grade

Table 8 indicates a positive significant linear relationship [F (2,73) =10.632, p=.000], with an R2 of .226. This signifies that 22.6% (R2=.226) of the variance in academic achievement in an English language course conducted in an ODL setting can be predicted from the independent variables of online learning readiness and online learning performance throughout the semester. Therefore, concurrently it can be inferred that the remaining 78.4% was due to other factors that were not taken into considerations in this study.

Besides, the respondents predicted the following regression equation with y (academic achievement) = 2.761 (constant) + .538(online learning readiness) + 1.266(online learning performance). This means that online learning performance gave a higher contribution towards academic achievement in an English language course in an ODL setting rather than online learning readiness.

4.6 OLR and OLP in terms of Programme

RQ5: Is there any significant difference between OLR and OLP in terms of programme?

Table 9: Independent Sample T-Test for OLR and OLP in terms of Programme

	Programme	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.
OLR	AT	19	3.40	.520	2.168	74	0.33
	CS	57	3.68	.494			
OLP	AT	19	2.88	.366	2.962	74	0.04
	CS	57	3.10	.244			

The mean score of online learning readiness obtained by the Bachelor in Computer Science (M=3.68, SD=.494) is higher than students of Bachelor in Plantation Technology and Management (M=3.40, SD=.520). To determine whether the mean scores are significantly different, an independent sample t-test was conducted. The results revealed that there was no significant difference in the mean scores of online learning readiness between students of different programmes [t (74) =-2.168, p=0.33]. This means that online learning readiness is not influenced by the study programme factor. Students from both programmes were born and grew up in the fast-paced digital era; they experienced the same online innovation.

The mean score of online learning performance obtained by students of Bachelor of Computer Science (M=3.10, SD=.244) is higher than students of Bachelor in Plantation Technology and Management (M=2.88, SD=.366). To determine whether the mean scores are significantly different, an independent sample t-test was conducted. The results revealed that there was a significant difference in the mean scores of online learning performance between students of different programmes [t (74) =-2.962, p=0.04]. This means that online learning performance is influenced by the study programme factor. Almost all courses stated in the study plan of Bachelor of Computer Science involve computer and internet usage as these are their main fields of study. Thus, they have gotten wider exposure in terms of using computers and the internet for a longer time daily compared to students in Bachelor of Plantation Technology and Management. They are already familiar

with completing tasks or assignments that need to be submitted online and also capable to endure back-to-back online lectures in a fully ODL semester compared to their peer from another programme.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

To conclude, online learning readiness and online learning performance predict academic achievement in an online distance learning setting (ODL). Thus, the lecturers need to identify their students' online learning readiness at the beginning of an ODL semester as well as continuously monitoring their online learning performance. This is to ensure that the lecturers prepare and deliver not only interesting but also suitable online learning content via online learning platforms. Aside from that, online learning performance was found to be affected by faculty. Bachelor of Computer Science students performed better compared to Bachelor of Plantation Technology and Management students when the study was conducted, perhaps due to their wider exposure and familiarity in using the latest technology in various compulsory faculty-based courses before this. To further enhance the quality of online learning in universities, the Ministry of Higher Education and all universities in Malaysia need to collaborate in creating and conducting more initiatives to train and promote online learning literacy among the students.

As for recommendations, future research can employ mixed methods and use bigger samples to gain an in-depth analysis of the issue. Besides that, future research might also study these two variables of online learning readiness and online learning performance with other variables such as socioeconomic status, cumulative grade point average (CGPA), and perceived online teaching performance effectiveness for a more detailed insight into the online learning.

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The Conundrum of Second Language Writing Anxiety Among ESL Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the main causes of ESL writing anxiety experienced by Malaysian university students. The students' attitudes towards writing were also examined, which are believed to influence their writing anxiety. This study employed a quantitative method using a questionnaire consisted of causes of writing anxiety. The questionnaire was distributed to 346 undergraduate students from UiTM Perak. The results revealed that there were positive attitudes towards writing among UiTM students although they experienced anxiety towards writing. Respondents also believed that writing was not merely a skill but also a talent that only skilled people could perform. Furthermore, the writing course, task fulfilment, writing skill, instructors and materials were not the main causes of writing anxiety among the ESL students in UiTM since most of the responses had neutral attitudes towards the causes. However, some items were rated higher which could lead to possible causes of anxiety which were incompetent grammar knowledge as well as failure in expressing ideas in English. The study sheds some light on the problems of ESL writing anxiety and raises awareness of language instructors as well as syllabus designers.

Keywords: *ESL Writing Anxiety, Causes*

1.0 Introduction

ESL learners confront with various difficulties and struggles that could lead to anxiety. According to Baez (2005), anxiety is prevalent among university students. Anxiety is one of the psychological factors which affect learners and hinder them from developing skills when learning English as a foreign or second language (Ali & Fei, 2017). Second language anxiety is defined as the feeling of tension and apprehension that are associated with second language contexts, especially concerning the major language skills which are known as speaking, listening, and writing. Research related to writing anxiety is crucial to be looked into and has already been the focal point of many language studies besides speaking anxiety. Cheng et al. (1999) are the first to venture into a study that differentiates anxieties related to different language skills using factor analysis. Many studies have also used second language writing anxiety (SLWA) to investigate further student's writing anxiety. By conducting studies on ESL writing, it helps to reveal that ESL writing anxiety can have profound effects on ESL writing performance (Cheng, 2004).

Many factors contribute to students' anxiety. However, high expectations or demands for writing are likely to affect university students the most since writing is considered a productive skill (Kara, 2013). Such productive skills in writing are highly related to the ability to have self-expression, smooth flow of ideas, growing confidence and enjoyment of L2 academic writing which is known to be the 'real-life' issues that students find hard to cope with (Baştürkmen & Lewis, 2002). Studies have also shown that students utilising productive skills are found to experience a considerable amount of anxiety in the process of learning (Hilleson, 1996; Zhang, 2001). Besides that, writing anxiety also occurs due to language complexity in general and the complexity of writing as a skill in particular (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Schweiker-Marra & Marra, 2000). It is undeniable that writing is a challenging skill for ESL students as it is a complex task to master compared with the other three skills (Daud, 2005). Some of the common challenges that provoke ESL students in performing writing include linguistic difficulties such as lexical items, vocabulary as well as grammatical rules, and coherency (Chamot, 2005).
Apart from that, several studies in the context of ESL writing have managed to highlight the crucial aspects of writing anxiety that affects the students. One of the effects is the negative attitudes towards writing and low motivation, causing them to lose interest and willingness to write and learn the skill (Chamot, 2005; Zhang, 2019). As a result, students are discouraged from expressing their ideas and unable to have writing self-efficacy which make them more intense, anxious, and feel insecure during the writing process (Kirmizi, 2015). Due to this, students

may suffer from anxiety while learning the language. This has raised concerns that led to this study since the issues have yet to be resolved. However, although writing has made learners uneasy, studies have shown that writing skills may contribute towards their ability to succeed in various academic subjects (Daly, 1979; Onwuegbuzie, 1997), which in turn influences academic and occupational choices (Daly & Shamo, 1976, 1978). Therefore, writing anxiety should be a central concern for all learning institutions. The current study seeks to investigate the students' attitudes towards writing as well as the main causes of ESL writing anxiety experienced by Malaysian university students. The following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. What are the students' attitudes towards writing skills?
2. What are the main causes of ESL writing anxiety among ESL students?

2.0 Literature Review

Anxiety is defined as "a psychological construct, commonly described by psychologists as a state of apprehension, a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object" (Hilgard et al., 1971, as cited in Scovel, 1991, p:18). It is deemed as one of the main causes that could give an impact on the learning process. Previous studies showed that stress and anxiety that were linked to academics could decrease the learners' academic achievement, reduce their motivation, as well as intensify the risk of school dropout among them (Pascoe et al., 2020). Even though anxiety has been found to affect many kinds of learning, when it is related to learning a second or foreign language, it is referred to as second or foreign language anxiety (Hashemi, 2011). Several researchers (Horwitz, et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 1995; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991) believe that language subjects or courses are considered highly anxiety-provoking. This is especially true as when language learners are practising productive skills, such as writing and speaking, they are found to deal with a substantial level of anxiety in their learning process (Hilleson, 1996; Zhang, 2001). Thus, examining the learners' anxiety in learning specifically in the second or foreign language is believed to be highly significant in assisting the learners to achieve the intended performance goals in their target language (Tanveer, 2007). Since the current study is focusing on anxiety among second language learners in writing, the following sub-sections are specifically discussing writing anxiety and the causes of such anxiety to happen.

2.1 Writing Anxiety

Writing anxiety is different from personal trait-related anxiety and it is described as "a relatively stable personality characteristic" (Horwitz, 2001, p.113). In other words, it is situation-specific anxiety that only happens in a specific situation such as right before a writing task (Zhang, 2019). Following this line of thought, some research concerning students' language learning anxiety portrayed a negative linear relationship between students' anxiety and their academic performance (e.g., Abdul Malik et al., 2019; Cheng, 2002; Huerta et al., 2017; Sabti et al., 2019). As an illustration, in a study done by Huerta et al. (2017), a qualitative analysis of a survey on 174 students collected from one writing class revealed that students' anxiety was associated with their proficiency in regulating their writing. A similar finding was found in Cheng's (2002) study. The study that used the correlation analysis discovered that college English students in Taiwan displayed a negative linear relationship between their confidence in regulating writing and anxiety. In another study done by Abdul Malik et al. (2019), it was found that the unproficiency of language makes L2 learners have negative feelings towards their writing and their peers' writings. Several students claimed they had lack self-confidence in the knowledge of writing making them feel shy and humiliated when reviewing others' writing and vice versa. They also believed that they have low-quality reviews which are less helpful for their peers' writing.

Sabti et al. (2019) discovered that the Iraqi EFL students, who recorded a high level of writing self-efficacy, showed unsatisfactory writing performance. The findings of this study also indicated that both writing self-efficacy and writing anxiety, and writing anxiety and writing achievement motivation were negatively correlated, whereas writing self-efficacy and writing achievement motivation were significantly and positively correlated. All of these studies again endorse and conclude that a high level of writing anxiety leads a learner to a degrading academic performance, while those with a low level of writing anxiety are professed to attain better grades in their writing assessments (Atay & Kurt, 2006; Erkan & Saban, 2011; Pajares, 2003; Senko, 2016). The findings from the studies also support the notion that writing can be challenging, difficult to learn, and is feared by either second language (L2) or foreign language (FL) learners (Gupta, 1998). Sabti et al. (2019) state that students with high anxiety in EFL writing tend to avoid a writing task as it is viewed as a threat rather than a challenge, making them unwilling into put more effort in enhancing their performance in writing. This is because writing demands language learners to connect suitable lexicon and grammar in crafting cognitive meanings and contents to be delivered (Hyland, 2007).

In addition, the idea of success in writing is usually linked with self-expression, the flow of ideas, outsider expectations, rising confidence, and enjoyment of L2 academic writing, and L2 learners are known to have difficulties dealing with this (Basturkmen & Lewis, 2002). Due to these demanding requirements in producing a good piece of writing, it makes writing a challenging and daunting task for students especially the L2 and FL learners. Thus, L2 or FL learners are mostly intimidated by the idea of writing especially when they are incompetent in the language that they are learning. With mother tongue interference, these F2 and L2 learners are further handicapped in writing, especially in creative and imaginative writing, due to their difficulties to go beyond the surface idea in writing (Chittra et al., 2010).

Despite the challenging task, it is one of the essential skills that language learners have to master because written assignments are typically required in many language courses. Hence, the obscurity of writing frequently causes problems for learners making them anxious when constructing their piece of writing (Huerta et al., 2017). Fortunately, writing anxiety can be mitigated by identifying the contributing factors which lead it to happen. When the related factors have been identified, teachers, lecturers, or language instructors can help to alleviate it and provide aid that their students need to perform and eventually improve their writing skills.

2.2 Causes of Second Language Writing Anxiety (SLWA)

Writing is professed as both cognitive and emotional activity; hence, it is highly connected with these affective factors: anxiety, self-efficacy, and motivation (Sabti et al., 2019). These effective factors play a substantial role in influencing ESL and EFL writing in various studies. Previous studies have identified that lack of confidence, achievement motivation, self-efficacy, and feeling of anxiety can negatively influence students' writing performance (Erkan & Saban, 2011; Pajares & Valiante, 2006; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016; Senko, 2016). Such studies have mostly affirmed that writing achievement motivation and writing self-efficacy may greatly boost writing performance, whereas writing anxiety could highly influence writing ability in negative ways. In other words, such factors play a considerable role in students' behaviour that could lead to either a good or disappointing performance. To exemplify, Sabti et al.'s (2019) study reported that negative characteristics such as fear of making errors and being negatively assessed by lecturers and classmates may have led the respondents to have a high level of anxiety and also led them to avoid the writing task. Similarly, in Abdul Malik et al.'s (2019) study, the peer review activity executed in a writing class caused the respondents to feel embarrassed and humiliated when their peers reviewed

their writing due to their unproficiency in the language that they were learning. Some of them also believed that the reviews from their peers were less helpful in improving their writing. These two studies indicate that fear of negative feedback causes students to have writing anxiety.

In a study done by Zhang (2019), it is revealed that the respondents who had writing classes using online resources felt challenged in using the knowledge to improve their writing. The immature knowledge of the online resources caused their anxiety as they believed the approach was "difficult" and "a bit overwhelmed" to them. Furthermore, Zhang also found that the respondents' emotional discomfort or anxiety was also heightened due to the continuous feedback from the teacher beyond language form. In other words, the findings indicate that apart from the teacher's feedback on the students' writing, the unfamiliar approach used by teachers can also trigger writing anxiety among the students.

In another perspective, having problems in proficiency, difficulty in elaborating ideas, and lacking subject knowledge and content details are listed as other reasons for writing anxiety to happen among students (Chittra et al., 2010). These causes are mainly related to the situation-specific anxiety that occurs right before executing a writing task (Zhang, 2019). Other than that, Price (1991) lists several factors which lead to writing anxiety. Levels of difficulty in language classes, learners' attitudes of their language proficiency, certain personality variables, and taxing classroom experiences are believed by Price to be the possible reasons for writing anxiety among students. The factor on personality variable was also supported by several researchers (Brown et al., 2002). These researchers state that learners' personality traits, such as introversion or extraversion, are linked with anxiety arousal.

In the same line of this thought, Young (1991) acknowledges six possible causes of language anxiety from three areas of arousal which are the learner, the teacher, and the instructional practice. He claims that language anxiety is instigated by the students' personal and interpersonal anxiety, students' beliefs about language learning, teachers' beliefs about language teaching, teacher-student interactions, classroom procedures, and language testing. In another study done by Yetis (2017) on the sources of writing anxiety in the French Language teaching, students found that the writing course, proficiency levels, attitudes towards writing, and the composing process were identified as the potential causes of writing anxiety. The data that were obtained from semi-structured interviews also exposed factors such as classmates, time pressure on writing activities, and teacher's attitudes towards students were other causes of writing anxiety. To deduce, there are a lot of contributing factors to anxiety in writing among students which include different

aspects and perspectives in both teaching and learning environment together with internal and external factors. Therefore, there is a dire need for language teachers or instructors to identify the factors that contribute to the students' anxiety in executing a writing task. Pedagogical considerations in course planning need to take into account students' emotional states (Zheng & Cheng, 2018) so, it can help to reduce the level of anxiety and eventually help the students to be proficient in their writing skills.

3.0 Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study was carried out using a quantitative approach as it seeks to investigate the attitudes towards writing as well as the causes of writing anxiety among diploma students of UiTM Perak.

3.2 Participants

A total of 346 students managed to participate in the study which consisted of 133 (38.4%) males and 206 (59.5%) females. The respondents were semester 1, 2 and 3 Diploma learners from the Art and Design Faculty, and Architecture and Planning Faculty of UiTM Perak Branch.

3.3 Instruments

An online questionnaire (Google Form) was adapted from Selma's (2013) study to investigate the students' attitudes towards writing as well as the main causes of writing anxiety that most ESL students encounter. The instruments include elements related to the causes of anxiety based on students' essay responses that were given out at the initial stage. The adaptation of the questionnaire was based on the researcher's teaching experience and secondary materials which include possible factors that cause ESL writing anxiety among Malaysian diploma students. The questionnaire contained 33 items, which consisted of five sections; section A (demographic profile), section B (writing course), C (writing as a skill), D (instructors) and E (materials). The questionnaire used the Likert scales to rate the participants' perception with five options (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree or Strongly, Agree).

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Only respondents who ticked or felt anxious towards writing, as well as fully answered questionnaires, were taken for data collection purposes, thus eliminating any possible outliers. The data were stored automatically in the hosted online survey service (Google Form) after submission of the responses. Descriptive data analyses such as frequencies, means and average were conducted using the Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS). The findings were tabulated and displayed using tables and graphs.

4.0 Findings

The overall findings and data analysis are presented and discussed based on the research questions.

RQ1: What are the students' attitudes towards writing skills?

Based on the results in Table 1, students relatively had positive attitudes towards writing. When respondents were asked to respond to the question of "I do not like writing", more than 50% (n=187) of the respondents disagreed with the statement. Out of 346 respondents, only 32% (n=111) of respondents stated neutral, whereas a total of 13.6% (n=47) somehow agreed and claimed otherwise as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Attitudes towards Writing

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	72	20.9
Disagree	115	33.3
Neutral	111	32.2
Agree	36	10.4
Strongly agree	11	3.2
Total	346	100

Table 2 indicates another result of showing students' attitudes towards writing. Although respondents had positive attitudes towards writing, they still believed that writing was a talent in which only skilled people could produce good pieces. Based on the results, a total of 41.7% (n=144) respondents agreed with the statement, whereas 36.7% (n=127) respondents claimed otherwise.

Table 2: Writing is a Talent

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	37	10.7
Disagree	90	26
Neutral	75	21.7
Agree	94	27.2
Strongly agree	50	14.5
Total	346	100

RQ2: What are the main causes of ESL writing anxiety among ESL students?

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for task fulfilment as a factor of anxiety towards writing

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Task Fulfilment	343	1.00	5.00	2.90	.789
Valid N (listwise)	343				

Table 3 shows the mean of responses for 'task fulfilment' as the factor of anxiety towards writing. The mean for this construct was 2.91, which indicates that the respondents had a neutral attitude (neither agree nor disagree) with the items listed under the task fulfilment construct. There were 14 items with means between 2.5 to 3.5 which are: 1) "I always feel anxious when I write something in English" (means= 3.08); 2) "when there is a topic"; 2) "I do not know what to write about that topic" (means=2.75); 3) "I cannot express myself in English because I'm lacking of grammar knowledge" (means=3.13); 4) "I have difficulty in finding topics to write" (means=2.98); 5) "I do not know how to begin writing" (means=2.95); 6) "I cannot organize my ideas to write" (means= 2.96); 7) "I cannot improve my writing because I do not read enough" (means=2.82); 8) "I find it difficult to combine or link ideas when I write" (means=2.92); 9) "I cannot organize what I want to write" (means=2.87); 10) "I cannot express what I think" (means=2.79); 11) "I have difficulty in writing because I am used to taking tests" (means=2.71); 12) "I organize my ideas in Malay while writing, therefore; it is difficult for me to express them in English" (means= 3.04); 13)"I cannot write because I lack vocabulary" (means=3.02), and 14) "I cannot generate ideas, so I am not creative" (means=2.74). This implies that 'task fulfilment' does not contribute to the learners' writing anxiety.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for instructors as a factor of anxiety towards writing

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Instructor	336	1.00	5.00	2.21	.901
Valid N (listwise)	336				

Table 4 shows the mean of responses for 'instructor' as the cause of anxiety towards writing. The overall mean for this construct was 2.21, and the mean for all items under the 'instructor' construct was under 2.5. This reveals that the respondents disagreed with all the statements, indicating that the instructor is not a cause of anxiety towards their writing ability.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics for materials as a factor of anxiety towards writing

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Coursebook	342	1.00	5.00	2.51	.847
Valid N (listwise)	342				

Table 5 shows the mean of responses for 'materials' as the factor of anxiety towards writing. The mean for this construct was 2.51. The respondents were neutral where they neither supported nor opposed the suggestion of materials as a cause of anxiety towards writing. Three out of four items had means between 2.5 to 3.5 which are: 1) examples in the materials are not exploratory (mean=2.52); 2) materials do not contain enough examples (mean=2.56), and 3) materials are boring (mean=2.57). The results reveal that the respondents were neutral towards the three statements. Meanwhile, the mean of responses for the statement "there are not enough exercises" was 2.41, which reflects disagreement towards the statement.

4.1 Summary of Findings

The main purpose of the study was to determine the attitudes of students towards writing as well as the main causes of writing anxiety among diploma students in UiTM Perak. The findings indicate that the respondents of the study still had positive attitudes towards writing although they experienced anxiety when it came to writing skills. Students also believed that writing was not merely a skill but also a talent that only skilled people could perform. Furthermore, writing courses, task fulfilment, writing skills, instructors and materials are not the main

causes of writing anxiety among the ESL students since most of the responses had neutral attitudes towards the causes. However, a few items are rated higher which could lead to possible causes of anxiety, such as incompetence grammar knowledge as well as failure in expressing ideas in English.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

Previous research has focused on writing anxiety and significant progress that has been made in improving the issue of both second language anxiety and second language writing anxiety. By conducting this study, it helps to uncover the reasons for second language writing anxiety faced by many ESL students. It also assists instructors to identify their learners' reasons for failure in writing classes and help their learners in overcoming the anxiety.

The findings of this study are inconsistent with the result reported in Selma's (2013) study related to the main causes of anxiety which are writing courses, task fulfilment, writing as a skill, instructors, and materials since not all elements were supported by the students. Although students claimed to have anxiety towards writing, however, majority of the items were rated neutral which contradict the results from many studies including Selma's (2013) study. Apart from that, a few elements were rated the highest, and this may also be considered as part of writing anxiety among ESL students in UiTM. The item is known to be the 'linguistic difficulties' which includes grammar incompetence, inadequate mastery of vocabulary, as well as expressing and organising ideas in English. The majority of ESL learners experienced writing insecurity, especially related to linguistic components whenever they are writing in English (such as grammar rules, sentence structure, and so on) as accuracy has always been the rule of thumb, especially in writing assessments. Learners tend to think a lot about the form of writing, causing them to be anxious which hinders them to write effectively since the mindset has already been stemmed from the grounded rules. Thus, learners' perception of their linguistic difficulties turned to be the utmost concern which indirectly contribute to writing anxiety. These are in line with the results reported by Zhang (2011) and Wahyuni and Umam (2019) which both stated the most obvious factor causing ESL writing anxiety was linguistic difficulties. The results are also consistent with the study of Hyland (2003) and Hongxia (2011) which claimed that the most obvious cause that distinguishes ESL writers was the difficulty expressing themselves in English due to linguistic incompetence.

These problems are essential for educators in Malaysia to take note which arouses fears as learners are being incompatible with the expectations in ESL writing.

There are many other factors involved in ESL writing anxiety which has been underestimated in the present context addressed by this study. Since ESL writing involves cognitive, emotional, and cultural processes, ESL writing anxiety and its role in ESL learning achievement need to be understood and deserve serious attention from ESL writing researchers, ESL writing teachers as well as ESL learners. By acknowledging the existence of ESL writing anxiety, including its causes and effects, would help to curb the prolonged issue successfully and effectively.

5.1 Pedagogical Implications

The findings propose that educational goals in Malaysia should develop a clear understanding of the writing needs among ESL learners and assist them in any way to reduce the fear of writing according to their writing ability and language proficiency. It is crucial to be aware of their anxiety, taking into consideration a few aspects and factors including the students' burden during the writing process along with the fear of making mistakes due to their limited linguistic knowledge and the ability to develop ideas in English. Hence, it is plausible to note that these shortcomings which are mainly rooted in classroom practices can be investigated further and solved effectively by applying proper measures in terms of its assessment and ways in overcoming the long winding issue.

Language instructors as well as syllabus designers need to be aware of the existence of the problem (ESL writing anxiety) and also offer assistance to alleviate the fear of writing among students by creating the right implementation and guidance. Ideas for reducing graduate student writing anxiety include creating student-instructor interaction which is believed to have a significant contributing factor to cognitive anxiety arousal (Reem & Alexander, 2020), providing workshops in which students are equipped with specific productivity strategies and support, and other tactics such as self-regulating one's writing, writing regularly and having a writing support group. These strategies will help to lessen student's anxiety towards writing and become more self-efficacious (Goodson, 2017; Murray & Thow, 2014). It is in the universities' best interest in making sure that graduate students are well equipped with the tools which allow them to successfully communicate ideas and become innovative in writing. Furthermore, more studies should be conducted in exploring this issue, specifically in the Malaysian setting as the skill is considered to be crucial for graduate students to master. In conclusion, it is hoped that these findings provide a foundational understanding for future suggestions in coping with ESL writing anxiety as well as lend to a step in forging new studies and future directions to help reduce writing anxiety in the current Malaysian educational context.

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Creativity and Youth Entrepreneurial Intention: A Conceptual Model

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this paper is to propose a new conceptual model on entrepreneurship in which creativity plays an important role to stimulate entrepreneurial intention (EI). The variable of creativity serves as a new and an additional predictor for the entrepreneurial intention in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) which is a well-known estimation model for measuring the effect of intention on human behaviour, particularly in the field of entrepreneurship. This study proposed a variable, creativity, as a new predictor of entrepreneurial intention in relation with all other existing variables such as attitude, social norm, and perceived behaviour control. Exploring the role of creativity in TPB could provide new insight into factors stimulating entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurial behaviour among youths, particularly in rural areas. Besides that, this move will also assist the public authorities in the formulation of extensive entrepreneurial policy-making to help those who would want to get involved in entrepreneurial activity. Hence, this will help society to empower positive entrepreneurial behaviour among youths, particularly in rural areas who face various environmental obstacles but are rich in prospects.

1.0 Introduction

The role of entrepreneurship in contributing to the development of a country's economy is irrefutable. Entrepreneurs' abilities in conducting business to generate profit, reduce impoverishment and create job opportunities have enabled them to be a spark to a nation's economic growth and prosperity (Anjum, Heidler & Tautiva, 2021). Entrepreneurs with the capability of being dynamic and forward-thinking are able to improve the economic performance of their country. As entrepreneurship plays an eminent role in contributing to a country's economic development, it is very important for the government to encourage more youngsters to participate in entrepreneurial endeavours (Mylonas, Kyrgidou & Petridou, 2017). With more people especially the youths participating in entrepreneurial activities, more job-creating business organizations can be formed.

One of the most significant factors which impact entrepreneurial involvement is entrepreneurial intention (EI). Zhao, Seibert & Lumpkin (2010) and Shi, Yuan, Bell & Wang (2020) proposed that entrepreneurial intention is required for an individual to become an entrepreneur. The entrepreneurial intention has proved to be a significant antecedent of entrepreneurial behaviour as scholars in the field of entrepreneurship have done in-depth research to further understand EI (Anjum et al., 2021). Additionally, the process of entrepreneurship can be further developed if the factors that affect an individual's entrepreneurial intention is understood. The entrepreneurial intention has become a main and vital step in assisting individuals to understand the inception of a business start-up. Furthermore, understanding EI could assist entrepreneurs in determining the pertinent criteria in a business start-up at an early stage.

Being creative is crucial to an entrepreneur as creativity is one of the important components of entrepreneurship. For entrepreneurs to identify and exploit opportunities, their creativity is essentially needed. Various research on creativity has revealed that creativity plays an important part in the entrepreneurial process (Anjum et al., 2021). There exists a strong relationship between creativity and the entrepreneurial intention of an individual. Previous studies have shown that people with strong entrepreneurial intention exhibits a high level of creativity (Chia & Liang, 2016; Zampetakis, Gotsi, Andriopoulos & Moustakis, 2011). Another study on British university students had discovered that creative young people tended to have a high entrepreneurial intention (Zampetakis, et al., 2011). This research has also been supported by a study on Taiwanese students that uncovered the fact that youths with high levels of creativity demonstrate a greater entrepreneurial intention and drive (Chia & Liang, 2016).

2.0 Knowledge and Research Gap

In the past, many scholars had given attention to the influence of creativity on entrepreneurial intention via the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Fundamentally, TPB tries to explain the relationship between an individual's intention and the behaviour of the individual. Based on TPB, personal attitude (PA), subjective norms (SN) and perceived behavioural control (PBC) all have a direct influence on an individual's intention (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen 2020). According to Ajzen (1991), personal attitude (PA) refers to the attitude towards the behavioural intention of an individual. Subjective norm (SN) is defined as the desirability towards other people which affect individual behaviour (Sabah, 2016); and perceived behavioural control (PBC) which is about an individual's belief in their capability to perform an intended behaviour (Yang, 2013). All these variables are the lone predictors of intention. According to Ajzen (2020), no additional variable is required in TPB but in principle, the model can be tried against other variables. Therefore, in our research, creativity is not treated as a new variable. Instead, creativity is assumed to belong to external factors such as PCB that may have a direct relationship with entrepreneurial intention. Further explanation will be discussed in the next section.

Copious research has been conducted on the relationship between creativity and entrepreneurial intention. In some of these studies, the relationship between creativity and entrepreneurial intention is either moderated or mediated by other variables. A study carried out by Hu, Wang, Zhang & Bin (2018) found that the relationship between creativity and intention is mediated by entrepreneurial alertness. Investigations done by Laguia, Moriano & Gorgievski (2019) showed that entrepreneurial self-efficacy and positive attitudes mediate the self-perceived creativity – entrepreneurial intentions link. In addition, Shi et al. (2020) conducted a study by taking into account creativity as a moderator to the link between perceived behaviour control and subjective norms towards intention. Anjum et al. (2021) found that perceived creativity has the disposition to act positively towards entrepreneurial intention with the moderating effect played by the perception of university support. Taking consideration of suggestion by Ajzen (2020), the model of this research treats creativity as a lone predictor which may have a direct relationship with entrepreneurial intention. Noticing that previous literature focuses on the variables that mediate or moderate the creativity – entrepreneurial intention relationship, our research filled the gap by focusing on the direct effect of creativity on entrepreneurial intention. Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to draw on the relationships between creativity and youth's entrepreneurial intention through the use of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB).

2.0 Theory Underpinning

The whole idea of this research paper is based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). TPB is widely applied in the study of psychology and the science of behaviour. Originating from the theory of reasoned action (TRA), TPB became a popular mechanism in various studies including entrepreneurship. Researchers found that TPB worked across multidisciplinary fields and it presented a better picture of human behaviour. TPB gained more popularity because it had introduced a new variable that can manage the incomplete volitional control present in TRA. The volitional control under TRA always assumes that individual behaviour can be executed easily without any barriers or problems. However, Ajzen (1991) and Ajzen (2020) established that in the real world, individuals can face problems or be prevented from acting on their intention to perform a behaviour. Thus, the inclusion of the new variable known as perceived behavioural control (PBC) allows variables such as the perception of taking part in determining human behaviour. This perception considers the factors that facilitate and impede acting on an intention to perform an intended behaviour. In a nutshell, human intention and perception play a very important role in determining human behaviour.

Individual intention is considered the motivational variable that greatly helps an individual to decide what to do in his or her life. It has a great impact on human behaviour or action. It tracks the degree to which a given behaviour or action would be attempted and how much exertion is made for this action to be performed (Ajzen, 1991). The individual's behaviour is reflected by their beliefs or intentions. Theoretically, the stronger the individual intentions or beliefs, the higher the chances for the individuals to materialize their intention through their behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Barlett, 2019). However, unanticipated events or barriers (such as insufficient time, money, or resource) and lack of requisite skills etc. may prevent an individual from executing his or her intention (Ajzen, 2020). In this situation, the degree of an individual's actual control over behaviour depends on (1) their ability to overcome the barriers; and (2) facilitating factors such as assistance by government or experience. In other words, the greater the individual's actual control over their behaviour, the higher the chances that their intention will be carried out (Maes, Leroy & Sels, 2014). Somehow, this actual behavioural control is difficult to measure and it is always substituted by a proxy called perceived behavioural control (PBC).

The perception that is explained by perceived behavioural control (PBC) measures an individuals' perception towards the level of difficulty when executing any intended behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). An individual's real behaviour is greatly

influenced by his or her perception. Subsequently, perceived behavioural control (PBC) can be applied to various circumstances or activities. Perceived behavioural control (PBC) can be linked to Albert Bandura's work on perceived self-efficacy that emphasizes the individual's ability to execute various possible actions given various conditions or circumstances (Bandura, 1982). Theoretically, they are the same but operationally they are different in terms of assessment (Ajzen, 2020). Perceived behavioural control is assessed by the ease or difficulty in actualizing the behaviour, while self-efficacy is assessed by the individual's confidence in being able to carry out the behaviour in the face of extenuating circumstances

Generally, an individual intention that measures individual motivation and behavioural control which also measures individual ability are critical variables in achieving intended behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Barlett, 2019; Ajzen, 2020). As shown in Figure 1, both intention and behavioural control have joint effects on behavioural accomplishment. The intention is expected to influence behavioural performance until an individual possesses behavioural control and in turn, an increase in behavioural control will directly increase the behavioural performance until an individual feels he or she is motivated to try. There are two hypotheses that could help establish a relationship between intention, perceived behavioural control (PBC) and behavioural performance: (1) if the intention is assumed constant, perceived behavioural control (PBC) is positively related to any intended behaviour, and (2) if perceived behavioural control could be perfectly substituted.
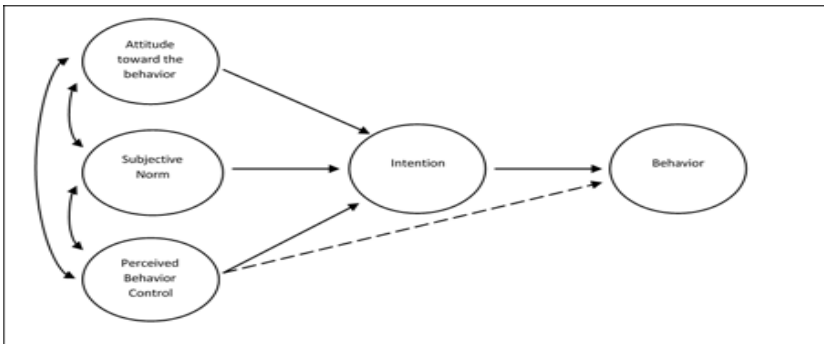

Figure 1: The connection between intention, PBC and behaviour.
Notes: Ajzen (1991)

As depicted by Figure 1, there is a strong connection between intention, perceived behavioural control (PBC) and intended behaviour. It is obvious that intention (desirability/motivation) is defined by personal attitude (PA) and subjective norms

(SN) with a view toward behaviour whereby ability/feasibility is defined by perceived behavioural control (PBC) (Sabah, 2016). It is always true to assume that the predictors of intention specifically personal attitudes (PA), subjective norms (SN) and perceived behavioural control (PBC) are distinctive variables and independent. In theory, variables such as personal attitude (PA) towards intended behaviour, subjective norms (SN) and the individual's perception of their ability to perform a behaviour (PBC) has a direct (positive) influence on individual intention (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen 2020).

The magnitude to which an individual has a satisfactory or unsatisfactory assessment of certain behaviour is defined as personal attitude (PA) towards behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). As opposed to what subjective norms (SN) refers to the desirability of other people that affect the individual behaviour, the personal attitude (PA) represents individual desirability toward his or her behaviour (Sabah, 2016). Moreover, personal attitude (PA) is a function of behavioural belief. This behavioural belief is defined as a person's subjective probability that executing any intended behaviour will lead to a certain outcome. According to Ajzen (2020), behavioural belief can produce a positive or negative attitude towards intended behaviour.

Subjective norms (SN) explain the influence of other people on an individual's willingness to execute the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). The subjective norm (SN) addresses the view of others (e.g., relatives and friends) about any intended behaviour. The inclusion of this variable in TPB is based on the contention that claims, individual behaviour is affected by others' perception towards the given behaviour (Sabah, 2016). Specifically, Ajzen (2020) categorized subjective norm (SN) into injunctive and descriptive belief. Injunctive normative belief is defined as the subjective probability of others (e.g., relatives and friends) on approving or disapproving an individual's behaviour execution. On the other hand, descriptive normative beliefs are defined as beliefs as to whether others (e.g., relatives and friends) themselves perform the behaviour.

As mentioned earlier, perceived behavioural control (PBC) measures the difficulty level of performing any intended behaviour. Specifically, perceived behavioural control (PBC) is about an individual's belief that he or she is capable of performing the intended behaviour. These beliefs are based on factors that can facilitate or impede the performance of the behaviour (Yang, 2013). For example, factors such as required skills; unanticipated barriers (insufficient time, money, or resources); assistance by the government and so forth may influence the difficulty level of performing the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen, 2020). Rather than being an actual control, perceived behavioural control (PBC) serves as individual perception and

can be operationalized through self-efficacy.

Perceived behavioural control (PBC) is assumed to moderate the influence of personal attitude (PA) and subjective norms (SN) on intention and in contrast, actual behaviour control is assumed to moderate the effect of intention on behaviour (Ajzen, 2020). In this situation, personal attitude (PA) and subjective norms lead to the formation of favourable intentions until people believe or have the perception that they can and can perform confidently the intended behaviour. Similarly, people should be able to act on their intentions until they have control over the performance of the behaviour. As mentioned earlier, if the knowledge on actual behavioural control is limited, perceived behavioural control can be used as a proxy to predict behaviour.

TPB tries to explain the relationship between individual intention and his or her behaviour. In doing so, it serves three major purposes namely, (1) intention is the best predictor for behaviour, (2) personal attitude (PA) and subjective norm (SN) are the determinants of intention, and (3) external variables may have indirect influences on behaviour (Abraham & Sheeran, 2003). For the first purpose, it predicts an individual's intention. This role allows researchers to study the influence of individual intentions on behaviour (i.e. he or she intends to do something). The second purpose states that an individual's evaluation of intended behaviour and an individual's perception of others judgement may affect those intentions. This role enables researchers to study the influence of individual attitude (i.e. doing something that would be good or bad for him or her) and subjective norm on the intention (i.e. individuals who are close to him/her feel that he or she ought to do something). The third purpose explains that other external factors may have just indirectly influence intended behaviour. These factors may act as a moderator or mediator variable in the model.

Theoretically, perceived behavioural control (PBC) as an external factor is a moderating variable. This means that favourable personal attitudes (PA) and subjective norms (SN) should lead to the formation of a favourable intention only to the extent that the individual also believes that he or she is capable of carrying out said behaviour (i.e., have high PBC). However, most empirical applications of the model have treated perceived behavioural control as a direct determinant of intention that has an equal position as personal attitude (PA) and subjective norm (SN). In order words, all variables are assumed independent predictors of intention. Recent research, however, shows evidence in support of the proposed interactions between these variables (La Barbera & Ajzen, 2020; Kothe & Mullan, 2015). For example, La Barbera & Ajzen, (2020) shows that greater perceived behavioural control (PCB) tends to strengthen the relative importance of personal

attitude (PA) in the prediction of intention and at the same time it also tends to weaken the relative importance of subjective norms (SN). This situation not only allows interactions to take place but it helps explain the weak relationship between subjective norms (SN) and intention.

As mentioned earlier, all these known variables like personal attitude (PA), subjective norms (SN) and perceived behavioural control (PBC) are the lone predictors of intention; and intention and actual control are the only factors determining behaviour. According to Ajzen (2020), there is no additional variable needed in TPB but in principle, it is still open to variables such as self-identity, anticipated effect and past behaviour as long as they fulfil some requirements. Interestingly, once again Ajzen (2020) considered personality traits, intelligence, demographic characteristics and other variables to influence intention and behaviour indirectly through behavioural (determinant of PA), normative (determinant of SN) or control beliefs (determinant of PBC). For example, the effects of gender on entrepreneurial intention is mediated via personal attitudes and perceived behaviour control but not subjective norms (Maes et al., 2014). Therefore, in this study variables such as creativity should not be treated as a new variable. Instead, creativity belongs to external factors such as PCB which may have an indirect effect on behaviour.

Personal attitude (PA), perceived social pressure (SN) and perceived behavioural control (PBC) are generally found to be strong predictors for individual intentions with high precision. Their role in explaining the connection between intentions and intended behaviour is something that cannot be denied. Intentions and perceived behavioural control (PBC) could explain why there are variations in individual behaviour. Hypothetically, personal attitude (PA), perceived social pressure (SN) and perceived behavioural control (PBC) has a direct effect on intentions. However, in empirical studies some researchers may realize that only personal attitude (PA) has an influence on intention, in others, personal attitude (PA) and behavioural control (PBC) are both have influences on individual intention. As such, the individual intention is empirically influenced by personal attitude (PA) in itself or the combination of personal attitude (PA), perceived social pressure (SN) and perceived behavioural control (PBC).

3.0 Theory of Planned Behavior and Entrepreneurial Behavior

Business or entrepreneurship could be a promising opportunity for everyone. Society as a whole enjoyed a lot of benefits from entrepreneurial activities i.e. production, employment, income. Therefore, studying entrepreneurship allows society to explore and utilize available opportunities. Entrepreneurship, by

definition, is about finding, evaluating and exploiting promising opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Hence, academic fields such as entrepreneurship focus on the study of the sources of promising opportunities. These include activities and people associated with the discovery, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities.

The theoretical relationship between entrepreneurship and TPB can be set up on the basis that entrepreneurship answers to perhaps the main research inquiries in this research area; the technique for which individuals find and utilize (exploit) opportunities. The response to this inquiry (opportunities exploitation) relies on individual attributes and the attributes of an opportunity. Shane & Venkataraman (2000) show that individual attributes such as the willingness to exploit opportunities may increase the chances of finding said opportunities. Individuals that possess high self-efficacy (PBC) are expected to create, discover and exploit opportunities. These individual attributes include elements of positive perception and optimism on opportunity exploitation.

In addition, explaining entrepreneurship behaviour requires the researcher to study human behaviour. This is because entrepreneurship is considered a study of intentionally planned behaviour that always involves a strategic decision. In the academic field of entrepreneurship, intention models as part of cognitive research have received huge attention from researchers who wish to investigate entrepreneurship behaviour (Liñán, Rodriguez-Cohard & Rueda-Cantuche, 2011). Besides that, entrepreneurial behaviour is considered a conscious mental activity and individual intention do drive the cognitive state (Renko, Kroeck & Bullough, 2012). Any conscious action must involve cognitive activity. It is contended that an entrepreneurial decision involves complex interactions that require an individual to use his or her intentional cognitive ability (Liñán, 2008). Thus, investigating entrepreneurship behaviour by utilizing entrepreneurship seems to be the right decision. This enables governments to formulate any policy to promote entrepreneurship among youths in Malaysia.

Amofah & Saladrigues (2020) via the multivariate statistical analysis techniques such as the structural equation modelling (SEM) and partial least-square (PLS) model found that TPB is a valuable instrument for forecasting entrepreneurial intention especially as found among undergraduates in Ghana. Their finding recommends that entrepreneurial intention is greatly influenced by personal attitude (PA) toward entrepreneurship and perceived behavioural control (PBC). However, they found that subjective norms (SN) have an insignificant influence on entrepreneurial intention. This explains that supports from other people like family,

relatives, friends and others have little or no influence on entrepreneurial intention. Their research also shows that subjective norm (SN) has a positive influence on (PA) personal attitude towards entrepreneurship and perceived behavioural control (PBC).

Using structural equation modelling (SEM), an empirical study conducted by Purusottama (2019) found that personal attitude (PA) and perceived behavioural control (PBC) had a great influence on entrepreneurial intention among undergraduates in Indonesia. Nevertheless, the subjective norms (SN) variable had an insignificant effect on entrepreneurial intention. Personal attitudes (PA) proxied by instrumental and experiential attitude is viewed as the main factor which affects entrepreneurial intention among undergraduates. The experiential attitude explains the role of entrepreneurship experience in creating a positive impression among undergraduates in university. The challenges and barriers confronted were considered a learning process to strengthen entrepreneurship skills among the undergraduates. On the other hand, instrumental attitudes explain the role of describing processes, methods, and actions of entrepreneurship in creating a positive impression among undergraduates. The positive reaction from undergraduates in terms of behavioural control shows that the constraints they face are not major obstacles.

Sabah (2016) had added that start-up experience plays a moderation effect variable in TPB and he found that self-attitude (PA), perceived social norms (SN) and perceived behavioural control (PBC) have a significant effect on entrepreneurial intention. In this regard, previous start-up experience as a personal factor has directly increased entrepreneurial intention among undergraduates in Turkey. This finding supports the research done by Siu & Lo (2013) which asserted that individual characteristics like mental ability, self-related concepts and past start-up experience play a significant part in clarifying the connection between entrepreneurial intention, perceived control (PBC) and entrepreneurial behaviour.

Kannan & Dhanabal (2015) showed that TPB is an important tool to discover entrepreneurial intention among undergraduates in underdeveloped countries such as South Africa. The findings show that more than half the undergraduates intended to start a business soon. Their further investigation proposed a strong connection between personal attitude (PA) and becoming an entrepreneur, whereby perceived behavioural control (PBC) and subjective norms (SN) predict the mutual intention to start a business especially among undergraduates in less developed areas. Other empirical findings have also confirmed that TPB through three antecedents of entrepreneurial intention is an appropriate tool in measuring entrepreneurship

behaviour among undergraduates (Gird & Bagraim, 2008; Muller, 2011; Otuya, Kibas, Gichira & Martin, 2013).

4.0 Creativity

Creativity can be defined as the process of bringing new, brilliant and imaginative ideas into reality. It requires enthusiasm and great dedication (Fillis & Rentschler, 2010). Chen & Tseng (2021) stated that anybody creative will enjoy the satisfaction and become successful in their life as they can create a better environment and good relationship with co-workers, customers, and even their families. These people will give their cooperation to assist entrepreneurs in collecting information, sharing resources, and any other business activities. These activities indirectly will help entrepreneurs in boosting their market share and earn profits in any potential market (Shi et al., 2020). People with creative abilities can enhance their self-esteem and build self-confidence throughout their entrepreneurial activities. The feeling of self-accomplishment will make these creative people do well in the business. Creativity sometimes led them to focus and set an autonomous goal in doing something. Thus, we do agree with Anjum et al. (2021) and believe that an entrepreneur's creativity will positively relate to the intention of being an entrepreneur. As it explains that creativity is perhaps the most valuable aspect needed by a successful entrepreneur to retain and develop their ideas relevantly. This will lead to more innovation, new ideas to be invented and developed based on their original thought and dream.

5.0 Entrepreneurial Intentions

Moriano, Gorgievski, Laguna, Stephan & Zarafshani (2012) defined entrepreneurial intention (EI) as a conscious state of mind that represents an individual's behaviour toward certain activities that show his or her interest in doing business, such as dealing with resources, customers, and heavily seeking information towards starting a business. Some studies discuss intention among entrepreneurs based on gender and geographical differences.

Hassan, Ramli & Mat Desa (2014) studied gender differences and their effect on an entrepreneur's behaviour in a rural area in Malaysia. They claimed that female entrepreneurs are better at doing business activities and can run them very well as they have the required strong belief system, strength of character and focus on the firm's vision. Most of them are in a varying levels engaged in businesses related to food preparation, while others are involved in agriculture, retailing, sewing, and tailoring activities (Dimitriadis, Anastasiades, Karagiannidou & Lagaki, 2018).

We believe that female entrepreneurs possess strong EI and excellent behaviour which are very important elements in surviving as an entrepreneur, especially in rural areas. This is because the existence of such entrepreneurs will increase the livelihood of rural people. They are the ones who create job opportunities, increase local production, and increase the standard of living among rural people. This is supported by many researchers who found that rural entrepreneurs can be considered an influential factor that may reduce the number of unemployed graduates and help them turn out from a deprived state (Chia & Liang, 2016). Normally, most of the rural entrepreneurs like to do sales and trade in their business activities as they would need only a low starting cost and the market is easy to enter. Only a very few of them are involved in businesses needing a high starting cost (Nagler & Naudé, 2017). Since these rural entrepreneurs are also contributing to economic growth, Ali & Yousuf (2019) recommend that the government and its agencies should give them more entrepreneurship opportunities to support them in increasing their intention to stay and survive in the business field they have chosen. This then may serve as an inspiration to youths and fresh graduates to get involved in business activities.

6.0 Creativity and Entrepreneur's Intention

Creative entrepreneurs will perform well in any field of business as they have a concrete intention to succeed. Rosly, Junid, Lajin & Rahim (2015) also agreed to this statement as they believe that even in the technopreneur age if the entrepreneurs are wise in dealing with their surroundings and stay competitive while understanding market opportunities, they can also achieve their targets. Creativity will help them to build up connections and seek new networks to maintaining their available resources and its acquisition while being efficient (Tiwari, Bhat & Tikoria, 2017). Hu, Wang, Zhang & Bin (2018) soon established a model with a mediating factor. Their study creates a creativity test to understand a student's intention in becoming an entrepreneur. From the test, if students get higher marks, they can be considered to have higher creativity. Thus, the result shows that there is a link between students with high creativity having high entrepreneurial intentions. They further explained that during the development process of building up intention, the perceived entrepreneurial alertness can be set as a mediator between creativity and intention.

Chia & Liang, (2016) established in their study on the new division of creativity. They had categorized creativity into two aspects that is originality and usefulness. Then, intention is also split into two namely conviction intention and preparation intention. Students from the Faculty of Tourism in an urban area were tested as

the sample of their study. The results fit the theory and confirmed the positive correlation between creativity and intention. It had proven that creative students will also have higher entrepreneurial intentions. The usefulness aspect of creativity highly influences entrepreneurial intention. To be specific, it had a greater impact that is significant on the conviction compared to the preparation of an entrepreneur. It means that students are more likely to use their creativity in developing passion towards entrepreneurship rather than prepare themselves to be an entrepreneur.

The development of a model to measure the intention of entrepreneurs usually refers to TPB. Laguia, Moriano & Gorgievski (2019) expanded it and created new models and showed that self-perceived creativity supported entrepreneurial intentions along with the explanation of other variances. Undoubtedly, the results showed that entrepreneurial self-efficacy relates to the positive attitude and becomes a mediator between the variables. Perceived creativity is explained by family and university support toward students. They may get attention from family members or take creative courses at their university. These factors can increase a student's intention to be an entrepreneur. Shi et al. (2020) also applied and expanded TPB in their study. The new model was established by taking creativity as a moderator between the perceived behavior control and subjective norms towards intention. This moderating effect links positively to intention but not towards the attitude of the entrepreneurs. With that, they conclude that the education system should concentrate in producing entrepreneurs by offering courses to encourage students to develop creativity, skills and the mindset to be an entrepreneur (Zampetakis et al., 2011).

Anjum et al. (2021) also carried out a study utilizing the same theory, but they found a different conclusion. Attitude as an opposite turned into an important element when coupled together with perceived creative disposition and acts positively towards entrepreneurial intention. The positive relationship is due to the moderating effect played by perception of university support. The result is supported by other researchers who also stressed on the role played by lecturers and university support in increasing a student's interest in becoming an entrepreneur (Saptono et al., 2019). Malabana & Swanepoel (2019) also did a study on students located in a rural area. A structured questionnaire was distributed and tested as to whether or not they had an intention to start a business. Through that survey, they revealed that TPB is valuable. The results showed that the attitude to be an entrepreneur and perceived behavioral control explained an entrepreneur's intention but not the subjective norms they are bound to. They believed that TPB is a good measuring tool to conduct a test on measuring entrepreneurial intentions with a view of building more entrepreneur development programs among students

in a rural area.

We too have the same thought as previous scholars regarding the support system in building up students' intention to be an entrepreneur. In Malaysia, the government has always supported the youth or student's goals on becoming an entrepreneur. Most universities offer or merge certain courses with entrepreneurship. They provide knowledge, skills, and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial success in a variety of settings. This is to give an option for students to choose to work for themselves and become successful, creative and talented entrepreneurs as they graduated. Roslan, Hamid, Ijab & Yusop (2020) added that university students are also given chance to be involved in social entrepreneurship at the varsity stage to prepare them to be able to give a more effective impact on the local community.

Taking the above discussion into consideration, the following proposition can be developed: creativity is positively related to the entrepreneurial intention of youths as shown in Figure 2.
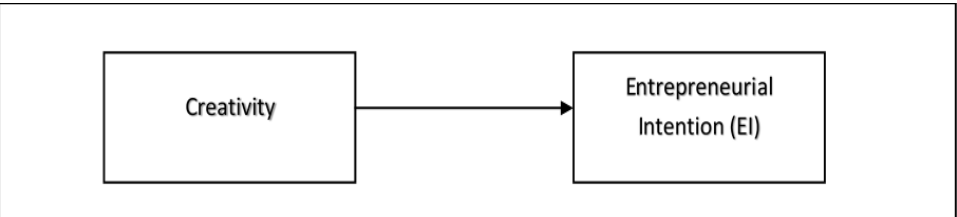

Figure 2: Conceptual framework on creativity and entrepreneurial intention.

7.0 Implications for Theoretical Development and Managerial Implication

The theoretical model proposed in this study is merely based on the review. We believe that it can draw several contributions towards entrepreneurial literature as well as theoretical development. Initially, the idea of entrepreneurial intention was expanded from the foundational standpoint. This study is associated with a specific context which is youths. Hence, it brings new insight to the current scholarly reviews specifically on the context of encouraging youths to get involved in the entrepreneurial world and become their own boss. One of the required vital exposures to entrepreneurship among youths in rural areas is creativity. This is parallel with the assertion of Anjum et al. (2021) that innovation and creativity may spark positive visions on the value of business activities as well as its survival. Hence, it is established that entrepreneurial intention enables more opportunities towards the identification of youths' entrepreneurial dynamic participation

especially in rural business areas.

Secondly, this review aims to explore the links among important measurements of entrepreneurial intention by studying youths' entrepreneurial behavior in rural business settings. Based on previous literature, this construct is commonly utilized in the context of university students for instance in the case of Anjum et al. (2021) and Setyaji, Yanto & Prihandono (2020) as well as established entrepreneurs (Chatterjee, Das & Srivastana, 2018; Litzky Winkel, Hance & Howell, 2020; Miralles, Giones & Gozun, 2016). Thus, the distinctive characteristics of youths in rural areas offer a novel perspective to investigate the potential of their entrepreneurial intention. Most importantly, the linking of creativity with youth entrepreneurial intention is developed in tandem.

Thirdly, another expected implication is grounded from the insight of varied business ventures and settings. A more thoughtful concept of creativity and youth entrepreneurial intention within these ventures may contribute to another beneficial entrepreneurial discussion. Besides, enhancement of creativity may be applied in other backgrounds including youth entrepreneurs in rural or urban areas (Kumar, Paray & Dwivedi, 2020). Regardless of the entrepreneur's locality, it is believed that creativity will improve business operation as it enables the entrepreneur to solve problems and broaden their perspective to consider many possible ways to survive.

This study also contributes to good management practices. It is crucial to encourage creativity and innovation among young entrepreneurs. However, the exposure must be instilled soon before they have the intention to actively get involved in business. They need to be more flexible in the context of innovative activities and its application which may strengthen creative development. This effort may indirectly lead to more positive effects on their business opportunities. Furthermore, it is expected to support the Malaysian government's efforts in enhancing economic growth of youths in rural areas as laid out in the Rural Development Policy 2030, which aims to reduce their unemployment rate (Mansor, 2020).

Furthermore, it is undeniable that growth, profits and productivity are among the significant aims of any entrepreneur. Hence, one of the useful ways to facilitate these priorities is through creative efforts such as through training and development. Entrepreneurs must foster an innovative spirit and inculcate cultural values in their business activities to be more localized (Anjum et al., 2021). Besides that, priorities should be given to identify factors that determine the means of which creative investments can be deployed towards their goal accomplishment. Therefore, there

is a need to provide formal entrepreneurial training and targeted education to youth entrepreneurs that includes creativity exercises as part of the early exposure to business function initiative. Not only does it help entrepreneurs to improve their decision, most importantly it supports a business's competitive advantage to stay ahead of their competition.

8.0 Suggestion for Future Research

This study serves as a platform for several further investigations that can be done in the future. First, there is a need to examine the creative development efforts among well-established and emerging entrepreneur ventures. Further exploration may be done on the human side of the spectrum such as the aspect of emotional flexibility and other aspects that facilitates creativity. It is believed that emotions play a significant role in influencing and motivating one's behaviour (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Hence, future research might focus on the emotional aspects that influence creative development and motivation among different business ventures. Secondly, powerful market competition and globalization may serve as a major challenge as well as an opportunity for entrepreneurs to remain competitive. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies may discover how these factors influence the way youth entrepreneurs encounter opportunities and manage their behaviour effectively as an effect towards their intention to remain in business.

9.0 Conclusion

In a nutshell, TPB enabled the researcher to assess entrepreneurial behaviour and it serves three primary purposes namely; (1) as the best predictor for intention, (2) personal attitude (PA) and social norms (SN) are the determinants of intention, and (3) external variables (as a moderator or mediator) may have an indirect influence on behaviour. The integration of creativity into TPB is conceivable because creativity may influence a moderating effect in the empirical model (Shi et al., 2020). In addition, Laguia et al. (2019) suggested that variables such as personal attitudes (PA), subjective norms (SN) and self-efficacy (PBC) may not adequately be sufficient to predict entrepreneurial intention. Instead, they believed that self-perceived creativity may be better able to explain additional variances in entrepreneurial intentions, beyond the three antecedents of TPB. Subsequently, there still exists room for improvement in analysing the connection between creativity and entrepreneurial intention. Further investigation on the role of creativity in TPB allows researchers to explain the effects of entrepreneurial intention on entrepreneurial behaviour more precisely. Hopefully, this will improve public understanding of entrepreneurial behaviour. The findings of this study could

assist the authorities to formulate better policies on entrepreneurship assistance, education and the environment in Malaysia.

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Digital Employee Experience (DEX): A Preliminary Study

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we will present some preliminary findings on the digital employee experience (DEX), which is influenced by an organization's digital transformation strategies. DEX evolved from employee experience (EX), but it has been modified to work in the digital world. Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR 4.0) and digital transformation boost the organization awareness about positive DEX. This article also explored the success factors of DEX and its implication to organizations. Our discussion will be based on the Human Resource (HR) approach. We outline how organisations believe that their employees are the most valuable resource because they are considered internal customers and end-users who directly use technology and digital platforms that contribute to the organization's profitability. Review of literature from previous academic research articles and practitioners' opinion papers conducted as a methodology of this research. The factors studied will guide the organization on how to create great DEX.

1.0 Introduction

The industrial revolution is a term used to describe the progress and development and manufacturing industries of the world. It can also be defined as the transformation of manufacturing and manufacturing processes from technology to more modern and sophisticated technology. Among the transformations that have taken place include the use of machines to replace manpower in the manufacturing and production industries. To date, the world has undergone several industrial revolutions and is now facing the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0). IR 4.0 involves automation technology and presents new challenges for all sectors, which require changes to be implemented in tandem with digital transformation to remain competitive. The discovery of new technologies such as automation, Internet of Things (IoT), analytics and big data, simulation, systems integration, the use of robotics and the cloud in IR 4.0 will accelerate the progress of the modern world landscape (Zafir et al., 2018). It has a strong impact on the nature of the job. The widespread use of digital technology in everyday life, especially in work, influences the interaction method with the environment. The nature of work has changed because of changes in how information and knowledge are accessed via various Internet mediums. Digital skills are becoming increasingly necessary for survival in a digital world (Moller et al., 2012). It results in increased efficiency and decreases the time required to complete tasks and resolve issues in the digital world, as well as making life easier for employees and providing opportunities for personal and professional development. Additionally, as a result of the covid 19 pandemics, the way work is done is changing, shifting more toward digitalization. The Covid-19 pandemic triggered a nationwide lockdown and normalised social withdrawal. This situation has unavoidably increased the use of digital technologies, impacted new ways of working and living and prompted organisations to adopt work-from-home policies (R. De' et al., 2020).

Digital transformation continues to occur in lockstep with evolving technological advancements, and it requires a key that reminds managers that organisations operate because of their people (Westerman, 2016). Kane et al. (2019) suggested that organisations must equip their employees with digital skills in order to maximise the return on their technology investments. Additionally, Westerman (2016) emphasised the importance of striking a balance between managing digital matters and employees in order to avoid jeopardising the relationship with employees. Digital transformation is critical to the way businesses operate. Organizations should rethink and upgrade their digital employee experience (DEX) to achieve effective digital transformation and increase productivity.

1.1 Objective

This paper aims to conceptualize the concept of (DEX), identify its components and present a conceptual framework for this concept. This paper purpose is to study the evolution of DEX and its components, and implications as the ability of organizations to survive in situations where digital technologies exist and are used, and it is in line with IR 4.0

2.0 Methodology

Review of literature on DEX conducted in academic resources and practitioners' articles. This study will guide organizations to improve DEX in workplaces and rethink their relationship with their employees to survive in the current competitive business environment.

2.1 Digital Transformation

The development of digitalization continues to occur, and the effects of pandemics are increasingly occurring. All organizations practice digitization since work from home (WFH) has been implemented. Digital transformation is a change that occurs in an organization that involves the structure, processes, functions, and business models which are the result of the implementation of digital technologies (such as the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, machine learning, augmented reality, computing in memory) (Matt et al., 2015; Sahu et al., 2018). This is in line with the definition described by Hess et al. (2016), which carried the meaning of the transformation that took place involved with the changes of digital technologies use that create an organizational business model, process, product or organizational structure. It becomes the most ongoing management challenge for powerful companies in the past and future.

Technology turbulence and IR 4.0 targets also play crucial factors in digital transformation. Digital transformation is an ongoing procedure for applying new digital technologies in the routine affairs of an organization (Warner & Weager, 2019). It assists the way organization's operation easier and faster as effectively as according to organization goals and shows the excellent effect on organizational performance. Therefore, the use of technologies such as social media and big data can affect the organization process. To ensure an organization looking to generate an effective customer experience, it must adapt and improve its employees and increase their productivity and aggregation. It is because employees are the important resource of the organization, and this must be considered to implement

and communicate information about digital transformation (Zinck, 2017).

2.2 Digital Employees Experience

The evolution of the Human Resource (HR) approach has taken place in organizations over time. Morgan (2017) described that HR approaches can be categorized into four phases. The first phase refers to utilities. The stress on utilities and usefulness was a major component of the work. However, high productivity in employees' performance is stressed in the second phase, which is a key factor in the achievement of an organization. While, in the third phase was the engagement in which the organizations were focusing on methods to benefit employees and try to identify the ways and reasons they work, rather than acquiring more profit, and enforcing power over employees. Then this phase moved to the fourth phase, employee experience (EX), also considered a silent revolution among organizations around the world. In this phase, organizations trying to determine ways to create an organization where employees want to appear. This revolution has changed the actions of employers that involve the perception of employees as assets to the perception of them as human beings. Employers also recognize the need to understand employees by identifying how they function best and designing solutions to suit their needs, rather than forcing them to submit and work within certain processes and norms (Nelson & Doman, 2017). In general, the EX is the result of an organization or employment action that treats an employee as a customer or employee involvement (Ludike, 2018).

The EX starts with the situation where a person finds a job vacancy at the organization. The person or a candidate may already be familiar with the product or service of the company, then begin to imagine a job and career with the company. The string of it, that person initiates a process with the company. Beginning with the application process to the employee selection and bidding process, and on to the day-to-day work routine, each employee needs to achieve and expect the experience to meet those needs. This is considered as the employee experience (Raia, 2017).

Technology development and rapid time circulation cause the experience to change online and digitally. Digital experiences expectations have increased more and more as employees compare each interaction with their best online user experiences. By investing an organization's resources in upgrading the digital experience for employees, organizations can generate a great experience and enhance organization performance. Robertson (2018) described that DEX is the amount of digital interaction in the employment atmosphere. DEX also can

be defined as the total number of digital interactions between workers and their organizations that use digital technology in doing work (Thoughtfarmer Group, 2019). Organizations need to be aware that employees are internal customers and need to take the initiative to ensure all tasks are performed digitally to produce a good experience because an organization can only thrive and grow when its users are highly satisfied and productive.

Gheidar & ShamiZanjani (2020), summarized that DEX is the result of a comprehensive and holistic perception of employees in the digital workplace as a result of the amount of direct and indirect interactions employees make with their careers, other organizational members, customers, strategies, systems, cultures, brands, organizational rivals, and it too influenced by individual characteristics. This definition clearly shows that DEX is the result of employees' perceptions that are influenced by their characteristics toward digitally performed work processes related to careers, relationships with members and other organizational systems within the organization. In general, the DEX stress employees' interactions with their digital devices and the digital workplace, while employee experience, however, depends on the interactions of brands with its users or employees (Digital Adoption Team, 2019). Thus, DEX will affect the productivity of individuals and organizations, especially in a digital environment.

2.3 Factors influencing Digital Employee Experience

To ensure creating a successful DEX, several factors have been identified based on academic studies and practitioners' opinions. Gheidar & Shami Zanjani (2020) proposed that there are DEX components, which are individual, organization internal and external factors. Technologies and data capabilities are the important factors to create a more valued experience for customers. Verhoef, et.al (2016) indicated to leverage current firm knowledge and resources, technologies and data are the main sources and factors. Big data such as customer journey data have capabilities to personalize services and offers to the firm. Additionally, the most powerful assets in the digital era now are data itself. Now data is the main factor and very useful. (Ng & Wakenshaw, 2017).

The great DEX depends on successful digital transformation. Digital transformation is influenced by the business strategy implemented by the company (Verhoef et al., 2019). To achieve successful digital transformation, digital resources are needed for firm transformation to adapt to digital change (Eggers & Park, 2018), particularly regarding a flexible organizational structure for digital change. Previous research has explored that digital transformation has taken into account

the organizational structure, which favours a flexible structure. Therefore, a flexible form of organization needs to be implemented for a rapid response to continuous digital change. This approach focuses on responsive ways of working, marking short cycles to test and update market assumptions quickly through trial and error (McGrath, 2010).

Various digital development strategies exist for digital organizations, but the most important development strategies involve the use of digital platforms (Parker et al., 2016). The current research situation highlights the significance of flexible IT (Cha et al., 2015), robust and scalable operational strategies (Sebastian et al., 2017), and new enterprise platforms (El Sawy et al., 2016), as part of a digital infrastructure that responsive.

Organizations targeting to transform digitally not only focus to have digital assets, however, need to acquire or develop capabilities related to digital networking, digital resilience, and platforms too. If all the investment strategies on digital assets, provisioning of great digital platforms, data, and technology capabilities, but there are no skills to use it, this will create negative employees' experience. Employees cannot adapt to it digitally. Thus, it is very much for investing in training programs and initiating learning organizations. Learning organizations will create a continuous learning culture that boosts the upgrading skills, abilities, and knowledge of employees (Tisch et al., 2016). Great DEX is the effect of digital literacy skills that employees have. This skill focuses on the reality that information is not only text but also includes, videos, still images, sounds, interactive websites (Hin, 2005). Employees are not only able to visualize the potential that arises from digital technology. They also can adapt their behaviour and find innovative techniques in their routine practice through the use of technology and learn from technology interaction. Therefore, improving the employees' digital literacy led them to leverage one or more capabilities using their digital technology (Du et al., 2019). These skills indirectly contribute to great employee experience.

To support learning organization culture, the role of the manager is very important. Edmead (2016) clarified that as digital leaders they need to continue to challenge an organization to make certain that transformation becomes a productivity and competitive advantage for the organization. Drucker (2017) suggests that a leader should be skilled in adapting to unforeseen changes that occur by improving the decision-making process to be more creative and credible.

3.4 Implication of great Digital Employee Experience

Employees are highly valued, communicating with the organization well when they have a great experience in the organization. They become more responsive to what they do and more productive (Morgan, 2017). Based on research by Sage people (2018), according to 72 per cent of employees, their productivity will increase when they have a great experience, interesting to say, this percentage involves 92 per cent of the workforce among the younger generation, which is half of the world's workforce in the 21st century.

Great DEX will create happier and more productive employees. Research conducted by De Neve (2019), found when employees feel happy, their productivity will increase by 13 per cent. Workplace to be considered as a place for increased employee happiness while they work. Awareness of this has led most organizations to start seeing that employee satisfaction is crucial especially when it is in a digital transformation initiative. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (2018), 44 per cent of executives involved in the study considered improving employee efficiency and a major emphasis on productivity in their organization's digital strategy. They believe that happy workers will accomplish organisational goals and drive great results and make all the difference.

IR 4.0 agenda led to organizations slowly changing digitally. Today, generation Z is 18 per cent of the world's population. Generation Z is a group born in the late 90s. They are the ones who will lead the country in the future and are responsible for the construction of IR 4.0. Their interests are more focused on computer technology and internet browsing technology of this group which is in communication. Generation Z also stimulates internet generation, digital generation, media generation and generation.com (Levickaite, 2010). A great DEX has been the main work culture and consideration, and also will create better retention and recruiting especially for Gen Zers.

To ensure that great DEX delivery is an ongoing and demanding process, continuing operations to the next level can help achieve and meet what end-users need while considering the appropriate and sufficient time and resources to make something planned doable. This could involve more information technology (IT) innovation that includes investments in new technology, cloud migrations, integrations, automation, or another trending innovation. All these actions are greater savings for the organization when giving IT department or digitally skilled workers the equipment or devices they need to monitor, monitor, and even predict possible problems that will arise can provide a good return on investment (ROI) in the long

term.

4.0 Conclusion and Suggestion

This research examines how digital transformation affects EX and the future of employment. Based on the recent situation in a business area that focused on technology and digital in line with IR 4.0, the balancing between employee productivity and digitalization is very important. Consideration to EX will change to DEX, one of the results of the implementation of digital transformation in the workplace. Encouraging knowledge sharing and collaboration across departments will increase employee engagement and empowerment. Indeed, in the long run, the impact of digital transformation will result in boosted high revenue, decreased operating management costs and indirectly meet good customer satisfaction (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). Nonetheless, to ensure digital transformation takes place, organizations need to review the company culture, align the employee with the company goals and improve internal communication.

It should be noted that, although this concept is very important for the future of employment, previous studies related to DEX are still lacking and insufficient. In this study, it has been attempted to explore what is the DEX and its evolution from the first of HR approach, and growth according to the digital transformation era that supports the IR 4.0 agenda until the organization realizes that employees are not merely assets, but employees are internal customers and end-users who contribute to the organization's profitability. Generally, this paper attempts to study the successful DEX factors and the implication to the organization. Great DEX was affected by successful digital transformation strategies that equipped the work way with great digital and technology investment. Great DEX also led to high employees' satisfaction and can also mean good customer satisfaction rates that increase valuations of the stock market (De Neve, 2019). A great DEX is perfect for any company's basic policy (Zhao, 2019) and fits with the current work and business environment.

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Exploring Determinants of Internationalization Among Small And Medium Enterprises From An Emerging Markets: A New Conceptual Lens

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ABSTRACT

The past two decades have seen a sharp increase in academic studies and public policy research concerned with the internationalization of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). From this perspective, it is the influence of organizational and environmental characteristics on the internationalization process that have been the focus of scholars. Nevertheless, little is yet known of the internationalization determinants of SMEs in developing countries, and a lack of conceptual evidence in the literature provides strong ground for this research. This study fills the void by documenting the relationships between organizational and environmental characteristics specifically, entrepreneurial orientation, global mindset, network relationships and government support and internationalization. The study is expected to make a valuable contribution to the knowledge of SME internationalization in developing countries, especially in the context that relates internationalization to organizational and environmental characteristics. It also has implications in the form of best practices for Malaysian SMEs. Managers should be aware of the complexities of internationalization and the necessity to examine various aspects of SMEs' internationalization frequently. Skills, competencies, and management know-how are not only crucial traits for entrepreneurs to develop to succeed in internationalization, but they are also critical to a company's advantageous positioning in the global market. At the same time, it can provide directions for the government and policy-makers in their effort to develop policies and programs for the betterment of this particular business community.

Keywords: *Employees Experience, Digital Transformation, Digital Employees Experience*

1.0 Introduction

International Entrepreneurship creates a connection between International Business and Entrepreneurship, leading to a new and complementary lens of internationalization phenomena. This perspective is positioned around the opportunity construct, as rooted in international growth and as an accompaniment to the liability of foreignness. It is also focused on the role of decision makers and their cognition, as a complement to organization-level resources and capabilities (Saad, 2014; Zucchella, 2021). As such, this present study aims to explore these issues and looking in advance for new research challenges.

International Entrepreneurship can be considered as the "product" of an era of globalization, whereby technologies and trade liberalization leads the way to faster and earlier internationalization of firms. By the same token, International Business has been the "product" of the post-war era of economic recovery and multi-nationalization (Zucchella, 2021). The present argument directed this paper to extensively examines how international entrepreneurship can contribute abundantly to a new realism, whereby barriers related to internationalization are rising, the digitalization of economic activities is increasing, and uncertainty rules economic perspectives. These contributions epitomize milestones in the development of International Entrepreneurship and the significance for International Business studies.

The study of the phenomena of internationalization is discussed along with three levels of analysis, enterprising individuals, entrepreneurial organizations and the inter-organizational level. International Entrepreneurship gives more attention to the role of individuals as key players in entrepreneurial internationalization. Subsequently, International Business studies concentrate more on the firm level and largely ignore the individual and small group level of analysis (McDougall et al., 1994). In addition, the last decades have seen increasing attention to focus also on the individual level in the international entrepreneurship study (Gartner et al., 1994; Saad, 2014). The individual level of analysis calls upon a better adoption of behavioural and cognitive sciences to further understand internationalization decisions and processes (Coviello et al., 2017). Thus, research on International Entrepreneurship opened an entirely new direction by bringing the entrepreneur to the centre of the stage. The study of international new ventures comprised of the initiation phase and the entrepreneurs' orientation, with its role in driving early and

fast international growth.

Globalization of the world economy has resulted in speedy growth and increased interest in international entrepreneurship over the past decade (Coviello et al., 2011). Subsequently, scholars, business people and governments have come to view international entrepreneurship as an important resource for improving the performance of companies and economies, as found by various international entrepreneurship studies. Most of these studies utilize organizational characteristics, environmental factors and firm strategies to explain factors that determine the internationalization of small and medium enterprises (Kiss et al., 2012; Saad, 2014).

The efforts of various scholars to design a well-grounded framework to better understand the nature and effect of international entrepreneurship has, however, largely concentrated on the application of various theoretical perspectives. In essence, they explained this phenomenon by disproving the applicability of traditional frameworks (Buttriss and Wilkinson, 2006; Callaway, 2004). Moreover, the field of international entrepreneurship is fragmented, inconsistent and lacks common theoretical integration, thus resulting in rather uncertain progress in this field (Coombs et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2011; Keupp and Gassmann, 2009). Despite being insightful and informative, past research has also raised questions about its overall value due to the utilization of different theoretical and methodological traditions. Furthermore, prior research has also lacked a unified framework that connects the antecedents of internationalization pursued by new ventures and established companies (Jones et al., 2011; McDougall and Oviatt, 2000). This area remains largely neglected, thus presenting a major gap in developing a general framework for understanding international entrepreneurship (Saad, 2014).

Despite the progress made in strengthening international entrepreneurship research, important issues remain unresolved due to research limitations or shortcomings (Banalieva and Sarathy, 2011; Zahra, 2005). For example, most studies have focused on relatively young high technology industries located in developed countries with little emphasis on traditional industries (Coviello et al., 2011; Senik et al., 2010). while knowledge on international entrepreneurship in emerging economies is limited (Kiss et al., 2012; Saad, 2014).

Most studies have presumed that international entrepreneurship is indicated by simply measuring a firm's international sales revenues (Hisrich et al., 1996; McDougall and Oviatt, 1996). Past studies also made conclusions based on case studies or a small sample of respondents (Chelliah et al., 2010; Coviello and Jones,

2004).

To date, international entrepreneurship studies have contributed a large pool of manufacturing and high-technology studies for comparative examination but there is a lack of service sector research or comparative research within and across sectors (Coviello and Jones, 2004). Few studies have examined service industries (Abdul-Aziz and Wong, 2010; Coviello et al., 2011) that remain historically understudied (Majumdar et al., 2010; Saarenketo et al., 2008). Knowledge about particular organizations is also relatively new and limited (Tuppura et al., 2008), with the agribusiness sector being much neglected by researchers (Ibeh, 2005; Spence and Crick, 2006).

This research explores three main industries; manufacturing, service and agriculture, consistent with recommendations in the literature for greater diversity in the industry scope (Saad, 2014; Zahra, 2007) in the emerging economies, with the specific intention of assessing whether theoretical perspectives developed in mature market contexts are valid in emerging economies (Akcay et al., 2014; Brush et al., 2011). By exploring a variety of industry contexts, international entrepreneurship scholars can enhance understanding of the links between industry-level variables and internationalization patterns, as well as contribute to theories that may be generalized to a greater range of economic sectors (Zahra, 2007).

Strategic management and entrepreneurship researchers have recognized the importance of the external environment on firms' various strategic choices (Szyliowicz and Galvin, 2010; Zahra, 2005). Fernhaber et al. (2008) found that international new ventures competed in industries that exhibited significantly higher levels of government protection and regulations, thus confirming that reputation is an important strategic asset (Palich et al., 2000; Saad, 2014), particularly for young entrepreneurial companies (Sinkovics and Bell, 2005). A favourable reputation, constructive support, connection to power and established networks and other invisible assets can greatly influence the ways companies proceed to position themselves (Calabrese and Manello, 2018), especially in international markets. Callaway (2004) suggested that external factors predict and significantly affect entrepreneurial performance. Callaway (2004) further suggested that studies within the field of entrepreneurship development that do not consider the external environment should be considered incomplete and invalid. By integrating the external environment factor in terms of government support, this research seeks to better document the determinants of internationalization among small and medium enterprises in emerging markets.

There has been increased interest in the internationalization activities of small and medium enterprises (Abdullah and Zain, 2011; Coviello et al., 2017). While current studies have explored the process of the internationalization of small and medium enterprises, the determinant factors of internationalization in this area present an unfilled gap in the literature on international entrepreneurship and strategy in emerging economies (Chelliah et al., 2010; Saad, 2014; Senik et al., 2010).

Even though small and medium enterprises play a major role in the development of the Malaysian economy, issues related to these enterprises remain relatively unexplored, with much research excluding the limitations such as the lack of frameworks, for better understanding of the sector (Nik Abdullah and Mohd Zain, 2011; Roudini and Osman, 2012). Most emphasized the observing and reporting of specific characteristics of SMEs, ignoring issues such as factors that can influence the internationalization of small and medium enterprises (Kabongo and Okpara, 2019). Hashim (2012) also reported little research attention was given to the impact and effect of government support programmers on these enterprises in Malaysia.

Given the significant contribution of small and medium enterprises in Malaysia and the lack of clear conclusions towards the determinants of internationalization and their development, this study focuses on such enterprises to help and guide both businesses and the government to build competitive enterprises in the international market.

This study identifies several gaps in prior research in international entrepreneurship as highlighted by various researchers. First, much work has focused on relatively young high-technology industries located in developed countries with little emphasis on traditional industries (Chandra and Coviello, 2010; Senik et al., 2010), thus knowledge on international entrepreneurship in emerging economies is quite limited (Kiss et al., 2012; Saad, 2014). The present study investigates a sample of Malaysian SMEs in an emerging economy with a focus on young and established firms, traditional, low-technology and high-technology industries to determine if the results are comparable with those from developed countries.

Most studies emphasized manufacturing firms, there is a lack of service sector research or comparative research within and across sectors (Coviello et al., 2017; Zahra, 2007). Few studies have focused on service industries (Abdul-Aziz and Wong, 2010) which are historically understudied (Ferreira et al., 2011). Knowledge about particular organizations is quite new and limited (Saad, 2014; Saarenketo et al., 2008), while the agribusiness sector has also been neglected by researchers (Ibeh, 2005; Spence et al., 2008). This research contributes to greater diversity in the industry scope by exploring three main industries, manufacturing,

service and agriculture in emerging economies as recommended in the literature (Zahra, 2007). The aim is to contribute to the literature in confirming whether theoretical perspectives developed in mature market contexts are valid in emerging economies. Specifically, it aims to ascertain clear international entrepreneurship patterns and outcomes.

The field of international entrepreneurship is fragmented, inconsistent and lacks common theoretical integration, resulting in uncertain progress (Coombs et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2011). Essentially, the research lacks a unified framework that connects the antecedents of internationalization pursued by new ventures and established companies (Jones et al., 2011; Saad, 2014). Therefore, this study used a unified framework that connects the antecedents of internationalization and thus provides a comprehensive view of the internationalization of Malaysian SMEs.

This study draws on prior research that presumed that international entrepreneurship is indicated by a simple measure of a firm's international sales revenues (Paul, 2020; Reuber and Fischer, 2011). Specifically, this study incorporates a percentage of the company's sales from international operations, a percentage of the company's profit from international operations, the number of the company's international markets and the duration of time involved international operations as a more accurate form of measurement.

Strategic management and entrepreneurship researchers have recognized the importance of the external environment on firms' various strategic choices (Szyliowicz and Galvin, 2010). With little research attention on the impact and effect of government support programmers to the SMEs in Malaysia (Hashim, 2012; Saad, 2014), this study showcases a better model to explain the relationships between internationalization and firm performance of these enterprises through the integration of external environment factors in terms of government support.

If prior research does not help us to fully understand the determinants factors of internationalization of small and medium enterprises in emerging economies (Abdullah and Zain, 2011; Saad, 2014; Senik et al., 2010), this study sheds light on the relationships between entrepreneurial orientation, global mindset, network relationships and government support as the determinant factors of internationalization of small and medium enterprises in Malaysia.

This study has vital business implications in the form of best practices for Malaysian SMEs for improving performance in international markets. The government may use findings from this study to create or modify policies and regulations that

should enhance the international competitiveness of small and medium enterprises in Malaysia.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Internationalization

Internationalization has become one of the major themes in international entrepreneurship research from a variety of viewpoints, including organization theory, marketing, strategic management, international management, and small business management (Coombs et al., 2009; Matlay et al., 2006; Saad, 2014). Its significance has been growing due in part to increased globalization and hyper-competition (Matlay et al., 2006). Issues such as international decision making and management, the development of international activities, and factors favouring or disfavoring internationalization have been researched both for large as well as small organizations (Abdullah and Zain, 2011; Chelliah et al., 2010; Lin et al., 2011).

The past decade has seen a marked increase in interest in the internationalization activities of SMEs (Abdullah and Zain, 2011; Coviello et al., 2017). The strategies used by such enterprises to enter and compete in international markets have been of particular interest to international business scholars (Pangarkar, 2008). Moreover, research in the internationalization of SMEs is often viewed alongside emerging research interest in international entrepreneurship (Callaway, 2004).

Internationalization is of vital importance for various countries due to its contribution to economic growth (Dutz et al., 2000; Saad, 2014) and the country's well-being and international reputation (Pina e Cunha, 2005). Particular interest in this area has been given to export performance, mainly in terms of such correlates as firm size (Jiang et al., 2020), firm age (Zahoor and Al-Tabbaa, 2021), strategy (Zahoor and Al-Tabbaa, 2021), perceptions (Akcay et al., 2014), orientations (Tang et al., 2009), international experience (Idris and Saad, 2019; Reuber and Fischer, 2011), attitudes (Okhomina, 2010), commitment (Tahir et al., 2011) and other characteristics of managers (Dimitratos et al., 2012), organizational characteristics and organization culture (Hagen and Zucchella, 2014), product characteristics (Lu and Beamish, 2006), distribution and marketing focus characteristics (Lu and Beamish, 2006) and industry environment (Ciravegna et al., 2019).

Other important issues within this area of study include the role of networks for internationalization (Fink et al., 2008; Saad, 2014), international joint ventures

(Zahoor and Al-Tabbaa, 2021), alliances (Nummela and Welch, 2006), export information (Falahat et al., 2020), relationships with suppliers (Jones et al., 2011), international channels choice decisions (Falahat et al., 2020), governmental export policies and programmes (Ushakov, 2011), international transfer of technology (Prange and Verdier, 2011), innovativeness (Solano Acosta et al., 2018) and diffusion of innovations (Acs, 2003), export stimuli (Etemad et al., 2014), personal and personnel adjustments (Dana, 2021), and export financing (Chen and Tan, 2012).

To many, internationalization is the key to a firm's growth (Kabongo and Okpara, 2019; Saad, 2014). The need to internationalize has become increasingly important due to; the organizations' self-interest, the belief that their position in the home market is threatened, foreign business opportunities, and also the impact of various external events and forces (Matlay et al., 2006). Zahra et al. (2005) suggested varying motivations exist for entrepreneurs to internationalize their operations. Among the motivating factors that influence entrepreneurs in entering overseas markets to include market expansion, increased profit and exposure to new ideas. However, these motivations have been overlooked in past empirical research, generating a serious gap in international entrepreneurship research.

Local researchers observed that the determinants of internationalization of Malaysian SMEs remain an unfilled gap, specifically the literature linking international entrepreneurship and strategy in emerging economies (Saad, 2014; Senik et al., 2010). Generally, the issues are related to the patterns of internationalization (Andersson, 2004), the impact of networking on Malaysian SMEs internationalization (Nik Abdullah and Mohd Zain, 2011), the role of the Malaysian government as well as business strategies (Hashim, 2012). Fragmentations in the above studies show that the determinants of internationalization are not fully understood in Malaysia, thus providing impetus to explore these issues in greater detail.

2.2 Dimensions of Internationalization

Mort and Weerawardena (2006) contributed to the development of SMEs internationalization through a comprehensive study that is representative, diverse and helpful for the development of meaningful measures of internationalization. The study concluded that foreign sales, as a percentage of total sales, have been extensively used to measure internationalization. Similarly, Contractor et al. (2007) measured internationalization through the eigenvector-weighted sum of foreign sales or total sales, the number of foreign employees or number of total employees and the number of foreign offices or number of total offices. In separate

research, Reuber and Fischer (2011) considered three components for measuring the internationalization of SMEs which include foreign sales as a percentage of total sales. This is a standard, a single measure of the degree of internationalization, encompassing the percentage of the firm's employees that spend over 50 percent of their time on international activities to capture the structural aspects of SMEs, degree of internationalization and the geographic scope of sales of the firm by the measure of the number of sales from different countries. Therefore, it can be concluded that past researchers focused on three dimensions of internationalization, namely the extent, speed, and scope of internationalization (Zahra, 2007).

2.3 Internationalization Theories

2.3.1 Resource-Based Theory

The resource-based view, which had been developed within the field of strategic management focuses on sustainable and unique costly-to-copy attributes of the firm as the sources of economic rents, the basic drivers of the firm and sustainable competitive advantage required for internationalization and superior financial performance (Schmid et al., 2010). A firm's capabilities in obtaining and maintaining profitable market positions depend on its capacity to gain and defend advantageous positions concerning the resources important to the firm (Runyan et al., 2008). Korsakiene and Tvaronavičiene (2012) posited that a firm's success in the market not only depends on environmental factors but also on the firm's functions and influence on the environment. They suggested that critical resources needed for internationalization should be valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and not substitutable. In addition, Kamakura et al. (2012) suggested that resources must capture durability, transparency, transferability, and replicability. While the resource-based theory is considered ideal by some for explaining a firm's international expansion, yet to some extent, it is unable to explain the choice of some entry mode strategies (Sommer and Haug, 2011). Furthermore, Falahat et al. (2020) argued that it does not appear able to measure various intangible assets.

2.3.2 Network Theory

A firm's internationalization within a process approach can be analyzed by using networks as the starting point as this approach presents firms as embedded actors in business networks (Johanson and Mattsson, 1993). By using the Uppsala model, Johanson and Vahlne (1990) continued with an examination of the internationalization process by applying a network point of view. The extended model engages investments in networks that are new to the firm, whereby

penetration involved developing positions and increased resource commitments in established networks. Integration refers to the coordination of different national networks and whether the relationships between firms are seen as a network. It is argued that firms internationalize since firms in their international networks do so.

The Johanson and Mattsson (1993) model highlighted gradual learning and the development of market knowledge through interaction within networks. The firm's position in the network can be considered from both micro (firm-to-firm) and macro (firm-to-network) perspectives. With the combination of these two elements, Johanson and Mattsson (1993) recognized four stages of internationalization: the early starter, the late starter, the lonely international, and the international among others. They argued that the internationalization of the firm means that the firm establishes and develops positions to other counterparts in a foreign network. The internationalizing firm is usually involved in a network that is mainly domestic and further develops business relationships in networks in other countries. The main issue that arose regarding the network approach, one that seems neglected in most process-oriented research, is the strategic position and influence of individuals, specifically entrepreneurs, in the internationalization of SMEs (Matlay et al., 2006).

2.3.4 International Entrepreneurship Theory

International entrepreneurship theory along with network theory represents state-of-the-art knowledge in international business thought. This theory represents the two extremes of incremental theory and network theory. The former focuses on large multinational firms with slow progress in international markets while the latter focuses on very rapidly internationalized small firms. International entrepreneurship theory argues that the individual's and firms' entrepreneurial behaviour is the foundation of foreign market entry (Mtigwe, 2006). While some authors argued that network theory and international entrepreneurship theory are synonymous, yet there are significant differences. International entrepreneurship can and exists outside formalized networks. In Southern Africa for example, most small firms expand into international business without the assistance of partners in a formalized network (Mtigwe, 2006). Therefore, there are two methods through which an entrepreneurial firm can internationalize: through a formal network or without the assistance of a formal network. Moreover, internationalization through networks may be the exception rather than the norm or maybe at least industry-specific. Therefore, international entrepreneurship theory and network theory should be viewed as complementary theories rather than synonymous theories.

However, some scholars have argued that international entrepreneurship is a far more inclusive phenomenon that cannot be understood from the perspective of small firm behaviour alone. More so, it cannot be viewed from the perspective of the 'Born-global' variety of small firms alone, on which the bulk of present international entrepreneurship literature is based. Thus, Zahra (2005) suggested that this has led to the exclusion of related theoretical contributions and proper articulation of what international entrepreneurship is and what it is not. In addition, they argue that this limited focus on international entrepreneurship is not warranted because large corporations frequently demonstrate entrepreneurial behaviour that is identical to those of small firms.

2.4 Determinants of Internationalization

Current studies suggest that several internal and external factors determine the internationalization of SMEs (Dana, 2021; Saad, 2014). Internal factors comprise firm-specific resources, foreign business experience, networking and strategic considerations that can be managed by the firms. Senik et al. (2010) found that the influential factors for SMEs internationalization in the Malaysian manufacturing industry include firm characteristics and motivational aspects. Furthermore, their study disclosed that the most influential factor for SMEs internationalization is networking. Several studies also indicated that network relationships are important determinant factors for small and medium-sized enterprises internationalization (Coviello et al., 2017). External factors include country and industry factors which are normally beyond the firms' control (Kunday and Şengüler, 2015; Saad, 2014). For example, (Hashim (2015) posited that the success of SMEs was influenced by three factors; entrepreneurial characteristics, the organizational context and the external environment.

Lin et al. (2011) suggested that firm internationalization was influenced widely by industry and resource-based considerations that were inherently shaped by domestic and international institutional frameworks governing these endeavours. In Malaysia, besides the support and assistance from the government, the business strategies of the SMEs further influenced the development of the SMEs sector (Hashim, 2012; Saad, 2014).

2.5 Entrepreneurial Orientation

The concept of entrepreneurial orientation summarizes the firm-level processes, practices, decision-making styles (Lumpkin et al., 2011) and strategic orientation (Wiklund and Shepherd, 2005) of an entrepreneurially-oriented firm has

become a major construct within the strategic management and entrepreneurship literature (Soininen et al., 2012).

Entrepreneurial orientation can be defined as the willingness of the firms to display proactive and innovative actions and to take calculated risks to create and exploit environmental opportunities (Covin and Slevin, 1989). Covin et al. (2006) defined entrepreneurial orientation as a strategic construct whose conceptual domain includes certain firm-level outcomes and management-related preferences, beliefs, and behaviours as expressed among a firm's top-level managers. In addition, Runyan et al. (2008) argued that entrepreneurial orientation is evidenced through visible entrepreneurial tendencies toward innovativeness, pro-activeness and risk-taking.

Miller & Friesen (1983) stated that "An entrepreneurial firm engages in product market innovation, undertakes somewhat risky ventures, and is first to come up with "proactive" innovations, beating competitors to the punch". Entrepreneurial orientation has been studied using a multidimensional construct of three to five dimensions. The three commonly cited dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation, proposed by Miller in 1983, are innovativeness, pro-activeness, and risk-taking. These three dimensions are part of the eleven "entrepreneurial" dimensions of strategy Miller and Friesen discussed in their 1978 paper.

Based on Miller & Friesen's (1983) statement, several researchers proposed that entrepreneurial orientation be a combination of the three multi-dimensional constructs; innovativeness, pro-activeness and risk-taking. Therefore, entrepreneurial orientation involves a willingness to innovate to rejuvenate market offerings, take risks to try out new and uncertain products, services, and markets, and be more proactive towards new marketplace opportunities than their competitors (Covin and Slevin, 1989; Miller and Friesen, 1983).

2.6 Global Mindset

A growing number of researchers viewed the global mindset, or cognitive capabilities of key decision-makers, as important success factors that influence organizational outcomes (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2002; Levy et al., 2007). To be a global entrepreneur requires a different mindset and to be successful, entrepreneurs must see their companies from a global perspective and must instil a global culture throughout their companies that permeates all business activities (Scarborough et al., 2012). This emerging phenomenon reflects the recognition that competitive environments today require a shift in focus from structural and

administrative mechanisms to mindset-based capabilities (Story and Barbuto, 2011).

To better understand the term "global mindset" it is crucial to appreciate the core concept of mindset. The concept of mindset is derived from the fields of cognitive psychology and organizational theory wherein scholars decipher how people and organizations make sense of the world with which they interact (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2002). They defined a global mindset as a firm's or manager's openness to and awareness of diversity across cultures and markets with a propensity and ability to synthesize across the divides. Similarly, the definition by Ishii (2011) described it as an individual's predisposition towards a particular international approach and experience. According to Rhinesmith (1992), a global mindset is a way of being rather than a set of skills. It is an orientation of the world that permits one to view certain things that others fail to see. A global mindset represents the ability to scan the world from a wide perspective, always looking for unanticipated trends and opportunities that may consist of a threat or an opportunity to achieve personal, professional or organizational objectives. Peter Senge (1990) defines mindset as deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or images that influence how individuals understand their surroundings and then take action (Buckley and Tian, 2017). Another definition by Paul (2000) described mindset as a set of deeply held internal images and assumptions that individuals develop through a continuous process of learning which, consequently, determines how they perceive and then react to a specific situation (Jiang et al., 2020). The above definition indicates that the global mindset concept can be used by both individuals and organizations. Specifically, the organizational mindset is just an aggregated mindset of its organizational members interacting with each other. Further, Perlmutter (1969) and Sullivan (2002) suggested that global mindset can be classified into three mental models, namely, ethnocentric (home country mindset), polycentric (host country mindset), and geocentric (global mindset).

2.7 Network Relationships

The significance of network relationships on firms' internationalization behaviour has been emphasized in several studies (Ojala, 2009). Research related to SMEs in knowledge-intensive sectors suggested that network relationships between firms or individuals are seen as determinants of internationalization (Coviello, 2006; Saad, 2014). Network relationships can assist firms in gaining access to resources, improving their strategic positions, controlling transaction costs, learning new skills, gaining legitimacy, and coping positively with rapid technological changes (Hemmert, 2004). In addition, Fernhaber et al. (2014)

argued that networks assist founders of international new ventures, or born-globals, to identify international business opportunities and also have an influence on the founders' country choices. Subsequently, Spence et al. (2008) posited that networking within and outside the SMEs' network improves a firm's performance.

Also, researchers Coviello and Cox (2006) argued that network relationships impact knowledge-intensive SMEs market and entry mode choice. They found that firms' network relationships were seen as the main initiators in the internationalization process as firms followed their networks into foreign markets. This finding concurs with assumptions in the internationalization network model (Johanson & Mattsson, 1993) that network relationships can act as a bridge to foreign markets.

Axelsson and Easton (1992) defined networks as a set of two or more connected exchange relationships. They suggested that markets are depicted as systems of social and industrial relationships among, for example, customers, suppliers, competitors, family, and friends. In the context of internationalization of SMEs, Abdullah and Zain (2011) defined network as a firm's management team and employees' relation with customers, suppliers, competitors, government authorities, bankers, families, friends, or any other party that enables a firm to internationalize its business activities. According to Johanson and Mattsson (1993), a firm can build relationships with a variety of actors, including customers, distributors, suppliers, competitors, non-profit organizations, and public administration. The diverse types of network relationships for penetrating foreign markets can be categorized into formal or informal types (Coviello et al., 2011), and intermediary (Freeman et al., 2012).

Formal relationships are related to business activities between two or more actors in the network, informal relationships are related to personal relationships with family members and friends (Coviello et al., 2017; Saad, 2014) and intermediary relationships are related to third parties that facilitate the establishment of the network relationship between buyers and sellers (Oviatt and McDougall, 2005).

2.8 Government Support

The development of SMEs and diversification of structure over time through employment and output share, output composition, market orientation, and location are related to many factors including the level of economic development and government promotion programs (Saad, 2014; Tambunan, 2008). Studies also showed increased acceptance of the various functions contributed by SMEs in wider social and economic restructuring (Smallbone and Welter, 2001). Thus,

to capture these economic and social benefits, virtually all governments support this sector (Ushakov, 2011). In that vein, Asgari et al. (2010) observed that Malaysian companies have achieved competitive advantage from technological skills, knowledge capabilities and the government's commitment to support the expansion of firms. It was also found that government policies impacted the internationalization path of SMEs (Acs et al., 2001) and the success of entrepreneurs (Spencer and Gómez, 2004).

The most logical way that governments can influence SMEs is through direct support policies and programmes that assist small firms to overcome size-related disadvantages (Smallbone and Welter, 2001). Government support programs in terms of general financial support or preferential treatment for entrepreneurial ventures (Spencer and Gómez, 2004), resources available through government procurement programs (Douhan and Henrekson, 2011), tax incentives (Akcay et al., 2014), business development assistance (McDougall and Oviatt, 1996), and government export assistance programs (Shamsuddoha et al., 2009) contribute to the regulatory environment that can assist individuals' entrepreneurial efforts. Abdullah (1999) identified the five aspects according to which the Malaysian government support programmes can be divided into, which are: financial and credit assistance; technical and training assistance; extension and advisory services; marketing and market research; and infrastructure supports.

3.0 Proposed Conceptual Framework

The proposed conceptual framework of this study is developed based on the literature review and related theories. The proposed conceptual framework is built around the concept of internationalization that consists of internationalization properties (market and time) and other building blocks of the proposed conceptual framework are organizational and environmental characteristics. The characteristics of the SMEs under study are reportable by the SMEs owner, Chief Executive Officer or general manager

The proposed conceptual framework advances SMEs internationalization research by clarifying the newly emerging field of international entrepreneurship and its theoretical foundation within internationalization research. International entrepreneurship placed more importance on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs (and their characteristics), broadly considered as the key variables in SMEs internationalization research. In addition, it emphasized the time dimension, particularly with the growing number of such enterprises operating internationally from their inception and thus signifying time as one of the strategic dimensions of

internationalization.

The proposed conceptual framework is expected to provide several contributions to the literature and addresses the issue for the development of an integrated and multidisciplinary approach to understand the internationalization of SMEs in Malaysia. Internationalization cannot be fully explained by one theory (Chandra and Coviello, 2010), and is better explained with an integrated approach (Freeman et al., 2012). Thus, this proposed conceptual framework integrates several theories related to internationalization that were discussed, namely resource-based theory, network theory and international entrepreneurship theory. Besides, it also focuses on the multidisciplinary field of study, international business, strategic management and international entrepreneurship intending to better understand, fully explain and document the internationalization of SMEs in Malaysia.

The proposed conceptual framework also considers environmental factors in terms of government support that may impact the internationalization of SMEs (Saad, 2014; Zahra, 2005). Furthermore, it represents a unified framework that connects the antecedents and internationalization pursued by new ventures and established companies (McDougall and Oviatt, 2000). This research is based on the proposed conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 below.
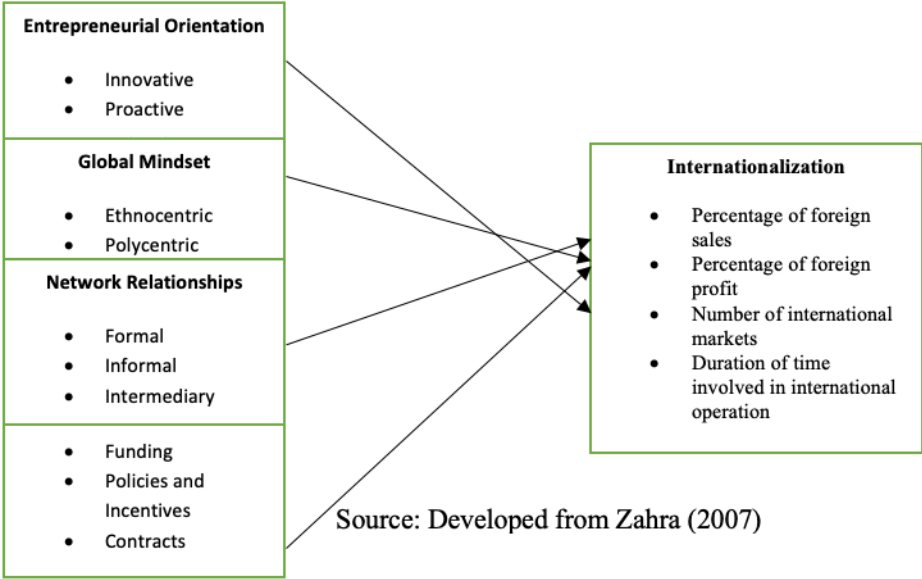

Figure1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

3.1 Propositions Development

Several propositions were developed based on the literature review and related theories. These propositions focus on the influence of entrepreneurial orientation, global mindset, network relationships and government support on internationalization. Details of the specific research propositions are presented as follows:

3.2 The Effects of Entrepreneurial Orientation on Internationalization

Scientific literature suggested that two main factors, internal and external, determine the internationalization of SMEs (Saad, 2014; Zahra, 2007). Internal factors comprise organizational characteristics that consist of firm size, strategy, international experience, international orientation, networking and other founders or managers' and firm characteristics that can be managed by the firms (Antoncic and Prodan, 2008; Saad, 2014). Conversely, external factors comprise environmental characteristics such as country factors and industry factors which are normally beyond the firms' control (Kunday and Şengüler, 2015). The four main environmental characteristics that are critically important for internationalization are domestic markets, foreign markets, market internationalization, and industry (Matlay et al., 2006).

Saad (2014) posited that the success of SMEs in Malaysia was influenced by three factors, being, entrepreneurial characteristics, the organizational context and the external environment. In addition, Senik et al. (2010) found that the factors influencing SMEs internationalization in Malaysia were firm characteristics, industry factors, external influence, and motivational aspects. As such, the above evidence strongly supported that the determinants of Malaysian SMEs internationalization are organizational and environmental characteristics. Thus, the present study used entrepreneurial orientation, global mindset, and network relationships as organizational characteristics and government support as environmental characteristics that affect the internationalization of SMEs in Malaysia.

Entrepreneurial orientation has been acknowledged as a determinant of the internationalization of SMEs ((Ripollés-Meliá et al., 2007). The internationalization of a firm either by export or direct foreign investments is considered as an entrepreneurial act because it involves the process of identifying and exploiting new business opportunities in a new environment which requires innovative and proactive attitudes (Fletcher, 2004). Furthermore, internationalization involves

certain levels of risk due to the major probability of failure in an unknown foreign environment (Lu and Beamish, 2006).

Miller and Friesen (1983) suggested that the development of entrepreneurial orientation is strongly related to the existence of flexible, organic, organizational procedures that lead the way in a proactive search for international business opportunities and prompt economic exploitation. As such, the earlier the firm's internationalization process, the greater the firm's readiness to explore and develop new business opportunities and finally act in an entrepreneurial manner.

Highly entrepreneurial orientation firms identify new business opportunities earlier than their competitors and their proactive characters and readiness to take higher risks to assist them in exploiting the opportunities before their competitors (Ripollés-Meliá et al., 2007). In addition, Kunday and Şengüler (2015) suggested that entrepreneurial orientation should be an instrument for the expansion and enactment of key organizational routines to be successful in international markets. As such, the review of the literature and above arguments suggested that relationships exist between entrepreneurial orientation and internationalization. Subsequently, this study proposed that entrepreneurial orientation will impact internationalization. Therefore, the following proposition is proposed:

H1: Entrepreneurial orientation relates positively to internationalization.

3.3 The Effects of Global Mindset on Internationalization

Active research has viewed the global mindset, or cognitive capabilities of key decision-makers, as important factors that influence internationalization and organizational outcomes (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2002; Levy et al., 2007). To be a global entrepreneur requires a different mindset and to be successful, entrepreneurs must see their companies from a global perspective and must instil a global culture throughout their companies that permeates all business activities (Scarborough et al., 2012). This emerging phenomenon reflects the recognition that competitive environments today require a shift in focus from structural and administrative mechanisms to mindset-based capabilities (Korsakiene and Tvaronavičiene, 2012).

Researchers and practitioners have recently suggested that the global mindset of managers is a prerequisite for early internationalization (Cavusgil et al., 2004; Fletcher, 2004). Di Gregorio (2005) found that the positive attitude of the manager is a significant factor in comparisons conducted between exporters from non-exporters. Furthermore, Oviatt and McDougall (2005) found that new ventures managed by managers with global visions can internationalize speedily and

successfully. Kunday and Şengüler (2015) observed that rapidly internationalizing firms seem to be more globally oriented than others. The above discussion signifies the importance of a global mindset for internationalization and leads to the following proposition:

H2: Global mindset relate positively with internationalization.

3.4 The Effects of Network Relationship on Internationalization

The importance of network relationships on the firms' internationalization process has long been recognized in several studies (Kontinen and Ojala, 2011). Research related to SMEs in knowledge-intensive sectors suggested that network relationships between firms or individuals were seen as determinants of internationalization (Coviello et al., 2017; Saad, 2014). Network relationships can assist firms to gain access to resources, improve their strategic positions, control transaction costs, learn new skills, gain legitimacy, and cope positively with rapid technological changes (Hsieh et al., 2019). In addition, McDougall et al. (1994) suggested that networks assisted founders of international new ventures, or born-global to identify international business opportunities and also influenced the founders' country choices.

Various researchers (Coviello et al., 2017; Saad, 2014) also suggested that network relationships impacted knowledge-intensive SMEs market and entry mode choice. In addition, they found that firms' network relationships were seen as the main initiators in the internationalization process whereby firms were seen to be following their networks to foreign markets. This finding concurs with the assumption in the network internationalization model (Johanson and Mattsson, 1993) that network relationships can act as bridges to foreign markets.

Researchers also recognized the importance of networks to SMEs (Hansen et al., 2011). Korsakien and Tvaronaviien (2012) discovered that nearly more than half of Finnish SMEs started their internationalization process with inward foreign operations through the import of physical goods or services. They concluded that such inward operations permit international network connections to be established. Coviello and Munro (1997) found that successful New Zealand-based software firms were actively engaged with international networks and outsourced many market development activities to network partners. Another research by Bonaccorsi (1992) that studied Italian SMEs, suggested that access to external resources (through buyer-seller relationships) played a significant role in the firms' internationalization process. The most recent study by Ibeh and Kasem (2011)

found that networks were crucial in explaining the initial internationalization, market selection and internationalization speed of SMEs of Syrian software firms. Therefore, it can be expected that internationalization will be influenced by network relationships. This leads to the following proposition:

H3: Network relationships relate positively to internationalization.

3.5 The Effects of Government Support on Internationalization

The role of the government through its policies is vital in assisting and influencing the internationalization path of SMEs (Acs et al., 2001; Saad, 2014). Government support is crucial for SMEs that face a shortage of internal and also external resources in terms of alliances with other upstream and downstream companies abroad (Kang and Park, 2012). In addition, it is the mandate of many government agencies to assist SMEs in entering foreign countries especially in countries with corrupt or inefficient legal systems that may be subject to political and other risks that are not issued in the domestic market (Acs et al., 2001).

Logically, the government can influence SMEs through direct support policies and programmes that plan to assist small firms to overcome size-related disadvantages (Smallbone and Welter, 2001). Government support programs in terms of general financial support or preferential treatment for entrepreneurial ventures (Spencer and Gómez, 2004), resources made available through government procurement programs (Saad, 2014), tax incentives (Harris & Wheeler, 2005), business development assistance (McDougall and Oviatt, 1996), and government export assistance programs (Douhan and Henrekson, 2011) contribute to the regulatory environment that can assist individuals' entrepreneurial efforts. Abdullah (1999) observed that Malaysian government support programmes can be divided into five aspects, among which are: financial and credit assistance; technical and training assistance; extension and advisory services; marketing and market research; and infrastructure supports.

The importance of government support in assisting SMEs has been studied by several researchers. Sulaiman et al (2010) found that government support was one of the contributing success factors for small businesses in the South Pacific. Acs et al. (2001) discovered that government policies impacted the internationalization path of SMEs in Canada while recent research by Kang and Park (2012) indicated that government support through project funding, directly and indirectly, affected the innovation outputs of small and medium biotechnology enterprises in South Korea. Thus, it is expected that government support will impact internationalization.

This leads to the following proposition:

H4: Government support relates positively to internationalization.

4.0 Conclusion

Internationalization is a vital issue for the new and established venture by providing growth opportunities in a foreign market. Theoretically, this study developed a proposed conceptual framework that leads to a better understanding of the determinants of the internationalization of SMEs in Malaysia. The proposed conceptual framework extends entrepreneurial orientation, global mindset, network relationships and government support on the constructs of internationalization. The resource-based of the firm suggests capabilities that are valuable, rare, and inimitable can be a source of competitive advantage.

Policymakers should motivate SMEs by encouraging internationalization as it increases revenue to the firm and allows SMEs to enjoy growth in international markets. They should work with SMEs to assist them to determine their unique capabilities and simultaneously examine foreign markets to identify opportunities that might benefit the SMEs in Malaysia. Emphasizing motivational and self-assessment initiatives is critical because these can influence the firms' internationalization efforts.

Another important practitioner implication of this study is that managers should be aware of the complexity of internationalization and the need to regularly evaluate various elements related to SMEs internationalization. Elements such as skills, competencies, and management know-how are not only important attributes that entrepreneurs need to build up to be successful in internationalization but are also critical to the firm's favourable positioning in the global market.

Entrepreneurial SMEs are considered as the most important engines of job and wealth creation, and the main front of resilient competitiveness. Therefore, the government must work to provide a fairly competitive business and regulatory environment which is conducive to the start ups' growth and the development of globally competitive SMEs in Malaysia.

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Leader-Member Exchange From The Perspective of People With Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

The increasing trend of a high employment turnover among disabled employees in Malaysia has spurred the direction in this study toward examining the concept of leader-member exchange (LMX) which examines the quality of supervisor-subordinate relationships from the perspective of employees with disabilities in Malaysia. A survey was conducted on 282 employees with disabilities to test the hypotheses of this study. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to assess the variations in the mean scores between categories. It was discovered that all components of LMX namely affect, professional respect, contribution and loyalty are all important factors that ensure a good relationship between supervisors and PWDs. In addition, it was found that types of disabilities and PWD working sectors has no mean difference toward the LMX components that infuence this dyadic relationship. This study is important because it will bring new insights on how managers can integrate person with disabilities (PWD) at the workplace by enhancing their social exchange relationship (dyadic), especially their leadership skills. Limitations, practical implications and directions for future research are offered.

Keywords: *Dyadic, Employees with Disabilities, Leader-Member Exchange, People with Disabilities, Social Exchange Relationship*

1.0 Introduction

Diversity in the workplace has been a common issue in the business world. Diversity refers to variety in a person's background, which includes things like culture, gender, religion, race, talents, and even physical ability. Diversity assists companies by bringing together expertise from different perspectives and abilities to address difficulties that a company experiences. Improvements in economic policy and technological advancements has vastly reduced trade barriers, allowing products, services, information, and resources (including human resources) to flow freely across borders (Roberson, 2018).

Many companies, on the other hand, are concerned with and have misconceptions regarding the difficulties in recruiting and retaining person with disabilities (PWD) (Lindsay, Cagliostro, Albarico, Mortaji & Karon, 2018). Disability as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) refers to impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. Disability results from the interaction between people with certain inherent or suffered conditions and the environmental barriers that hinder their participation in society on an equal basis with others such as in terms of job opportunities (World Health Organization, 2011).

PWDs and employment related problems have been a constant source of worry as the world evaluates them based on their condition (Lee, Abdullah & Mey, 2011). According to reports, only 570,000 PWDs in Malaysia, from a total of 4.7 million disabled persons documented under the National Registration Department as of 2020, have registered with the Social Welfare Department (Mulop, 2020). Overall, PWDs makes up twenty percent of the Malaysian population, which is significantly above the World Health Organization's average of fifteen percent. Although the Malaysian Government has implemented the one percent public sector policy for PWD recruitment, there seems to be little traction to this policy. This is clearly observed in the overall PWD employment statistics in Malaysia for 2019, which was at 0.003 percent in the public sector and 0.001 percent in the private sector, respectively (Suhaimi, 2020).

PWDs have significant work obstacles as compared to non-disabled employees, resulting in reduced labor pool participation, higher state rates, and lower wages. It might be a major obstacle in Malaysia to guarantee that persons with disabilities remain in the workplace for a longer period. According to Talib, Sunar and Mohamed (2019), due to the stigma and prejudice that businesses and society have towards PWDs, they have a lower labor market participation rate compared to non-disabled people across the world. The Malaysian government has encouraged the private and public sector to at least have a one percent PWD employment

inclusion rate, but some sectors are still unable to meet the one percent policy due to several reasons. Essentially, most companies are concerned about the financial, productivity, and skills (or up-skilling) expenses which relate to hiring people with disabilities (Narayanan, 2018). Employers are concerned that they will have to arrange new workplace changes, which would raise business costs, and most of them are concerned about their employees' incapacity to accomplish the set productivity target despite undertaking workplace changes for PWD benefit. Bonaccio, Connelly, Gellatly, Jetha and Ginis (2019) further explained that managers, on the other hand, regularly indicate that it is difficult to attract qualified applicants among people with disabilities.

Besides that, Indramalar (2017) explicated that limited work opportunities and employment of disabled persons are due to the lack of awareness and knowledge about them. Most employers are insensitive and unconcerned about the requirements of their disabled employees which might lead to their subsequent resignation from the company. This is an essential scenario to consider since PWDs have been firm with their decision when they decide to leave a company, even though their prospects of finding other employment is poor. Hence, Ta and Leng (2013) affirm that the government measures and initiative to have more PWDs employed in both the private and public sector which in accordance with the National Welfare Agenda 2003 and PWD National Action Plan 2016-2022 might be only rhetorical.

In Malaysia, several studies have indicated the presence of an unfavorable and negative perspective on PWDs' involvement in the labor sector. Manaf, Othman, Saad, Jamaluddin and Noor (2018) stated that this particular problem has remained difficult and hard to address due to persistent employer misunderstandings. Earlier studies stated that the resulting insecurity or feelings among persons with disabilities develop a sense of inner conservatism, due to employer misunderstanding which might have a bad impact on their academic goals and career prospects in the long run (Hendey & Pascall, 2001; Lee et al., 2011; Baidi, Ilias & Ghazali, 2018). However, Malaysia has undertaken various initiatives to assist and encourage employment among PWD. It includes initiative that the head of departments to hire one percent of the total public servant from the disabled depending on the suitability of the job and their types of disabilities. Yet, the number of PWD employed is still below the expectation. On the other hand, Ta and Leng (2013) affirm that private sector employers are more concern towards fulfilling the PWD needs at work regardless their types of disabilities as compared to public sector. However, lack of studies that capture the leadership point of view of establishing a leader-member exchange (LMX) from the perspective of PWD, which can significantly provide new insight into how managers might integrate more PWDs in the either in private or public

sector. Hence, this paper seeks to address the knowledge gap related to the LMX from the perspective of PWD. Therefore, the objectives of the study are:

1. To investigate if there is a significant mean difference between types of disability and PWDs' perception in LMX components.
2. To examine if there is a significant mean difference between PWD working sectors (public and private sector) and PWD

2.0 Literature Review

Leadership is defined by the type of the exchange link formed between leaders and their followers. The connection between leaders and members is important for the formation of a successful working group. According to the Buengeler, Piccolo and Locklear (2021) one of the fundamental assertions of the LMX is that leaders distinguish themselves from their followers. While Hashim, Kadir, Yunus, and Kamarudin (2018) asserts that supervisors are very important to employees with disabilities as their good relationship will benefit both parties. Hence, this study proposes a framework of LMX from the context of PWD in Malaysia.

2.1 Leader Member Exchange (LMX)

The study on LMX has long started over the past 30 years (Harris, Wheeler & Kacmar, 2011). The study is based on its importance as well as to refine its critical roles and unique relationship issues between leaders and members (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). This concept clearly incorporates the relationship-based approach between supervisor and employee (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) in which the leader will have a different style of leadership and relationship in dealing with their employees (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Further, a high-quality LMX is the indicative of social exchange relationship between supervisor and subordinate. LMX theory is particularly powerful because it recognizes that a manager has a different dyadic interaction with each employee in a workgroup (Matta & Van Dyne, 2020). LMX theory states that leaders and subordinates establish unique relationships based on their social communication and the quality of their communication within the organization affects employee performance (Martin, Thomas, Legood & Russo, 2018). Peterson and Aikens (2017) stated that a leader may form relationships with their employees in the workplace that are characterized by trust, compassion, respect, and social communication but at the same time maintain a distance from others through transactional exchanges. Moreover, LMX can be measured or shaped by several components which is affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect.

2.2 Affect / Affiliation

Affect is the significant indication of one's emotional condition that can be expressed via verbal or non-verbal communication. Based on the viewpoint of organizational psychology, affect, sometimes known as affiliation, is a measure of interpersonal attraction (Dulebohn, Wu & Liao, 2017). Employees will be more likely to have favorable experiences prompted by a positive affiliation if there is good attachment between the leader and employees (Mostafa, 2017). According to Ding and Lin (2020) affective activation is essential in driving an effective workforce and positive perceptions such as performance ratings, job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In addition, leaders who exhibited pleasant emotions were regarded as more charismatic by others and brought more excitement to the workplace (Cropanzano, Dasborough & Weiss, 2017). Ng (2017) stated that transformational leader exchanges can improve on followers' positive emotional well-being, which, in turn, boosts job performance. Hence, developing an affect mechanism in the workplace is vital to improve employee performance and creativity.

2.3 Loyalty

In LMX, loyalty can be defined as the public support of another's behavior in all conditions. To put in other way, loyalty is a high level of mutual trust toward others. Ali, Lodhi, Raza and Ali (2018) further elaborated that loyalty is a commitment to an individual that is consistent from one scenario to the next and it is important for developing confidence in employees, which in turn will benefit the organization. According to Akremi, Vandenberghe, and Camerman (2010) loyalty between leader and employees is important in the context of LMX, as leaders would want to hire loyal employees to ensure the organization's success and sustainability.

2.4 Contribution

Contribution refers to the amount of time and effort each member of the team dedicates towards achieving the shared goals of a team. In terms of task outputs, the dimension of contribution refers to the sense of quality, degree of labour effort, and performance input supplied by each member towards a common objective (Grobler & Boitumelo, 2021). Moreover, Kaluza, Weber, Van Dick and Junker (2020) stated that contribution is evaluated based on the other partner's expectations towards the specific position. The degree of contribution has an impact on the quantity, complexity, and significance of tasks assigned and accepted

by members as it indicates the leader's belief in the ability and willingness of members to undertake and complete tough and essential jobs effectively (Indyra, Noor, Irwandy & Rivai, 2021). Besides that, Mascareño, Rietzschel and Wisse (2021) believes that contribution and professional respect may have a stronger relationship with a wider and more encompassing organizational outcome in innovation and creativity rather than the affect and loyalty mechanisms.

2.5 Professional Respect

Professional respect is measured by how much each person acknowledges and admires the work of others, as well as their competence and expertise. Li, Zhang, Zhu and Li (2021) affirm that professional respect is when employees and leaders are admired for their job knowledge or talents, and it usually occurs among humble employees since they respect the qualities of others. According to the Strukan and Nikolic (2017), professional respect may occur when skilled leaders can understand future requirements, communicate effectively, and enable people to share and carry out the shared organizational vision. Employees may respect their leaders if they communicate effectively and conduct themselves responsibly. Experience and knowledge may lead to respect, which is fundamental in the LMX philosophy since in companies with several dyadic groupings, understanding may be difficult to achieve if respect is lacking (Lanier, 2021).

2.6 Person with Disabilities (PWD)

PWDs have been referred to people with certain biological properties (Woodhams & Danieli, 2000). The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development through the Malaysian Disability Act (2008) defines PWD as individuals who are diagnosed with long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sense impairment which restrict them from fully and effectively participate in the community. With the total population close to 34.0 million people, it is estimated that between five (5) to ten (10) percent of the population are proclaimed as PWD. Additionally, PWDs encompass of various types such as physical disabilities, mental problems, sensory impairment, learning disabilities, problematic speech, and various troubled disabilities.

2.7 Types of Disabilities and LMX Components

In this study, different types of employees with disabilities are suggested to influence their perception towards LMX. According to Kensbock and Boehm

(2015), the relationship that employees with disabilities build with their supervisors is an essential component in promoting sustained employment and enhancing work experiences regardless of their disability types. However, the influence of types of disabilities is consistent with the assertion made by Foster and Wass (2012) whereby he concerned that by virtue of their disability, PWDs are different and require different treatment. Furthermore, Ellsum and Pederson (2005) asserts that impairment may affect one's dynamic career development due to the different obstacles that they had encountered. Hence, the decision to hire PWDs needs to be carried out with a focus on specific attention as it can influence the hired PWDs' life (Thanem, 2008). As such, based on the discussion above, type of disability is expected as a factor that could influence how PWDs' perceived their dyadic relationship with their employer and superiors in the workplace. It is expected that this factor influences employees with disabilities' perception towards leader-member exchanges. Accordingly:

H1: There is a significant mean difference between types of disability and PWDs' perception in LMX components.

2.8 PWD Working Sectors and LMX

One of the government responsibilities towards PWDs is to prepare an appropriate plan that includes programs such as education, rehabilitation, and training and skills – as per the Disability Act, 2008. The ultimate rationale is to assist them in finding the best job that suits their qualification with less difficulty. Moreover, the Malaysian government has established policies that requires head of departments to ensure PWD employee inclusion of one percent from the total public servants hired through Circular 10, 1988 (Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat, 2011) which can be seen as a full institutional support given to PWDs. Besides that, the private sector is also being urged to show their commitment in hiring more qualified PWD employees (Yusof, 2009). Yet, Khor (2010) found that less than 5,000 disabled are hired in the private sector while only 1,754 have been hired in civil services ("More jobs for the", 2014) regardless of the incentives given by the government. While, Hashim, Ishak & Hilmi (2015) asserted that a different work group environment might alter PWD perception differently to possibly influence their working outcomes. Based on the above arguments, the following hypothesis is posited:

H2: There is a significant mean difference between PWD working sectors (public and private sector) and PWD perception towards LMX components.

3.0 Methodology

Employees with disabilities who are part of Malaysia's public and private sectors were the target sample participating in this study. As the researcher conducted research on PWD, all relevant sources such as the PWD's profile from a total of twenty ministries, agencies, and organizations which includes PWD working in few industries such as tourism, manufacturing and retailing were gathered. In this study, a questionnaire was utilised to learn about the attitudes of employees with disabilities towards their leaders in the context of LMX. It is spread across sectors and focuses on four major forms of disability (hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical disability and speech disability).

Each of the subcategories, which are different forms of disability, was discovered and categorised in both sectors. As a result, a stratified random sampling was used since it is the most effective approach for extracting unique information from numerous sections (Sekaran, 2006). A total of 684 questionnaires were sent out, with only 282 returned and deemed usable.

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 21.0 software was used to analyse the data collected. Using the mean and standard deviation, the researcher calculated the demographic breakdown and disabled employees' perspectives. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to assess the variations in the mean scores between categories of disability and employees with disabilities' perspectives on LMX. Furthermore, an Independent Samples Test was utilised to assess the disparity between the PWD working sectors and their assessment of LMX components. Furthermore, the respondents expressed their responses on a seven-point Likert scale based on the LMX components namely affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect.

4.0 Results and Discussion

This study consists of a sample with the size of 282 employees with disabilities. Most of the respondents were male (73%), while females made up 27% of the respondents. Malays made up more than half of the respondents at 82.3%, and is followed by Indians at 7.8 %, Chinese at 6.7 %, and others at 3.2%. In terms of the category of disabilities, most respondents were physically disabled at 66.3%. The remaining were made up of the hearing impaired at 25.5%, the visually impaired at 5.3% and those with speech disabilities at 2.8%. Almost half of the respondents or 49.3% of the sample were married, while 46.1% were single and 4.6% of them were divorced. Moreover, 55.3 % of the sample were made up of those disabled

since birth and 44.7% were disabled due to accidents. About 20.6% of respondents have been working with their current supervisors for less than one year while 25.2% of them have been working with their current supervisors for a duration between three (3) to five (5) years reported. Finally, most of the respondents were between the ages of twenty-one (21) to thirty (30) years old with a percentage of 36.2%, while the 34% were between thirty-one (31) to forty (40) years old, 16.3% aged between forty-one (41) to fifty (50) years old, 10.3% aged between fifty-one (51) to sixty (60) years old, 2.8% were aged less than twenty-one (21) years old and 0.4% aged sixty-one (61) years old.

In the reliability test, the value of all four (4) components (affect, contribution, professional respect, and loyalty) was between 0.65 and 0.95. (Piaw, 2009). The affect outcome was at 0.859, contribution at 0.895, professional respect at 0.871, while loyalty was at 0.870.

It was discovered that the responses were heavily impacted by the identified components in LMX via the mean score and standard deviation value. The highest mean score at 5.619 is attributed to affect, followed by contribution at 5.591, loyalty at 5.399, and professional respect at 5.378. It demonstrated that the responder had a positive connection with their superiors, and that the majority of employees with disabilities strongly agreed with the all components of LMX.

Table 1: Summary of ANOVA Results for Types of Disability and Leader Member Exchange Components

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
MeanAff	Between Groups	2.427	3	.809	1.268	.285
	Within Groups	177.283	278	.638		
	Total	179.710	281			
MeanLoy	Between Groups	4.067	3	1.356	1.736	.160
	Within Groups	217.144	278	.781		
	Total	221.211	281			
MeanCon	Between Groups	2.550	3	.850	1.974	.118
	Within Groups	119.739	278	.431		
	Total	122.290	281			
MeanProff	Between Groups	3.470	3	1.157	1.819	.144
	Within Groups	176.731	278	.636		
	Total	180.201	281			

Table 1 demonstrates that the component values of affect (β = 0.285), loyalty (β = 0.160), contribution (β = 0.118) and professional respect (β = 0.144) in the results garnered was more than the significant value (p > 0.05). The mean scores indicate that there is no significant mean difference between types of disability and PWD perception of LMX components. Thus, the study findings do not support H1 which posited that there is a significant mean difference between types of disability and PWD perception of LMX components.

Table 2: Summary of t-Test Results for Types of Disability and Leader Member Exchange Components

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
MeanAff	Equal variances assumed	-109	.741	.494	280	.622	.04728	.09578	-.14126	.23582
	Equal variances not assumed			.496	274.978	.620	.04728	.09533	-.14040	.23495
MeanLoy	Equal variances assumed	.422	.517	-.157	280	.876	.01665	.10631	-.22591	.19262
	Equal variances not assumed			-.157	275.147	.875	.01665	.10579	-.22490	.19161
MeanCon	Equal variances assumed	1.649	.200	-.731	280	.465	.05772	.07897	-.21317	.09773
	Equal variances not assumed			-.738	278.071	.461	.05772	.07823	-.21171	.09627
MeanProff	Equal variances assumed	2.398	.123	-1.184	280	.237	.11334	.09571	-.30175	.07507
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.203	279.921	.230	.11334	.09424	-.29886	.07218

Notes: Independent Samples Test

The Independent Samples t-Test was used to examine employees with disabilities in both the public and private sectors as a separate group (Table 2). The results revealed that all forms of LMX were not statistically significant (P > 0.05) where affect was at β = 0.741, loyalty at β = 0.517, contribution at β = 0.200 and professional respect at β = 0.123. Therefore, the study results do not support H2. Based on the results, it is confirmed that there is no significant mean difference between PWD working in public or private sectors and their perception towards LMX components.

4.1 Discussion

It is believed that leadership plays a vital role in influencing people towards certain goals. So, leader-member exchange is believed to play its part in this situation. Applying leader-member exchange is referring to a condition whereby leaders (supervisors) form a relationship of differential qualities with

their members (subordinates) (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). In this research, the focus was to look at LMX from the perspective of employees with disabilities. It was discovered that there was limited research on PWDs in Malaysia, particularly in the context of leader-member relationships (Lee et al., 2011; Shamsudin & Rahman, 2014; Nasir & Efendi, 2017; Jing, 2019). The low possibility of PWDs finding work in Malaysia have resulted in additional issues such as poverty among them. Although the government has established policy backed requirement of at least one percent employment in both the public and private sectors, it appears that the programme will take longer to yield the targeted outcome. Bonaccio et al. (2019) emphasized that the principal cause for PWD's underutilization is that employers are always negative about the working skills of PWDs.

In this study, findings explicated that all components of LMX namely affect, loyalty, contribution and professional respect were pertinent towards understanding the behaviour of employees with disabilities. A good relationship and understanding between leaders and employees with disabilities presents a positive synergy towards performance of a company regardless of PWDs' types of disability or the working sector that they are employed in. Our findings show that a high-quality relationship between leaders and workers increases the commitment of employees with disabilities towards their jobs. This is consistent with earlier research (Lyubykh, Ansari, Williams-Whitt & Kristman, 2020), which found that employees with a greater level of supervisor–employee relationships are less likely to participate in absenteeism, have higher levels of job satisfaction and resilience, while scoring better on performance evaluations regardless on their types of disabilities and their workplace.

This study has the application in the context of working with PWD from a managerial perspective. Managing disabled employees involves fitting different norm and intentions as in handling non-disabled employees so that it will enable them to fulfill their potential. The efforts on the disabled employment must be informed to the whole organization through appropriate communication system. This openness culture could influence the readiness in accepting attitude and socially responsible rather than isolating the disabled. Mahsud, Yukl and Prussia (2010) assert that leader empathy is positively related to the use of relations-oriented behavior in which this obligation should be used in managing employees with disabilities. This remains true and applicable even in crisis condition such as during the Covid-19 pandemic. Epstein, Campanile, Cerilli, Gajwani, Varadaraj and Swenor (2021) emphasize on the importance of fulfilling the disability community which have not been met. This situation could possibly lead to stress (Lund, Forber-Pratt, Wilson & Mona, 2020) in various forms for many disabilities. Hence, the social

responsibility matters to us individually and to the society as a whole.

Based on these findings, it is expected that this study would provide employers with a new perspective on how to successfully interact with employees with disabilities and reduce the stigma associated with them. Furthermore, it is hoped that these findings will contribute to the development of starting a better perception towards employees with disability in a work setting. The start will be through enhancing the supervisors' understanding on the impact of leader-member exchange in strengthening a high-quality relationship with the employees with disability which simultaneously will boost their job embeddedness. However, these engagements can only be executed with full commitment from all actors such as government, agencies, companies and society. The movement for a better inclusion of PWD cannot be seen as a fulfilment of the social responsibility per se. It requires attention in designing policy, evaluating programs and related services as well as researching how these changes may affect them.

5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper extends the supervisor-employee relationship with a view on the perspective of employees with disabilities by demonstrating the relationship between their perception and affect, loyalty, contribution and professional respect. PWDs' perceived affect as the highest contributing point in this study. This implies that employees with disabilities require their superiors to accept them for who they are and to treat them in the same way as other employees. Types of disabilities does not make any difference on PWDs employed in the public or private sector. It was found that types of disabilities and PWD working sector imposes no mean difference towards LMX components.

This study has some limitations despite its contributions. First, the study respondents consisted of employees with disability with different disability types, namely, visual, hearing, and physical impairments. Intellectually-employees with disability were excluded following the study scope due to significant cognitive deficits (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2015). Hence, these disabilities also affected functional and adaptive skills and reduced conceptual, social, and practical abilities in life. Additionally, this study was limited to study on PWD perception towards their LMX. This study could become more accurate in the findings by taking into consideration the perception from the disabled immediate supervisors especially in measuring the leader-member exchange (relationship between disabled and their supervisor from the perspective of their superior).

In a nutshell, disability acceptance and recognition are essential in the workplace because it helps businesses manage and deal with PWDs more successfully, and it normalises hiring of people of all abilities by employers of any given organization (Lindsey et al., 2018). Understanding the different forms of LMX from the perspective of employees with disabilities is thus highly suggested and should be researched further in the future.

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