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How have our teaching competencies evolved to suit blended learning environment?

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on teaching strategies and educators' pedagogical and digital competencies. During the pandemic, educators faced challenges in fostering students' self-learning and critical thinking in online formats, influencing their perceptions of their pedagogical effectiveness. While many teachers reported confidence in preparing materials and addressing student challenges, they also encountered limitations in developing students' autonomy and interactive skills in online settings. Post-pandemic, most participants found their digital competencies significantly enhanced, frequently utilizing e-learning platforms like Moodle, MS Teams, Kahoot!, and WordWall to support both in-class and independent learning. This study highlights a positive shift toward blended learning as educators integrate technology into traditional classrooms, fostering greater student engagement and autonomy. The main challenges identified in implementing blended learning include technical issues and limitations in available digital materials for certain student needs. Additionally, the study explores educators' perspectives on the paradigm shift in teaching, which emphasizes their role in adapting to digital tools and strategies to meet evolving student expectations in a blended learning environment.

Introduction

The shift from traditional learning to electronic learning during the Covid-19 pandemic has forced educators to re-think their teaching strategies to adapt to the dire time. As the world gradually shifts back to a sense of normalcy, classes have gone back to be conducted in the physical classrooms again. Some studies have predicted that the abrupt change to traditional learning in institutions may bring changes and new possibilities for progressive teaching techniques in the classrooms (Abdullateef, 2022 and Mitchell et al,2022).

Previous researches have mentioned the importance of educators to be competent leaders and motivators in the classroom to match with the learners needs (Waruwu, Nurdelima & Arifin, Fatkhul & Hady, Yazid ,2023 ; Pham, 2022). Therefore, educators need to be able to implement the skills that they have learned during their online classes in the face-to-face classes as COVID-19 pandemic has forced started a paradigm shift for education. Even though blended learning has started before the pandemic, it has become the new norm post-pandemic.

Singh, Steele & Singh (2021) stated that a central element of blended learning is online resources are not meant to replace face-face class time but rather to enhance the learning in the classroom. In order to conduct an effective blended learning classroom, educators need to have the competencies to do so. Previously before the pandemic, researches show that educators struggled with learning and adapting digital skills in the classroom (Kelly & Wicklein, 2009; Kimav & Aydin,2020; Alamri, 2021; Singh, Steele & Singh, 2021).

This research will look into how teachers' teaching styles might have evolved after the online teaching practice during the pandemic. This study looks into the perceptions of UTAS-Ibra, Oman lecturers on whether their pedagogical competencies have been affected by the sudden shift to electronic learning during COVID-19 and whether the shift has influenced their digital competencies. Furthermore, the study will investigate how technology is incorporated in the post-COVID 19-classroom settings and the challenges that they are faced with.

Literature Review

Pedagogical competencies

Researchers and educators have defined pedagogical competence as teachers‟ ability to manage students' learning from the planning to the evaluation process or known as what makes an effective teacher. Pham (2022, p.151) investigated what makes a good teacher and cited that a good teacher should not only have a good knowledge on the subject matter and skills to teach the subject (Neil, 1991) but a good teacher should also be able to stimulate intellectual excitement and the use of suitable psychology techniques in the classroom to motivate students (Lowman, 1995).

As education evolves from teacher-centered to a more student-centered environment, the competencies of teachers have become more personalized where teachers act more as

facilitators to guide students to build their learning and thinking skills. Kahveci (2021) findings show that teachers feel justified in doing their job well when they value and understand learners‟ needs and be flexible with students as they must consider each students‟ learning challenges and differences. Therefore, the planning process is very important to ensure that teachers are prepared for any challenges or issues encountered in the classroom.

Febriyanti (2018) states that teacher‟s preparedness should include interesting and appropriate materials to the task, able to analyze students‟ needs as well as able to arouse and sustain students‟ interest in the classroom. Apart from teachers‟ competencies to plan, design the lessons and cater to students‟ needs, teachers also need to be aware of the changes in the industry. Irgatoğlu and Peker (2021) stated that language instructors need to be able to adapt to the changes in the field and are expected to keep up with continuous learning and be aware of any innovations related to their field.

Digital Competencies

As the education industry starts to evolve by integrating information and communication technology (ICT) into the classroom in the 21st century, teachers‟ pedagogical competencies started to include digital competencies. Having digital competencies are crucial for teachers as teaching techniques and digital technologies have become intertwined with classroom practices and institutional curriculum (Bojukrapan et al., 2023). With the emergence of blended learning and online learning, previous studies have noted the rising importance of teachers; digital competencies. It has even been stated that one of the core competencies in educators is digital competencies as it covers teaching competencies, knowledge and skills (Ayrancil & Başkan,2021). Part of teachers‟ digital competency includes using digital technology, developing digital learning resources, re-mix learning resources, communication with students and facilitating learning (Ally, 2019; Aslan, 2021; Benali & Mak,2023). To be able to demonstrate their digital competencies, teachers should be able to transfer their face-to-face teaching skills into the digital platform to meet the learning demand of students from Gen Z. These skills range from classroom management, lesson creation and planning and communication with students. Furthermore, digital competencies don‟t only focus on the learning materials but managing students learning and emotional needs as well.

Ally (2019) discussed digital teachers‟ personal characteristics include to be a lifelong learner, be flexible and adaptable in the digital age, show empathy, be sensitive to learner‟s difference and accept innovation. Keskin (2023) study‟s finding align with previous research where digital competencies and lifelong learning tendencies support each other. Teachers who have lifelong learning tendencies are less resistant to learning about new technologies and how to adapt them into their professional practice. Cabero-Almenara et al (2020) has also mentioned that teachers with digital pedagogy competence are capable to use digital technologies to improve teaching process and interact professionally with all the stakeholders in the institution. Furthermore, Benali & Mak (2023) study identified that teachers‟ digital competence is also linked to educator‟s professional development which also includes understanding ICT‟s in policies, empowering learners and even facilitating learners‟ own digital competence. In an education setting, teachers‟ digital competencies are the bridge between the institution‟s digital curriculum and students own digital competencies as a co-relationship between the harmony of them two are important to ensure a smooth knowledge passing process thus the importance of developing teachers‟ digital competencies (Clark & Simpson, 2020 and Bojukrapan et al., 2023).

Paradigm shift

The incorporation of technology into the classroom has met with some resistance in the past due to uncertainty or lack of training for teachers. The ability to incorporate technology into their learning varies depending on their perception of adequate ability of using technology (Kruger & Blıignaut, 2013). This statement was backed up by Smith (2020) that educators fixed mindset make them believe that they cannot adapt face to face teaching materials into online learning materials when in fact, the lessons can be applied in any form of classrooms by using different or strategic strategies. Ungerer (2016) mentioned that higher education institutions need to provide continuous support to develop staff to incorporate digital tools into their classrooms to endorse teaching and learning goals.

Moreover, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, all the learning was forced to be moved into remote online learning and teachers and students all over the world had to adapt to the sudden change. The pandemic has challenged educators to rethink their pedagogical competencies to cater to the digital environment regardless of their perception towards technology. Virtual learning gained momentum where both teachers and students

learned to be more comfortable with using technological tools in the classroom (Abdullateef, 2022). Despite the many challenges that teachers have faced during the pandemic, there have been a few notable positive changes that it brought into the paradigm such as improving teachers‟ digital competencies. Mitchell et al (2022) found that during online learning teachers try to increase communication with students, create a safe learning environment and give them more agencies for open communication how lessons can be delivered and designed. It has also been found that during online teaching, teachers develop emotional flexibility to reflect on useful signals such as students disinterest in activities or practices or even students‟ reluctance to activities and prepare better strategies with the negative experience (Farrell, 2021).

These studies suggest that student-centered learning is possible even with remote online teaching if the teachers have sufficient digital competencies. However, the positive changes are mainly seen in those who have embraced the changes and familiarize themselves with digital tools. Students and teachers who have more technology exposure and experience have more positive outlooks on e-learning tools and students who are self-efficient performed better in online learning tasks (Yüce, 2022).

Furthermore, the pandemic has forced the education industry to no longer ignore the significance of shifting into a form of student-centered blended learning post-COVID. The education system before the pandemic may no longer be compatible with the changing environment and educational leaders to re-think how the new paradigm looks like (Mbhiza, 2021). Kara (2021) believes that the acceptance of the new paradigm shows the commitment from higher institutions in utilizing technology to facilitate flexible, adaptive learning environment and empower students with hands-on digital literacy.

Challenges in blended learning

However, previous studies have found that implementing blended learning prior to the pandemic into the classroom has met with a few challenges from both students and teachers. Students‟ perception towards the usage of technology plays an important role in their interest in blended learning. Rianto (2020) found that students have negative perception to certain technical online aspects which affect their interest of blended learning resulting in them preferring to have face-to-face learning assessment rather than blended learning assessment format. Students‟ perceptions can be influenced by internal and

external factors such as their own technological savviness while the external factors that can influence them are something that they have no control of. Students' perception of blended learning can heavily be affected by their lack of digital skills or when they must learn how to use the digital tools can make them cognitively overwhelmed with new knowledge (Hussain et al., 2019 and Aysegul Liman Kaban et al., 2024). Kimav & Aydin (2020) mentioned that students find the use of technology is not useful in class due to technical difficulty which resonates with the previous finding. One of the external factors that can affect students‟ perception is the teachers‟ ability to use technology in the classroom. Hussain et al (2019) found that students wish their instructors are more trained in using technological tools. Students have less confidence in the effectiveness of blended learning when their teachers struggle to use the tools that‟s meant to enhance their learning. Students believe that teachers need to train students at the beginning and incorporate digital tools from the beginning so students will be familiar with it (Altay & Altay, 2019).

Lack of training from the institutions is one of the reasons why teachers themselves feel that they lack the skills to integrate blended learning in the classroom. Altay and Altay (2019) and Aysegul Liman Kaban et al., (2024) found that teachers struggle with implementing blended learning as they can‟t cope with the changing role of teachers and students, lack of training with blended learning and unfamiliarity with new technologies. However, Kimav & Aydin (2020) stated that even if training is provided, some teachers need more guidance and even doubt whether they can apply what they‟ve learned on their own. Apart from the lack of digital competencies, teachers struggle to implement blended learning due to factors that they have no control to ensure that they meet their deadline. It was found that teachers feel that they have lack of time to fit in blended learning methods into the academic timetable to meet course outcomes (Hussain et al., 2019). The idea of implementing blended learning can also increase workload for teachers especially if they are not well trained or have negative perception towards integrating technologies into the classroom. Ghimire (2022) mentioned that integrating online materials and lessons might give teachers extra work as they need pick the suitable syllabus and spend more time and effort to ensure that there‟s a balance between face to face and online learning.

Another challenge that institutions and teachers face is to be able to evaluate what is considered as a successful blended learning environment. Past studies have discussed that

to have effective blended learning environment teachers need to have flexibility, facilitating students learning, technological adaptation and providing a supportive learning environment (Kimav & Aydin, 2020; Ghimire, 2022; Aysegul Liman Kaban et al., 2024; Hirst et al., 2024). Hirst et al., (2024) also mentions that in order to have a successful blended learning, it requires support from all levels from the administration to faculties, course development and students.

From the researches cited above, emergency remote online learning might have shifted the education paradigm where the education industry can no longer ignore the need to implement blended learning into the classroom. Even though studies have found that teachers‟ digital competencies have improved during that period, there are little studies to show how the pandemic has impacted teachers‟ ability to incorporate the growth into the new paradigm of post Covid classrooms and the challenges they face.

Methodology

Research design and question

A qualitative method was conducted to investigate how teachers' teaching competencies might have evolved after the online teaching practice during the pandemic. An open ended interview was conducted to ensure an in-depth understanding of how individuals perceive their situation (Merriam, 2009).

The research questions are:

1. What is the literary nature of teachers' pedagogical competencies during electronic education?
2. How has online teaching affected teachers‟ digital competencies?
3. What are the challenges that teachers face in implementing blended learning?

Participants and instrument.

For the purpose of this research, homogenous purposive sampling was done to get a more precise and relatable finding to the study (Etikan et al, 2016). The participants for this study were 7 English lecturer who have worked for at least 5 years in UTAS-Ibra, Oman to ensure that they have the same experience of teaching at the institution prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure the validity of the interview questionnaire, the questionnaire was

checked by 2 English professor and the questions were modified based on their feedback.

Findings

Research question 1: Perception of pedagogical competencies during online teaching

For the purpose of this research, pedagogical competencies are coded into 4 different codes: the ability to help students build self-learning skills, to guide students build thinking skills, to prepare materials that cater to students‟ personal need and to be more aware of students‟ challenges.

Table 1: Codes for participants‟ perception of their pedagogical competencies during online teaching

	Build self learning skills	Guide students to build thinking skills	Prepare materials to cater to personal need	Be more aware of students‟ challenges
P1	✓	✓	✓	X
P2	X	X	✓	✓
P3	X	✓	✓	✓
P4	X	X	✓	X
P5	X	X	✓	✓
P6	X	X	X	✓
P7	✓	X	X	X

Table 1 (a): Interview excerpt for build self -learning skills and guiding students to build thinking skills code

Code	Code Desc	Interview excerpts

	ripti on	
Ability to build students self-learning skills	Participants gives their perception of their ability to guide students to build their self-learning:(a) positively or (b) negatively	***P1***: Personally what I‟ve found, which is like interesting in online teaching, the way how to guide students towards the objective of the lesson. So I have to be like concise direct to the point and making my words a little bit simple in order to make them follow and understand what they have to do.
		P2: Online teaching was not quite successful with our students because that was the first time our students went online (sic) So I don't think it really improved their self-learning. ***P3***: Because I was not well versed at that time with the online platforms and how to really optimize its use in teaching and learning. So yes, in a way, the really impeded. ***P5***: Students just produced the Google answer or just Cut Copy paste. I felt that students really did not put in enough of efforts to learn something on their own ***P6***: I think it has limited my ability to provide their necessary support and guidance to my students, especially when it comes to writing.

Ability to build students thinking skills	Participants gives their perception of their ability to guide students to build their thinking skills :(a) positively or (b) negatively	***P1:*** So what I did actually I I used a lot of like educational application like PADLET for example. So they were like jotting down their ideas so in that way they were a little bit like free to express their themselves. ***P3***:I did some online courses and professional development programs. I attended a lot so I used to various tools to engage them in class. So it really actually enhanced the students thinking you know.
		P2: I am not sure about how successful it is. ***P5:*** I didn't get enough of response like I would get enough face to face class. ***P7***: With even when we simplified the instructions, they still they still were not able to.

Based on table 1 and 1(a), only 1 out 7 participants felt that their ability to guide students to build their self- learning skills was not affected. The other 6 felt that teaching online had

affected their ability to as both the students and themselves were not familiar with the technical side of being in an online environment or that they were not be able to monitor students study habit in comparison to face to face class.

As for their perception of their ability to guide students to build their thinking skills, 2 out of 7 participants have a more positive perception. The other participants were not sure whether their effort was successful.

Table 1 (b): Interview excerpt for preparing materials and being more aware of students‟ challenges code

Code	Code Description	Interview excerpts
Ability to prepare lesson materials	Participants gives their perception of their ability to prepare materials to cater to pers	***P1***: the worksheet, I converted them into like a live worksheets. So I provided them with the link, which is like accessible at any time. ***P2***: we use Ms. teams as a platform to share those things (videos and notes) so that the students can come to the Class prepared so and so. ***P3***: I had to keep in mind every stage of the online, you know, class and I had to really modify or better word will be simplify the activities. I had to focus more on instructions than on. ***P5***: My planning wasn't affected. I knew what to teach. I had my lesson plan. I had my materials.
		P6: it caused uncertainty and a lot stress in lesson and material preparation. ***P7***: to address their individual needs, that part I didn't so much because they were heterogeneously grouped.

	onal need: (a) positively or (b) negatively	
Ability to be more aware of students‟ challenges	Participants gives their perception of their ability to be more aware of students challenge	***P2***: When it comes to online teaching, the students have problems with being familiar with the platform and then poor network connections and then interacting with the teacher and facing a lot of problems during their exams ***P3***: And that really helped me a lot in understanding the students‟ abilities. I started doing differentiated teaching and learning methods.
		P1: In this point, no, because most of the students were like silent they didn't eager to speak up. ***P4***: it's kind of challenging because mostly we cannot see them. ***P7***: we're not even sure if the task they submitted are really from the really from them. So in terms of authenticity or of the actual production of their work, I cannot really ascertain if that really came from them and therefore I cannot identify their

	s: (a) positively or (b) negatively	levels

Based on table 1 and 1(b), 5 out of 7 participants believe that online teaching did not affect their ability to prepare lessons as they believe that technology helped them to prepare materials as they need to be more aware of students‟ technical skills or availability.

4 out of 7 participants believe that they are able to be more aware of students‟ challenges during online teaching especially when it comes technology savviness or availability. Those who don‟t share the same sentiment believe that the lack of physical presence made it harder for them to be sure the actual level of students‟ English proficiency.

Research Question 2 :How has online teaching affected teachers' digital competencies post Covid practices?

In order to understand how online teaching has affected the participants digital competencies post Covid practices, the codes are grouped under two parts; perception and current practice as shown below:

Figure 1: Codes for perception and current practice

Perception

Code:

- Confidence of ability to adapt to new technologies
- Confidence of developing digital resources /re-mix lesson
- Confidence in transferring skills

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Current practice

Code:

- Using digital resources in the classroom
- Using digital resources out of the classroom
- Encouraging feedback on the usage of digital resources
- Using technology to improve communication with students

Perception	Confidence of ability to adapt to new technologies	Confidence of developing digital resources /re-mix lesson	Confidence in transferring skills
P1	✓	✓	✓
P2	✓	✓	✓
P3	✓	✓	✓
P4	✓	✓	✓
P5	✓	✓	✓
P6	✓	✓	✓
P7	✓	✓	✓

Table 2(a): Interview excerpts for participants‟ perception of their digital competencies post COVID practices

Code	Code Description	Interview excerpts
Confidence of ability to adapt to new	Participants gives their perception of their	***P1***: thanks to the online classes we were able to investigate more, indicate some educational application like Kahoot, padlet class note in PowerPoint and among others. So we were like more digitized now comparing to the past. ***P2***: So I think I develop professionally and I also explored how to use such platforms to teach and to assess

technologies	confidence of ability to adapt to new technologies	students in different ways and how to use the features. ***P4***: it has made me become resourceful and more patient with the use of technology
Confidence of developing digital resources /re-mix lesson	Participants gives their perception of their confidence to develop digital resources /re-mix lesson	***P5:*** In fact, I'm more confident than what I was earlier. So now I know if something goes wrong I can switch on to online immediately and otherwise. Also I'm happy with my paperwork, so a mix of both kind of blended learning is really helping me out. ***P6***: It has in enlightened me with my knowledge of teaching through technology and it empowered me with tech skills. ***P2:*** I don't say that I am fully confident, but with the help and the support of a tech savvy person, I would say that I would be able to design materials that would be suitable for an online platform

Confidence in transferring skills	Participants gives their perception of their confidence in transferring skills to digital platform	***P7:*** Yes, even now in our classes we are meeting the students face face to face. Still, I'm using a lot of like technology. So in case in the student for example we go back to online classes. I feel that totally I am ready for that. ***P7:***I think I'm more confident this time because it's no longer something new in my practice as I have had experience

Based on the findings in table 2 and table 2(a), all participants believe that their digital competencies have improved post online teaching. All of the believed they are more adaptable to new technologies to be used in the classroom and have no issues in developing or re-mixing their resources. 1 participant feel that even though he might not be fully confident, he is still able to with the guidance of someone who is more technology savvy.

Furthermore, all of the participants believe that they are confident with their ability to transfer their face-to-face skills into digital platforms and vice versa.

Table 3: Codes for participants‟ current practices in the classroom post COVID

Current practice	Using digital resources in the classroom	Using digital resources out of the classroom	Encouraging feedback on the usage of digital resources	Using technology to improve communication with students
P1	✓	✓	✓	✓
P2	X	X	X	✓
P3	✓	✓	✓	✓
P4	✓	✓	✓	✓
P5	✓	✓	✓	✓
P6	✓	✓	✓	✓
P7	✓	✓	✓	✓

It can be seen in table 3 that almost all of the participants use digital resources inside and outside of the classroom. Despite that all of them have positive perception of their digital competencies post COVID practices, 1 of the participant didn‟t incorporate digital resources in the lessons. The type of digital resources used in and outside of the classroom are shown below in table 3(a).

Table 3 (a): Types of digital resources used

Code	Code Description	Details
Digital resources	Types of digital resources that participants use in the	• Moodle • Kahoot • Live Worksheet • Wordwall

in the classroom	classroom	• Quiz form on MS Teams • VocabTest.com
Digital resources outside the classroom	Types of digital resources that participants use outside of the classroom	• MyELT • Moodle • Kahoot as assignment

Table 3(b): Types of feedback for digital resources and how technology is used to improve communication

Code	Code Description	Details
Encouraging feedback on the usage of digital resources	Types of feedback on the usage of digital resources	• Class discussion • Survey via Moodle • Individual feedback through a private message / digital space
Technology improve	How technolo	• MS Teams - Able to send message even during outside of

commu nication with students	gy is used to improve commu nication with students	class hours / weekend - Make messages clearer, shorter and precise (through chat) - Audio message - Video call

Based on table 3 and 3 (b), the 6 participants who use digital resources in their lessons state that they collect feedbacks through various channels from students to ensure that students have a safe environment to express their opinion regarding the resources used in and out of the classroom.

All participants have a positive outlook on how one of the institution subscribed digital platform, MS Teams is used to improve their communication with students as shown in table 3 and 3(b).

Research Question 3:What are the challenges that teachers face in implementing blended learning?

Table 4: Codes for the challenges that the participants face in implementing blended learning

	Students	Materials	Lesson preparation	Technical issues
P1			✓	✓
P3		✓		✓
P4	✓			
P5	✓			✓
P6		✓		✓
P7		✓		

Table 4(a): Interview excerpts for the challenges that the participants face in implementing

blended learning

Code	Code Description	Interview excerpt
Students	Participants explain how students behavior or lack of can affect blended learning environment negatively	***P4***: Not all students can afford to have mobile data or have digital resources such as suitable mobile phones and the lack of motivation ***P5***: So for me, controlling the class, even online or face to face had been a big challenge. Two students didn't show much interest initially because they were trying to copy from each other.
Materials	Participants explain digital lesson resources can affect blended learning environment negatively	***P3***: Some online activities have answers. Students see the answers and they passed the answers to other students ***P6***: There are some platforms that have the subscription fee. It's not free. Not all materials are user friendly P7: Like when we have when they prescribe materials where we have no choice just but to use them, although we know as professionals that they're not fit for the students‟ level.
Lesson preparation	Participants explain how lesson preparatio	***P1***: It needs time to prepare.

	n can affect blended learning environment negatively	
Technical issues	Participants explain how technical issues can affect blended learning environment negatively	***P1***: The network is weak, so for sure you will find some who are not using because of network issues. ***P3***: some students have poor Internet connectivity ***P5***: technical glitches because students use their mobiles and many of them didn't get connected

Based on table 4 and 4(a), 4 out of 7 of the participants found that one of the main issues of implementing blended learning in the classroom is technical issues. One of the repeating issue pointed is poor Internet connectivity whether on or off campus.

Apart from that, 3 out of 7 of them found that the readily available online or the prescribed material by the syllabus hindered their lessons in blended learning. 2 out 7 participants stated that students‟ behavior or lack of motivation affected the blended learning environment negatively.

Discussions

Concerning with the first research question, it was found that the majority of teachers felt that online teaching during the pandemic affected their pedagogical competencies in terms of their ability to guide students to build their self-learning and thinking skills in a negative view. As

mentioned by Kavici (2022) that teachers feel justified of their ability when they are able to encourage these skills. Therefore, when they were not able to do it during the online teaching which had affected their perception of their own pedagogical competencies. However, the findings revealed that more than half of the participants don‟t believe that online teaching affected their ability to prepare suitable materials or being aware of students‟ challenges. This finding shows that despite conducting online classes, the participants believe that their perception of themselves regarding these skills were not affected negatively. Previous researches have shown that educators pedagogical competencies are linked to their classroom preparedness and their ability to adapt to changes to ensure that the lessons are able to be conducted effectively (Febriyanti, 2018 and Irgatoğlu and Peker, 2021).

As for the second research question, all participants believe that their digital competencies have improved in terms of their ability to adapt to new technologies post COVID online teaching when it comes to their ability to develop digital resources and in transferring their skills. This results supports previous researches that to be digitally competent, teachers should be lifelong learners and are able to adapt to new technological inventions (Ally, 2019; Aslan, 2021; Ayrancil & Başkan,2021). This belief is backed up by the evidence of their usage of e-learning platforms whether its assigned by their institution (Moodle, MS Teams and MyELT) or free independents platforms from the internet (Kahoot!, Liveworksheet, WordWall and others). The participants‟ usage of these platforms is not limited to only for classroom practice, whether for in or out of classroom work, but they also use it them to communicate with their students. These findings aligned with previous studies that suggest digitally competent teachers are able to use technologies to not only enhance learning but to use it communicate with the stakeholders (Cabero-Almenara et al, 2020;Ayrancil & Başkan,2021; 2020;Mitchell et.al, 2022).

Interestingly, this study found the participants‟ confidence when it comes to their ability during the online teaching were affected due to their unfamiliarity to the online teaching environment. However, the perception changed into a more positive tone when asked them to reflect on how their digital competencies have changed after their online teaching experience. There‟s evidence of the paradigm shift to blended learning as almost all of the participants incorporate technology in their lesson as their confidence in using technology tools have improved (Kruger &Blugnaut, 2013 and Abdulateef, 2022). The participants not only

incorporate e-learning platforms in their classrooms but also for work outside of classrooms which increases students‟ autonomy of their learning outside of the physical classroom settings. Apart from that, the study found that participants encourage students to give feedback on the effectiveness of the usage of the digital activities through surveys and class discussions. This aligns with Farrel (2021) and Mitchell et al (2022) that a positive paradigm shift to a blended learning environment is the teachers create a safe environment for students to give feedback and have an open communication with them.

The third research question focuses on the challenges that the participants face when it comes to implementing blended learning into the classroom. One of the main challenges in implementing blended learning found was technical issues that students face in the classroom (Hussain et.al, 2019 and Kimav & Aydin, 2020). Almost all of the participants resonate with this statement as one of the main challenges they found is technical issues with either the students‟ devices or with the connectivity. Another interesting aspect that this study found is that the findings did support Ghimire (2022) that materials suitability affect blended learning environment. Participants felt that most readily available made materials are not suitable for their students‟ level or that students will look at the answer instead of attempting the tasks.

This study did not present a strong evidence that students‟ lack of technical skills might affect their attitude towards a blended learning environment (Hussain et al,2019 and Kimav & Aydin, 2020). This might because of the participants‟ confidence in their digital pedagogy which means they are able to guide the students on how to use the digital platform in the class. This supports Altay & Altay (2019) study which states that students are more positive towards using technology in the classroom if their teachers are trained well on how to use them.

However, findings did not support Ghimire (2022) that teachers felt incorporating digital resources gives them extra work as only 1 participant expressed that sentiment.

Conclusion

This study explored the perception of lecturers on the pedagogical and digital competencies and how do they impact the lecturers teaching strategies in the blended learning environment. This leads to the conclusion that after the post COVID online teaching lecturers‟ digital competencies have improved which contributes to adopting a blended learning environment.

Because this study is only done in a small sample from a branch from UTAS, the findings can‟t be generalized. A future study can involve into more lecturers from different branches of UTAS to get a more accurate finding. Furthermore, a future research that can be suggested is to understand the students‟ perspective on their lecturers‟ digital competencies and how it affects the blended learning environment

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