The Acceptance of Pondok School Administrators towards APEL: A Study in Pahang

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Abstract
An individual's experiential learning that is equivalent to formal education can be recognised and accredited through the Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) process. Islamic traditional schools known as Pondok schools in Malaysia have long been ignored in terms of academic status. The importance of this study lies in the fact that the CEO of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) believes that universities could develop into APEL centres, particularly at Pondok schools in Kelantan, providing academic possibilities for their graduates, but before that, we need to know the level of Pondok school acceptance. In order to assess administrators' acceptance of APEL in Pondok schools in Pahang, the researchers conducted a quantitative research methodology, which is a cross-sectional study employing non-probability sampling in each district of the state. The survey was completed by 128 respondents in total using Google Form and an enumerator. The research findings show that administrators' views of their perceived behavioural control and their attitudes towards APEL were important determinants of their acceptance. It is interesting to note that acceptability among administrators was not significantly predicted by subjective norm. This finding should be interpreted cautiously, though, as it could not be applicable to different contexts or populations. A future researcher suggested using a longitudinal study to investigate the acceptance of APEL over time.
Keywords: Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), Pondok schools, The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Pahang

Introduction
The pondok institutions have served as traditional educational institutions for the Malay community for over a century, meeting the demands of the Muslim community for thorough and comprehensive guidance in matters of faith and worship (Rahman et al., 2020). These institutions continue the religious instruction that takes place in mosques and suraus, and students often transfer from one pondok school to another to further their education. Some

students also opt to continue their studies in the Middle East (Masyhurah et al., 2015). Since its inception, the pondok education system has produced many prominent figures who are respected in various fields of Islamic education, including independence fighters, religious scholars, and community leaders. Pondok education not only serves as an alternative method for the Malay community to pursue knowledge, particularly in the field of religion, but also symbolizes the traditions of the Malay and Islamic society in Malaysia (Ab Rahim & Nor, 2020) The pondok institution faces its own set of problems, including issues related to curriculum, finances, and management such as infrastructure, teaching staff, and enrollment (Ishak et al., 2019). The main challenge for graduates of pondok institutions is related to their opportunities to pursue higher education. The Malaysian government has introduced Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), a recognition system that acknowledges individuals' prior learning experiences and certifications, regardless of where and how they were obtained. APEL enables more people to pursue higher education programmes and obtain formal academic credentials. The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) oversees and approves APEL, which is utilised and accepted by higher education institutions in the country (Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi, 2020). The primary objective of the APEL programme is to expand access to higher education for those with previous education and work experience. For pondok students, APEL provides an opportunity to close the gap between their religious education and formal education, allowing them to receive credit for their prior learning experiences.

Literature Review
Definition of Pondok
According to Abidin et al (2020), pondok was the first traditional Islamic educational institution to be established in Malaysia during the 19th century. On the other hand, Yasid, (2012)noted that Pondok Pesanteren, an Islamic Boarding School, is among the earliest educational institutions in Indonesia. Meanwhile, pondok in Thailand is regarded as a traditional Islamic educational institution that applies teacher centered approach in teaching and learning programmes based on religious texts (Hussin et al., 2019).

The Scenario of Pondok Institutions in Pahang
Pondok is a traditional Islamic educational institution that has a long history in Pahang. The establishment of pondok institutions in Pahang can be traced back to the 20th century. At that time, Pondok institutions were mainly set up by Islamic scholars and some Hadhrami Arabs who came to Pahang from other parts of the Malay Archipelago (Latiff et al., 2018).
One of the earliest pondok institutions in Pahang was established in Pulau Tawar, which is located near the mouth of the Pahang River. The Pondok in Pulau Tawar was founded by Sheikh Ahmad bin Abdul Rahman Al-Fathani, a renowned Islamic scholar from the Hadhramaut region of Yemen, in the early 1800s. The Pondok attracted students from all over Pahang and the surrounding areas, and it became a center for Islamic learning and scholarship.
Another notable pondok in Pahang is the Pondok Lubuk Tapah, which was established by Haji Muhammad Yusuf bin Haji Abdul Majid in the early 1900s. The Pondok became known for its emphasis on Islamic teachings and the cultivation of moral values. Many prominent Islamic scholars and leaders in Pahang and the surrounding regions were educated at this Pondok.

Today, Pondok schools continue to play an important role in Islamic education in Pahang. They serve as centers for the transmission of Islamic knowledge and values, and provide opportunities for young people to learn about their cultural heritage and identity.

The Challenges of Pondok

The decline of Pondok institutions can be attributed to various factors, including competition from modern educational institutions like schools and madrasahs, the loss of experienced teachers, and a reliance on outdated systems of study (Abidin et al., 2020). According to Tibek, et al (2019) there are three main factors that support the development of the present pondok education which are the curriculum, finance and management of the pondok study itself. Therefore, there is a pressing need for modernization of the Pondok system to effectively disseminate Islamic education and knowledge to the contemporary Muslim community in Malaysia.

This assertion is supported by scholarly research and analysis, which highlights the need for innovative approaches to revitalize traditional Islamic education systems. Through modernization, Pondok institutions can remain relevant and continue to play a crucial role in promoting Islamic education and scholarship in Malaysia (Abidin et al., 2020)

APEL Learning

The term "accreditation of prior experience learning" (APEL) refers to the process through which relevant experiential and uncertified learning is granted academic recognition. The academic value is frequently quantified in terms of academic credit points (a measure of volume) at a given level (a measure of difficulty), but it can also take place outside of a framework of academic credits for exemption from particular course units (Garnett et al., 2004)

For the identification, validation, and acknowledgement of past and non-formal learning, Europe has developed methodologies and systems. Since it is widely acknowledged that learning occurs in the job, at home, and during leisure activities, special attention has been paid to learning acquired outside of official training and schooling. Outside-the-classroom education and training have always been and continue to be essential to every person, business, and society. Traditional methods of validation and certification, which only emphasise learning within the context of formal education and training, have not taken this into account (Bailie & O'Hagan, 1999)

Experiential educators have been using the learning cycle, learning style, and learning space—central ideas of Experiential Learning Theory—in higher education for for 50 years. We look at the most recent research on these three ideas and highlight some excellent examples from the numerous disciplinary contexts where experiential learning is used in higher education (Kolb & Kolb, 2017)

Unfortunately, the higher education (HE) industry in Malaysia is essentially unaware of APEL. The implementation of it in Malaysia's higher education institutions is extremely difficult because of the numerous restrictions that still exist (HEIs). In order for APEL to be implemented in HEIs, certain obstacles must be removed. Since APEL in Malaysian HEIs is still in its infancy, this research focuses on creating a framework for its implementation (Kaprawi et al., 2015)

Human Resources Malaysia's 2016 data show that 20.8% of adolescents (15–24 years old) and 29.2% of adults (24–65 years old) had completed postsecondary education, showing that Malaysia still has a long way to go in terms of economic development. The Ministry of Education Malaysia introduced the APEL (Access) as a substitute admission into tertiary education in 2011, with the goal of encouraging more qualified applicants to enhance their education level and, at the same time, encouraging lifelong learning (Cheng & Siow, 2018)

Pondok and APEL Learning
The Chief Executive Officer of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), Prof Datuk Dr Mohammad Shatar Sabran, has stated that the university has great potential to become a center for the Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), with a particular focus on pondok schools in the East Coast, especially in Kelantan. He further explained that this initiative will provide opportunities for many graduates of pondok schools to improve their academic qualifications through the APEL pathways, such as APEL.A, APEL.C, or APEL.Q, offered by the university. This will indirectly enhance the reputation of UMK both nationally and internationally (Petah Wazzan Iskandar, n.d.).

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)
The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Icek Ajzen is one theory that has gained a lot of interest. Beginning at the end of the 1960s, Professor Ajzen was one of the pioneers in the research of intentions and behaviour, particularly with Fishbein. From its inception, TPB has tested, advanced, and challenged in many domains of social science, which has greatly piqued academics' curiosity (Tornikoski & Maalaoui, 2019)

According to the theory of planned behaviour, attitudes towards the conduct, subjective norms about the action, and perceived control over the behaviour are the three fundamental components that predict behaviour (Sussman & Gifford, 2019)

In higher education research, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a social psychological paradigm that is frequently used to explain how people's beliefs, attitudes, and intentions affect their conduct.

According to the idea, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control all have an impact on behavioural intentions, which are seen to be the most direct antecedents of conduct. The TPB has been used in research on higher education for a variety of activities, such as student learning, academic achievement, and career development. It has also been used to pinpoint the elements that influence college students' involvement, tenacity, and achievement.

Based on the theory of planned behaviour, the goal of this study was to create a model to assess the crucial factors that impact students' acceptance and deployment of blended learning (BL) at higher education institutions (TPB). 1,811 university students in Malaysia who responded to an online survey questionnaire provided the data. The findings showed that students' intentions to embrace BL were strongly influenced by actual BL deployment, attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, and self-efficacy. This study offers factual support and a clearer understanding of the factors that may encourage or deter students from using BL in higher education settings (Jnr et al., 2020)

Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis
H1: There is a positive relationship between subjective norms and APEL acceptance.

H2: There is a positive relationship between attitude and APEL acceptance.
H3: There is a positive relationship between perceived behavioural control and the APEL acceptance.
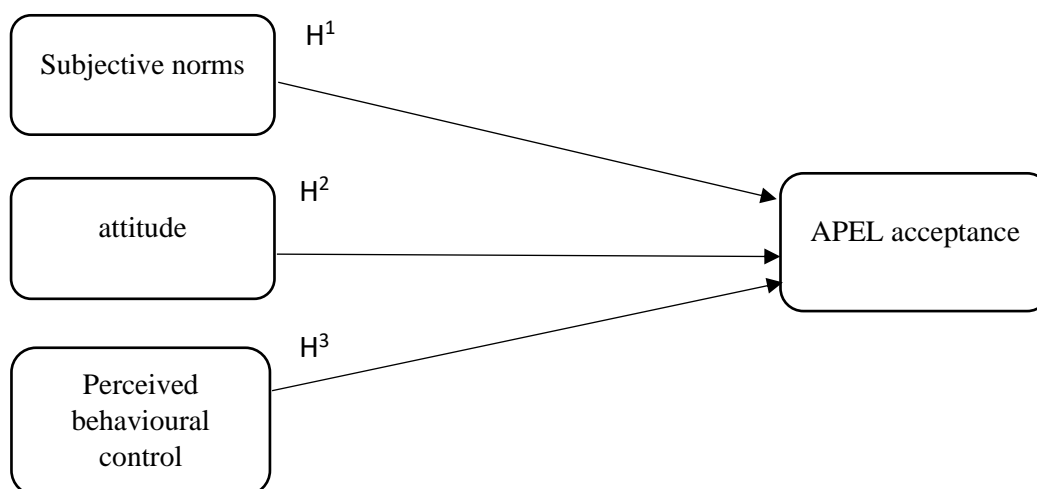

Figure 1: Research model

Methodology
To identify the administrators' level of tolerance towards APEL, the cross-sectional study employed in the study's technique to assess administrators' acceptance of APEL in Pondok schools in Pahang. A cross-sectional study is a sort of research method that gathers information from a population or sample at a specific point in time. Examining the prevalence of a specific outcome or exposure in a population is made possible by the study design (Viera & Garrett, 2005). According to Witteloostuijn et al (2020), reassuring participants of the study's secrecy and anonymity is one technique to mitigate typical method bias. To do this, it must be made very clear in the study materials and consent form that the information gathered will be kept private and utilised only for research. Respondents are more likely to give truthful and accurate answers if they aren't worried about negative consequences or social desirability bias. This strategy can aid in reducing the impact of typical procedure bias on the study outcomes, resulting in more trustworthy and legitimate findings. In general, safeguarding privacy and anonymity is a crucial step in preventing frequent technique bias in research investigations. To gather data for the study and gauge administrators' acceptability of APEL, a Likert scale questionnaire was used. A self-administered questionnaire with five Likert scale items was used to gather the data. The questionnaire was made to gauge the administrators' approval of APEL at various stages, from pre-contemplation through action. Likert scale items were graded on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 denoting strongly disagree and 5 denoting strongly agree. We disseminate surveys using Google Forms and by assigning enumerators to distribute them around the districts. Administrators of Pondok schools in Pahang participated in this study. Therefore, the minimum sample size required by G*Power analysis is 119, although we were able to obtain more in our study. Purposive sampling was used to pick the 128 respondents for the sample, which guarantees that the target population is adequately represented. The researchers ran correlation and regression analyses on their data using SPSS, a widely used statistical programme in the social sciences. In these analyses,

hypotheses were tested, correlations between variables were identified, and the statistical significance of the results was evaluated using p-values and confidence intervals.

Data Analysis

73.1% of the variation in APEL acceptability may be attributed to the research model. The findings of the hypothesis testing were displayed in Table 1. H1 looked at the connection between APEL acceptance and Subjective Norm. It was determined that it did not significantly influence APEL acceptance (β = 0.020, p > 0.5). The association between attitude and APEL acceptance was the subject of H2, which was shown to be significant (β = 0.581, p < 0.01). The outcomes also demonstrated that H3 is significant with (β = 0.328, p < 0.01) in the results. This came to the conclusion that while H2 and H3 are supported, H1 is not supported.

Table 1
Hypothesis testing

Variable	hypothesis	Beta value	T Statistics	P Values	R^2	Remark
Subjective Norm	There is a positive relationship between subjective norm and APEL acceptance.	0.020	0.335	0.738		**Not Supported**
Attitude	There is a positive relationship between attitude and APEL acceptance.	0.581	7.807	0.000	0.731	**Supported**
Perceived Behavioural Control	There is a positive relationship between perceived behavioural control and APEL acceptance.	0.328	4.901	0.000		**Supported**

Discussion

Understanding the variables that affect prior learning assessment and recognition (APEL), which has emerged as a crucial topic in education, is vital. This study used a research model to examine the connections between subjective norm, attitude, and perceived behavioural control and APEL acceptance. The findings demonstrated that the research model might be held responsible for 73.1% of the variation in APEL acceptability. Also, Table 1 displayed the results of the hypothesis testing.

According to the first hypothesis, APEL acceptance would be influenced by the subjective norm. However, the findings demonstrated that this contention was unsupported because the subjective norm had little to no impact on APEL acceptance ($\beta = 0.020$, $p > 0.5$). This runs counter to Al-Emran et al (2020) contention that subjective norms are important determinants of the sustained use of mobile learning. The connection between attitude and APEL acceptance was significant ($\beta = 0.581$, $p < 0.01$), which supported the second hypothesis. This result is in line the study's findings by Begić (2022) supported the notion that mathematics instructors in Croatia have a favourable attitude towards the idea of lifelong learning.Similar to the second, the third hypothesis (H3) was also confirmed by the findings, which revealed that APEL acceptance was substantially correlated with perceived behavioural control ($\beta = 0.328$, $p < 0.01$). This result is consistent with earlier research by Al-Emran et al., (2020) that shown that perceived behavioural control is a strong predictor that helps to explain why people keep using mobile learning. In conclusion, the current study discovered that whereas subjective norm was not a significant predictor of APEL acceptance, attitude and perceived behavioural control were. These findings have significant policy and educational institution ramifications for APEL acceptance promotion. Policymakers can create interventions that promote the adoption of APEL by concentrating on people's attitudes and their perceived behavioural control. The non-probability sampling method used in the study, which limits the generalizability of the findings to a larger population, should be taken into consideration when interpreting the study's conclusions. The current study used a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to establish causality. For future study a longitudinal research design could be used to investigate the causal relationship between attitude, perceived behavioural control, and APEL acceptance over time.

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