

MALAYSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON TEACHING, LEARNING, ASSESSMENTS, AND PEER INTERACTION DURING THE TRANSITION FROM OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING TO HYBRID AND BLENDED LEARNING

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Abstract: *The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted various aspects of our lives, including education. Teaching and learning methods have evolved as institutions adopted alternative approaches to meet educational demands during the crisis. This shift is particularly evident in higher education institutions (HEIs). As schools continue to have face-to-face classes as prior to COVID, many HEIs in Malaysia transitioned from using open distance learning (ODL) to hybrid and blended learning. This somehow has brought up various responses from the students in many aspects. Thus, this study aims to explore students' perceptions towards teaching and learning, assessments and interactions with peers based on their experiences learning through ODL, hybrid learning and blended learning. To collect the data, a survey was conducted among public and private HEIs in Malaysia using a structured questionnaire. The survey recorded responses from 202 respondents which were selected based on random sampling. The findings highlight that there was a range of students' reactions and there is a*

need for hybrid learning designs that balance flexibility with structured instructional support to maintain engagement, uphold academic integrity, and foster consistent collaboration. Although many students value the flexibility offered by hybrid and blended learning, there are concerns on quality and fairness of assessments and the level of interaction among peers. This study benefits the lecturers and HEI management in managing overall learning experiences by addressing the concerns of the stakeholders for better teaching and learning approach in the future.

Keywords: *Open Distance Learning, Hybrid Learning, Blended Learning.*

Introduction

As COVID-19 shifted toward an endemic phase, it has triggered a shift in the education environments, promoting more adaptive and sustainable learning models. In Malaysia, many higher education institutions (HEIs) have started transitioning from online distance learning (ODL) to hybrid and blended learning. The transition was driven by the need for more interactive and engaging learning experiences as well as a more student-centred approach (Dhawan, 2020). Hybrid learning is a combination of online components lessons and face-to-face interactions. Due to the hybrid nature, this approach promotes flexibility and personalisation in learning. For example, Ashraf et al. (2021) notes that students have the freedom to choose whether to attend a physical, face-to-face or online class, depending on their schedule and preferences. This flexibility can support more personalised learning and active student engagement, which is a significant component to ensure the success of hybrid learning. Thus, to promote engagement, hybrid learning environments should have a variety of teaching instructions, such as recorded lectures, online discussions, and personalised group tasks. Blended learning, on the other hand, is a mix of traditional classroom instruction and online learning (Can, 2024). Students can attend physical classes and at the same time participate in online learning activities. The activities can be in the form of video or voice instructions and lectures, online quizzes, and forum discussions.

The transition from ODL to hybrid and blended learning requires careful planning and preparation. Successful implementation according to Hodges et al. (2020) requires investment in technology and infrastructure, professional development training for instructors and curriculum reviews that are student-centred and focus more on interactive learning so that students can use online tools effectively. Hybrid and blended learning also have provided new opportunities for students who might not have been able to attend conventional in-person classes. It can also provide flexibility for students who must balance work or family obligations with their studies. Therefore, the transition to hybrid and blended learning is an important development in the education environment that can help students in improving their access to learning, engagement, and learning outcomes.

However, while hybrid and blended learning offer flexibility and wider access, they also present several challenges. Past research (Crawford et al., 2020; Ghazali et al., 2021) points towards the digital divide as a major concern, noting that not all students have access to reliable internet connection or suitable devices, which limits their participation in online activities. Many students also struggle with self-discipline and time management, which leads to reduced engagement in online classes. While instructors on the other hand face increased workload

managing both in-person and online components which complicates lesson delivery (Singh et. al., 2022). Additionally, limited face-to-face interaction in online settings may hinder collaboration, spontaneous discussion and feedback. These drawbacks highlight the need for careful planning to ensure hybrid and blended learning models support learners rather than hinder them.

This study examines Malaysian HEI students' perceptions towards teaching and learning approaches, assessment methods, and interactions with peers, based on their experiences with ODL, hybrid and blended learning. Thus, the research question is "What are the students' perceptions on teaching, learning, assessments and peer interaction during the transition from ODL to hybrid and blended learning?". To address this question, data were gathered using a set of questionnaires distributed through a survey.

Literature Review

Open and Distance Learning in Malaysia

The transition from ODL to hybrid and blended learning in Malaysian HEIs causes a significant shift of pedagogy, which influences students' perceptions of teaching and learning, assessments, and peer interactions. ODL, which physically separates instructors and students, gained popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic due to its flexibility and accessibility through synchronous and asynchronous modalities (Armstrong-Mensah et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2020; Zakaria, 2020). In addition, ODL has become a preferred platform for learners who have difficulty attending physical classes, especially those from remote areas and working professionals. The expansion of ODL is in line with Malaysia's national digital policies, such as the Jalinan Digital Negara (JENDELA) initiative, which aims to improve Internet connectivity and support digital education.

ODL: Definition and Perspective

ODL is defined as a learning approach that both educators and students experience from a distance, incorporating digital technology and the Internet (Al-Busaidi, 2013). According to Fahmeeda and Ming (2015), open learning assimilates electronic devices to improve educational activities, synchronously or asynchronously. Instructional delivery may occur through offline e-learning, which utilises digital devices independently of Internet access, or through open e-learning, which integrates technological tools in conjunction with Internet connectivity to support the teaching and learning process. To understand the ideas, advantages and disadvantages behind ODL, this study will tap into the perspective of (1) teaching and learning, (2) assessment and (3) interaction with peers.

ODL: Teaching and Learning

From a teaching and learning perspective, Fahmeeda and Ming (2015) stated that the benefits of ODL to students are evident in their thoughts and attitudes, as well as in their confidence and the catalyst for their interest in and the effectiveness of open learning. Students also felt that they benefited greatly from open learning, as it provided a strong platform for them to communicate and engage with lecturers and peers, with the added benefit of being primarily in control of their ideas and discussions (Masrom, 2007). In a study conducted by David and Hill (2021), tertiary-level university students expressed their satisfaction with the learning content if it was comprehensible and properly organised. However, reports stated that students had

difficulties maintaining attention during online lectures, which were often described as monotonous and lacking interactivity (Lim et al., 2021). This issue has led to a demand for more engaging instructional strategies, many of which are now being implemented in hybrid and blended learning models, including flipped classrooms and mixed-modal content delivery (Rashid et al., 2022). Students often face challenges related to limited Internet access, lack of adequate digital tools, and emotional stress—factors that can impede comprehension and engagement (Embi, 2011; Ghazali et al., 2021; Yusof et al., 2021). Furthermore, ODL environments have been criticised for fostering feelings of isolation and a decline in peer interaction due to the absence of face-to-face collaboration (Francis et al., 2025). Yiong et al. (2015) found that Malaysian students had a below-average level of acceptance for open learning, as they felt they required more time to understand and adapt to the idea of open learning. They also exhibit different levels of acceptance due to various reasons, including technology support, lecturer support, students' behaviour and characteristics, course content, knowledge management, and online forum groups. A study by Ahmad et al. (2010) also revealed that, although ODL is effective and beneficial, factors such as Internet speed have become an issue in its implementation.

ODL: Assessment

George et al. (2014) highlighted that various assessment methods, like MCQ, short essay questions, open-ended questions, and gap-filling questions, were easier executed through the online learning mode. The results of these methods are projected based on the students' skills, knowledge, and attitudes. The variety of assessment methods in open learning suggests that the learning quality of ODL is equivalent to, and in some cases, better than, the traditional face-to-face method, as students have greater control and responsibility in their learning process. However, the reliance on frequent online testing during ODL raised concerns about cognitive overload and motivation, especially toward the end of academic terms (Boud & Falchikov, 2007). Students expressed stress and fatigue due to the repetitive nature of assessments and the pressure to perform in unfamiliar digital formats (Francis et al., 2025).

ODL: Interaction with Peers

Based on a study by Sthapornnanon et al. (2009), the concept of social constructivist learning has been implemented in ODL. It has yielded positive results among tertiary-level students. The process encouraged social interaction, and most students claimed that group work was more effective; they were also happy with the activities executed in an online environment. Furthermore, student perceptions of peer interaction reveal obvious differences between ODL and hybrid and blended learning environments. As ODL limits impromptu efforts with peers, hybrid and blended learning still promote individual engagement with the help of digital tools, promoting students to collaborate work in a community (Mohamad et al., 2023; Zainuddin & Perera, 2021). This transition promotes positive, balanced, and wholesome learning experiences, though it also necessitates effective instructional design, institutional support, and student readiness.

Blended Learning

Following the end of the pandemic, many learning institutions have resumed traditional teaching and learning. At the same time, the post-pandemic transition has led to a shift in learning approaches known as blended learning, where educators incorporate face-to-face and online learning methods to maximise the teaching and learning benefits of both modes (Ginting

et al., 2021). Subsequently, blended learning has emerged as an innovative teaching strategy that allows for greater flexibility and convenience for both learners and instructors (Tukiman et al., 2020). With this approach, students have access to online resources and materials outside of traditional class, while instructors can use online platforms to track student progress and provide personalised feedback. However, despite its convenience, blended learning requires careful planning and execution (Singh et. al., 2022). Instructors must balance the use of technology and face-to-face interaction while also ensuring that students have access to the resources they require to navigate the online learning environment. Therefore, the current state of blended learning following the pandemic and transitioning to normal and face-to-face interactions should focus on creating a dynamic learning environment that combines the best of both worlds for the benefit of students, instructors, and educational institutions.

Hybrid Learning

As noted by Kazui and Yalçın (2022), hybrid learning encapsulates the blending of traditional classroom learning with technology-driven instruction that prioritises the student's needs, in a more flexible way. It usually comprises both synchronous and asynchronous elements, enabling institutions to harness the benefits of online learning while promoting in-person engagement. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) views the adoption of hybrid learning as a strategic shift towards Education 4.0 and the digitisation of pedagogical processes (MOHE, 2021). The plan encourages HEIs to adopt hybrid learning not just as an emergency response to COVID-19, but also as a sustainable educational practice for the future. Lee and Ahmad (2021) analysed policy implementation in several Malaysian universities and found that successful hybrid learning rollouts depended heavily on institutional support, such as centralized learning management systems (LMS), digital learning guidelines and faculty development programs. However, it is crucial to note that effective hybrid learning also depends on instructional design and robust digital infrastructure. This is because instructional strategies that include flipped classrooms, problem-based learning (PBL) and scaffolded group work, have allowed educators to maximise in-person time for application and interaction, while leveraging online platforms for content delivery and individual review (Tan et al., 2022). In addition to that, digital platforms like Moodle, Microsoft Teams, and Google Classroom have facilitated hybrid instruction as reported by Hashim et al. (2022). Therefore, it is important to note that hybrid learning centres on the integration of pedagogy and technology to create a student-centred learning experience.

For this study, hybrid learning is defined as a method that asynchronously combines face-to-face and online instructions, which allows for communication between instructors and students, despite their physical whereabouts (Gudoniene et. al, 2025). This approach provides opportunities for the instructors to deliver the same contents of lessons to students in physical and virtual classrooms simultaneously. To achieve this, the integration of digital tools such as video conferencing platforms, shared digital workspaces and learning management systems are required which could ensure seamless interaction, collaboration and participation. Thus, hybrid learning not only offers flexibility and accessibility but unique pedagogical challenges as instructors need to manage the learning environment effectively.

Students' Perceptions of Blended Learning and Hybrid Learning

According to earlier research, Malaysian students value the convenience and flexibility of hybrid learning. Students appreciated the flexibility and user-friendliness of blended learning, which improved their motivation and academic performance (Khasanah et al., 2023). These results align with Rahman et al. (2020), who pointed out that blended learning fits into students' schedules and enhances traditional teaching methods, proving that this approach is suitable for today's students.

Despite these benefits, blended learning has been associated with a number of documented challenges and resistances. First, students have voiced concerns regarding the technology infrastructure, instructor preparedness, and the effectiveness of the online curriculum. According to Ariffin et al. (2021), inconsistencies in delivery techniques, combined with inadequate preparation of lecturers on teaching through technology, significantly impact student satisfaction and motivation. Additionally, many students find it challenging to adapt to new technologies. Students frequently find it difficult to meet the technological requirements of blended learning platforms, according to Putri et al. (2020). They might become irritated and stop participating if they do not have the necessary information or direction. Because communication technology develops faster than they can integrate into their education, students may experience anxiety when using digital tools (Rasmitadila et al., 2020). Second, students have shared various perspectives about online assessments, citing academic dishonesty, technological disruptions, and ambiguous rubrics as major issues (Ismail et al., 2021). While some other students prefer the convenience of open-book and online tests, others say that they do not capture the core of learning. These impressions formed as peers and self-assessments emerged during and after the shift to hybrid models (Yusof et al., 2023). Finally, students have also expressed concerns about peer interactions during hybrid learning. Peer interaction is an essential part of student engagement and group learning. It gives people a lot of good opportunities to talk, present, and make connections with others. But problems like digital fatigue (Elizondo-García & Espínola-Carballo, 2023), uneven participation in online discussions (Palmer et al., 2022), and not being able to be social on virtual platforms (Barrera et al., 2020) are still problems.

Evidently, the shift at Malaysian HEIs from ODL to hybrid and blended learning has produced a range of student reactions. Even though many students value the flexibility of hybrid learning, there are still issues with peer interaction, assessment fairness, and teaching quality. Therefore, as hybrid learning becomes a permanent feature of higher education, it is essential to understand how students perceive various factors to develop inclusive, effective, and engaging learning environments.

Methodology

Research Design

This study made use of a quantitative approach by employing a cross-sectional research design. The quantitative approach was selected because it is suitable to investigate variables that include gender, age and perceptions (Creswell, 2014). This approach was chosen due to the study's objective to obtain measurable evidence on students' perceptions on teaching and learning, assessments and interaction with peers during the transition from ODL to hybrid and blended learning among Malaysian HEIs students.

Samples

This research determines the population based on language students from public and private universities in Malaysia. Due to the large population, the study conducted a two-stage sampling. Firstly, a sampling frame was developed. The estimated number of the whole population is 100,000. Using the sample size formula, the required number for representative sample size is 384, which was based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970). Cluster sampling was conducted by clustering the students based on four institutions situated in four states of Malaysia which are Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Johor and Pahang. Finally, the study made use of random sampling, in which 384 respondents were targeted.

Data Collection Procedure

A set of questionnaires was developed. The questionnaires were divided into five sections. The first section is on Demographic, the second section is on Teaching and Learning, the third section is on Assessment, and the final section is on Interaction with Peers. There were 23 items in the questionnaire altogether to address Research Question 1. Likert-scale of five points was used for the questionnaire indicating the lowest point 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5= Strongly Agree. Some items were adapted from previous studies involving perceptions towards ODL, blended and hybrid learning. It was then submitted together with forms concerning ethics while conducting the research to the Research Ethics Committee, Universiti Teknologi Mara, Malaysia. Once the approval was received, (letter reference: REC/03/2024 (ST/MR/58), the distribution of the questionnaire began to take place.

While collecting the data, the questionnaires were given through a person-in-charge at each of the selected HEIs. A month of duration was given to the person-in-charge to distribute the questionnaires to the respondents. During this duration, the person-in-charge reminded and encouraged the respondents who had probably forgotten to respond. Since the participation in the study was done voluntarily, respondents were allowed to withdraw anytime with no repercussions, and their data would not be included in the study. The data were finally collected from 202 respondents. The target was not achieved due to low response rate despite multiple follow-ups done.

Data Analysis

The survey data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 29. Descriptive statistics were utilised to effectively organise and summarize the dataset. Key measures such as frequencies, means and standard deviations were computed to illustrate the demographic profiles of the participants and to present their responses to individual survey items. SPSS was used as it supported accurate and systematic data processing, contributing to the overall reliability of the analysis (George & Mallery, 2024).

Results

This section presents the findings of the study, which aimed to investigate Malaysian HEIs students' perceptions during the transition from ODL to hybrid and blended learning. The analysis focuses on three aspects of learning: (1) teaching and learning, (2) assessments and (3) interaction with peers. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to summarise the data.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Perceptions during transition from ODL to hybrid and blended learning

No	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
<i>Teaching and Learning</i>			
1	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning allows me to have freedom in my study as I have my materials online and lecturer's guidance face to face.	3.46	.632
2	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning allows me to work around my schedule and study at my own pace.	3.36	.658
3	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning saves my time and traveling cost as I do not have to travel to go for classes all the time.	3.30	.833
4	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning motivates me to be more confident in engagement during classes.	3.12	.791
5	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning increases my attendance in class due to the flexibility.	3.33	.737
6	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning trains me to manage my study time independently (self-regulated learning).	3.30	.695
7	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning technical issues (Internet connection, device issues) have no effect on my study.	2.57	1.04
<i>Assessment</i>			
8	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning gives easier access to assessments.	3.34	.630
9	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning allows prompt feedback from the lecturers.	3.20	.700
10	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning offers a variety of assessments to better suit the current learning style.	3.20	.678
11	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning limits plagiarism during assessments.	2.89	.852
12	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning limits free riders among the students.	2.77	1.032
13	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning reduces anxiety in completing my assessments.	3.04	.813
14	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning encourages reflections on my performance during assessments.	3.26	.687
<i>Peer Interaction</i>			
15	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning allows me to interact with other students who are taking similar subjects.	3.40	.716
16	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning allows me to know more students than I might in ODL classes.	3.26	.864
17	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning allows me to have an enjoyable learning experience as I get to share my thoughts/opinions with my classmates.	3.31	.733

18	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning allows me to achieve a better understanding of course materials as I could discuss with classmates.	3.32	.700
19	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning encourages me to ask questions during discussions with my classmates.	3.31	.726
20	Compared to ODL, interaction with classmates during hybrid learning motivates me to complete tasks/assignments.	3.27	.733
21	Compared to ODL, interaction with classmates during hybrid learning encourages me to engage with the subjects.	3.32	.686
22	Compared to ODL, completing assignments/tasks with classmates allows me to produce better quality work.	3.37	.689
23	Compared to ODL, hybrid learning allows me to have better engagement with classmates in completing group work.	3.39	.699
Average		3.22	.759

Students' perception during the transition from ODL to hybrid and blended learning was analysed based on three aspects of learning: (1) teaching and learning, (2) assessments and (3) interaction with peers. Table 1 summarises the descriptive statistics, highlighting the mean scores and standard deviations for each item.

Students' perception on the teaching and learning during the transition show moderate agreement, with an average mean score of 3.22. The highest-rated item was "*Compared to ODL, hybrid learning allows me to have freedom in my study as I have my materials online and lecturer's guidance face to face*" ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.632$), suggesting that students appreciated the flexibility and access to resources and instructor support. This was followed by "*Compared to ODL, hybrid learning allows me to work around my schedule and study at my own pace*" ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.658$) and "*Compared to ODL, hybrid learning increases my attendance in class due to the flexibility*" ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 0.737$), indicating that hybrid learning encourages better attendance and time management for the students. However, students moderately agreed that hybrid learning promotes self-regulated learning ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.695$) and helps reduce time and travel costs ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.833$). The motivation to engage during classes was rated slightly lower ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.791$), indicating areas for improvement in encouraging students' participation and maintaining their motivation in class. A notable finding shows that the lowest score was recorded for the statement "*Compared to ODL, hybrid learning technical issues (Internet connection, device issues) have no effect on my study*" ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.04$). This suggests that technical challenges remain a significant barrier in hybrid learning environments.

The responses for assessment experience in hybrid and blended learning environments yielded a slightly lower average mean score of 3.10. Students mostly agreed with the statement that "*Compared to ODL, hybrid learning gives easier access to assessments*" ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.630$), suggesting that students found it easier to access and complete assessments. Similarly, students acknowledged the value of timely feedback, as reflected in the item "*Compared to ODL, hybrid learning allows prompt feedback from the lecturers*" ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.700$), and the flexibility of assessment types ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.678$). Additionally, while students

acknowledged the benefit of hybrid learning in promoting self-reflection during assessments ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.687$), concerns about group-based tasks remain evident. The statement *“Compared to ODL, hybrid learning limits free riders among the students”* received a relatively low mean score ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.032$), suggesting there are still issues with unequal contribution in group assessments. Similarly, the item limiting plagiarism ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.852$) reflects students' low confidence in academic integrity when completing assessments.

The responses for peer interaction indicate generally a moderate agreement, with the average of 3.33, with students indicating that hybrid learning enhances classroom discussion, motivation, and collaboration. For example, items related to expressing opinions ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 0.733$), understanding course content through discussion ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.686$), and motivation to complete tasks ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.733$) scored positively. The highest-rated item was interactions among peers ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.716$), suggesting that the hybrid environment encourages positive engagement among students. This aligns with other high-scoring items such as *“Compared to ODL, hybrid learning allows me to have better engagement with classmates in completing group work”* ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.699$) and *“Compared to ODL, completing assignments/tasks with classmates allows me to produce better quality work”* ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.689$).

The overall average mean score across all items was 3.22 ($SD=0.759$), reflecting a positive perception on teaching and learning, assessment, and peer interaction during the transition from ODL to hybrid and blended learning. This suggests that students respond positively to the transition especially in terms of flexibility, feedback from instructors and collaborative engagement with peers. However, the findings also addressed challenging issues such as maintaining academic integrity and ensuring fair contributions in group works, which suggest the need for continuous improvement in the hybrid learning environment.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the Malaysian HEIs students' perceptions on teaching and learning, assessments and interaction with peers during the transition from ODL to hybrid and blended learning. The findings revealed a comprehensive understanding of students' perspectives and experiences, highlighting both the strengths and limitations of the hybrid learning approach.

Based on the results, students identified flexibility in learning and easy access to resources and instructor support as major advantages for a hybrid learning environment. Students rated academic freedom ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.632$) and self-management in their study plan ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.658$) moderately high, suggesting that hybrid learning promotes student autonomous learning. This supports Eslit's (2023) claim that hybrid learning should combine traditional classroom learning with technology-enhanced instruction to provide more flexibility and a student-centred approach. However, it has to be noted that while hybrid learning does support flexibility, it does not ensure students' motivation and active engagement in class as can be seen for motivation item score ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.791$). This finding aligns with the concerns in the literature that autonomous learning environments require support from active interactivity from instructors' presence (Jeon and Lee, 2023) and a high degree of self-regulation and autonomy (Song and Lee, 2024) to maintain students' participation and motivation. Thus, it is crucial to design a hybrid learning environment that is a balance of flexible learning style as well as

structured instructional support to maintain students' motivation and learners' engagement. Additionally, the lowest-rated item ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.04$) shows that poor Internet connectivity and device limitations continue to disrupt hybrid learning. This indicates that despite advances in pedagogy, challenges in the digital aspect and infrastructure remain a barrier, as mentioned in Singh et al.'s (2022) findings on how technical barriers can hinder the effectiveness of online and hybrid education.

The results related to assessment experience in the blended and hybrid learning environment reflect a moderate satisfaction among the students. In general, the students mostly agreed that hybrid learning made assessments more accessible ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.630$) and they received prompt feedback from instructors ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.700$). This could happen as a result of various assessment formats and supported by the flexible nature of assessment submission on online platforms which facilitate quick and prompt feedback from the instructors. This is echoed by Meinel et al., (2024), suggesting that while online learners benefit from having a clear and consistent course structure, it is equally important to provide them with a degree of flexibility. While students acknowledged the opportunity for self-reflection during hybrid assessments, issues related to group work challenges were still evident. The relatively low score for the item on limiting free riders ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.032$) indicates ongoing frustrations with unequal participation in group tasks, a common concern in both traditional and online learning environments (Ismail et al., 2021). Additionally, the findings on plagiarism control ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.852$) suggest that students remain concerned about the academic integrity of assessments in hybrid learning environments. This also raises concerns about promoting academic integrity among learners. As Saputra et al., (2024) notes, assessments should be designed to enhance learning, rather than merely to test and trick learners. Therefore, the issue of academic integrity should be openly discussed across various learning contexts.

The findings on peer interaction suggest that students generally had a positive experience with this aspect of hybrid learning. With an average mean score of 3.33, students indicated that the hybrid format helped foster classroom discussions, motivation, and collaboration. The highest-rated item, peer interaction ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.716$) reflects that students value the opportunities to engage with their classmates. This is further supported by high scores for items related to working in groups and completing tasks together, such as improved engagement in group work ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.699$) and producing better quality output through collaboration ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.689$). These results indicate that collaborative components should be integrated in hybrid learning environments as it can encourage students' interaction and teamwork. This corroborates with Estriegana's (2021) study that mentioned students also appreciate peer engagement and see it as an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to their learning outcomes. Therefore, these findings across teaching and learning, assessment, and peer interaction collectively underscore that blended and hybrid learning environments can be effective when there is a clear balance of flexibility and well-planned instructional support.

Conclusion

This study investigated Malaysian HEIs students' perception of teaching and learning, assessments, and peer interaction during the transition from ODL to hybrid and blended learning. The results highlight the need for hybrid learning designs that balance flexibility with structured instructional support to maintain engagement, uphold academic integrity, and foster consistent collaboration. To address these concerns, institutions should increase instructor

engagement through prompt feedback and interaction, improve group work structures with clearer roles, include peer evaluation as part of assessment, and support students with tech-related challenges. Assessments should also focus on fostering learning with flexible formats rather than monitoring dishonesty. At the same time, academic integrity can be strengthened through open discussion, ethics-based instruction and embedded into part of the syllabus. However, although these findings offer important insights, the study is limited to student perspectives from selected institutions and does not include instructor and institution input or performance-based outcomes. Future research should explore these additional views to gain a more holistic understanding of the effectiveness of hybrid and blended learning environments.

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