

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**UNDERGRADUATE
DISTANCE LEARNERS'
SENSE OF MATTERING AT
A PUBLIC HIGHER LEARNING
INSTITUTION**

NUR MAIZURA BINTI LIN

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ABSTRACT

The inception of distance learning in Malaysia has brought about a significant impact on the Malaysian higher education landscape, especially among working adult learners. Adult learners reap the many benefits of distance education, nevertheless, they also face innumerable challenges. To address the overwhelming number of challenges that distance learners face, the concept of *Mattering*, established by Rosenberg and McCullough, and later on introduced in higher learning institutions by Schlossberg as the Theory of Mattering and Marginality is revisited. *Mattering* is defined as the feeling of being cared for or mattered to by another person (individual mattering) or a group of people (societal mattering). Schlossberg believed that feeling that one matters can positively affect an individual. The Theory of Mattering and Marginality consisted of five constructs, and they include awareness, importance, ego-extension, reliance, and appreciation, and to measure these constructs at higher learning institutions among adult learners, Schlossberg, LaSalle, and Golec came up with The Mattering Scales for Adult Students in Higher Education (MHE). The Theoretical Framework of this study was based on the Theory of Mattering and Marginality. In view of the issues faced by distance learners, five research objectives were developed and they investigated English language distance learners' experience of *mattering* with regard to their peers, faculty members, administrative staff, advisors, or mentors as well as the university acknowledging them as learners holding multiple roles. The five aforementioned areas reflected the five dimensions in The Mattering Scales for Adult Students in Higher Education (MHE) survey. This mixed-methods study consisted of both qualitative and quantitative parts. Online interviews were carried out and MHE surveys were distributed for the purpose of data collection. Johnny Saldaña's Thematic Analysis and The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) were used to analyze data from both studies. Findings from both methods revealed that in general the distance learners felt that they matter to all five dimensions (peers, lecturers, academic advisors/ mentors, administrative staff and as learners holding multiple roles). This study has made contributions from the aspects of theoretical, and methodological implications. Key directions for future research were proposed at the end of the study.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces important information about the thesis beginning with the research background of this study, followed by the problem statement, the research objectives and research questions, the theoretical framework, the limitations of this study, the definition of terms, and a summary of the chapter. The research background presents information about the evolvement of the mode of learning in Malaysia which then weaves in some information about distance education in Malaysia. The problem statement of the study highlights issues in distance education and introduces as well as connects the issues with the Theory of Mattering by Nancy Schlossberg. A mention of the connection between the two in the Western education setting and local setting will be presented as well. The theoretical framework for this study is highlighted which includes a thorough explanation of the five dimensions of mattering. The limitations of the study and definition of terms are highlighted too towards the end of the chapter. Lastly, the chapter closes with the chapter summary.

1.2 Research Background

The Malaysian higher learning education landscape has evolved over the years. Beginning from a traditional face-to-face mode of learning in a classroom environment to the inclusion of technology where blended learning became a norm at higher learning institutions. The immersion of technology in education has brought about an overflowing number of uses such as online discussions, ‘chatting’, ‘instant messaging’, and others (Muhamad Suhaimi & Francis, 2020). To add, learning has even become accessible via mobile phones (Hampton, 2021). Furthermore, in some higher learning institutions, it is evident that classes are conducted fully online. As mentioned by Muhamad Suhaimi & Francis (2020), online learning is a teaching