Enforcement of Online Learning: A Sustainable Pulling Mechanism in Attracting Students in Private Institutions

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Abstract: This study looks at the experiences of undergraduate students moving from the traditional method of learning to a hybrid mode. In the hybrid mode, parts of the academic delivery occur using the online platform called Moodle at a private college in Malacca. The majority of students favoured moving to a hybrid mode because of the adaptability and suitability of the online component. Students, however, expressed the opinion that the interaction with peers and networking opportunities were significant aspect of undergraduate education in the business world. This is a qualitative study whereby interview and surveys were conducted to collect data. The interview was conducted with the head of program while 10 students participated in the survey which was created by the researcher. The study discusses the effectiveness and importance of the course for the college, the sustainability and ethical concern of the online learning. The outcome of the taken initiative is that it is here to stay in the college and hope to encourage more student enrolment.

Key words: Enforcement, sustainable, pulling mechanism, effectiveness, ethical

INTRODUCTION

Online learning is a contemporary appearance of distance education which exists for some years now. During that time there have been hundreds of comparative studies of the impact of different teaching technologies on student learning and performance. Hicks *et al.* (2001), second that there are demands for universities to "provide for a larger and more diverse cross-section of the population to cater for emerging patterns on educational involvement which facilitate lifelong learning and to include technology-based practices in the curriculum". Therefore, the demands not only fall on public universities and colleges but private as well. The Malaysian Blueprint (2015) has stated that online learning which has been implemented in Malaysia for several decades, is the instructional model which has been instrumental in widening access to education, enhancing the quality of teaching and learning while enabling greater personalisation of student learning. The next horizon for ICT-based learning is Globalised Online Learning (GOL). There are significant opportunities for Malaysian Higher Learning Institutions in embracing the full potential of GOL. Base on this notion, the present college which has twinning programme with a university from United States, introduced online learning.

Definition: Pull factors include all those reasons that emphasize positive and desirable alternative that pull to their choice while mechanism is defined as what makes a concrete system tick and it is argued that to propose an explanation proper is to exhibit a lawful mechanism. Whilst, enforcement is defined as to make a particular situation happen or be accepted. Therefore pulling mechanism can be defined as a concrete system which emphasize positive and desirable alternative that pulls to their wanted choice for the betterment of an institution and be accepted by all. According to Gunn the term 'sustainable' in e-Learning context has three conditions that it should meet, it should be a learning design that involves information and communications technology, the concept must have the potential to be adopted and adapted and finally its sustainability should not compromised. Effectiveness is defined as the degree to which something is successful in producing a desired result, in the present context the introduction of e-Learning in the college. For every new thing that is introduced, the ethical consideration should be there in the present study it is defined as the degree to what a person should do (Schultz, 2005). In e-Learning environment etiquette provides the framework for civility of interactions, by providing standard of considerable behaviour, respect and patience (Khan, 2005).

Problem statement: Since, mid last year 2015, the Learning Management System (LMS), Moodle has been adopted as a important portion of technology at Putra International College. As future courses will adopt this system it is crucial that students learn to use Moodle. Therefore, this study attempts to find out the

effectiveness of creating blended learning through online learning mode by using Moodle on student's learning achievements and also its effectiveness, sustainability and ethical values.

Research objectives: Since, this research aims to determine the effectiveness of a blended learning approach using Moodle and to determine of future achievement, it strives to achieve the following objectives:

- To investigate the change initiative and its importance in the college and wider context
- To identify if the implementation and effectiveness of the initiative is successful
- To analysis the critical factors for the sustainability of the initiative
- To identify the ethical considerations used in the initiative

Research questions: Since, this research aims to determine the effectiveness of online learning using Moodle and to determine of future achievement, it strives to answer the following research questions:

- Is the change initiative provides importance in the college in a wider context?
- Is the implementation of the initiatives effective and successful?
- What are the critical factors involved for the sustainability of the initiative?
- What are the ethical considerations used in the initiative taken?

Literature review: According to the Malaysian (Blueprint, 2015), Malaysia currently stands at 67% in internet access, the seventh highest dispersion rate across Asia. This places Malaysia in a good position to connect the power of online learning to widen access to good quality content, boost the quality of teaching and learning, lower the cost of delivery and bring Malaysian proficiency to the global community. A survey conducted among University Kebangsaan Malaysia undergraduates identified that the students were ready for e-Learning. Therefore proper training and development should be incorporated for educators and higher learning institutions to implement it. Having an online learning platform in PIC would encourage more enrolment in future as it would be a pulling mechanism to attract SPM school leavers to join this college. Moodle stands for "Modular object-oriented dynamic learning environment". It was the brainchild of Martin Dougiamas. It is designed to help

educator's "to create quality online instruction" (Khan, 2005). Research has proven that Moodle or (LMS) usage in the classroom enhances learning beyond the classroom for both teachers and learners. This technique will encourage learners to construct psychological models and problem solving skills, the benefit of this skill is to make learners more alert and to control their own learning process and increase their retention capability (Liebowitz and Frank, 2011). Clark and Mayer (2008) add that e-Learning will also increasingly make use of the unique technological features that can support simulations and good opportunities to learn. This technique will encourage learners to build mental models and problem solving skills relies on both cognitive and meta-cognitive skills.

Fundamental theory/research design/research framework: Exploring, inquiring, critiquing and building their own knowledge together by educators and students in the digital age in learning theory has been related to socio-constructivist pedagogy. Therefore the building of knowledge through knowing the world helping them to organize and interpret their perception is linked with constructivist theory (Sackeny and Mergel, 2007).

Figure 1 presents the research conceptual framework using Moodle. The conceptual research framework was a developed base theory, a literature review and findings that stated that Moodle is e-Learning software that could help teachers or educators to create communication and cooperation with the course content and enhance student's learning achievement. It is believed that the usage of Moodle helps implementing blended learning easily in different learning environments. Hence, lead to student's learning achievement, learning motivation, collaboration and communication to take place effectively.
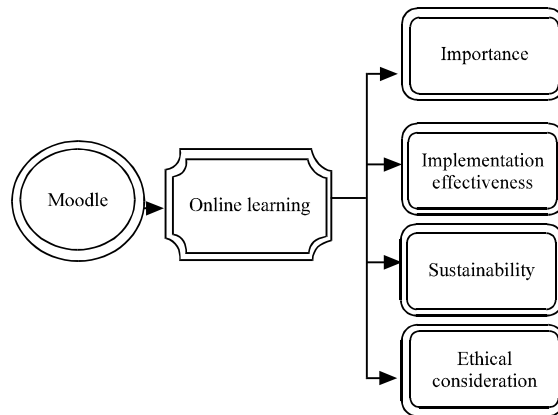

Fig 1: Research conceptual framework

Context of the study: Putra International College (PIC) is located at Ayer Keroh, Melaka. Working in partnership with Trine, USA, Putra International College is an approved and recognized site of Trine University, USA. The courses follow the same academic standards and course guidelines as required by Trine University, USA. The students need to go through 10 modules base on Trine University course structure. In order to teach these modules, 10 lecturers from Trine University, USA conduct the modules. These lecturer's used an open source online platform known as Moodle for assignment, quiz and exam purposes. It is a Course Management System (CMS). Hence, students should be prepared priory when the actual courses commences. In order for students to sit for the Trine University Modules, students are required to sit for a study called adult learning experience with 1 credit hour. Communication skills in language is enhance with the use of Moodle as it requires social interaction between students and teacher (Ani, 2008) (Fig. 2).
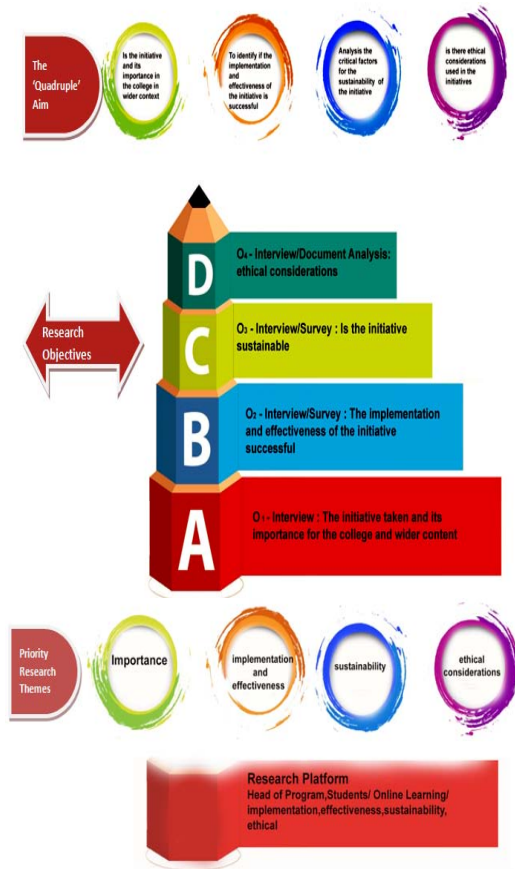
Research framework: It shown in Fig. 2.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a qualitative case study with document analysis, interview and survey used to collect data. The researcher has been working in this college for nearly 2 years as a lecturer. The overall population in the college are about 220 students. A majority of them are from Sabah and Sarawak. Chinese and Malay holds the largest percentage in this college. Interview was conducted with the head of program. The head of program, a Chinese woman in her mid thirties has been working in the college for 9 years is a well experienced person in the education line with a Masters in English. Ten students were chosen to sit for the survey. All the students are taking Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA), 2nd and 3rd years.

Research procedure: Once data collection was completed, the researcher transcribed the interview tape and checked their accuracy. The researcher's goal was to prove that the data and analysis were credible, transferable, truthful, dependable and confirmable (Fig. 3).

Data collection: interview/survey: The present study used primary data collection using surveys and interview while secondary data was obtained by collecting information from documents or electronically stored information. The interview with the head of program was recorded and was conducted in the staff's office and lasted for 30 min. It was conducted on Friday, 26th Feb 2016 from 4.45-5.15 p.m. (30 min). The head of program had been given to sign an interview consent form and had the liberty to stop the interview. Survey was felt needed as it
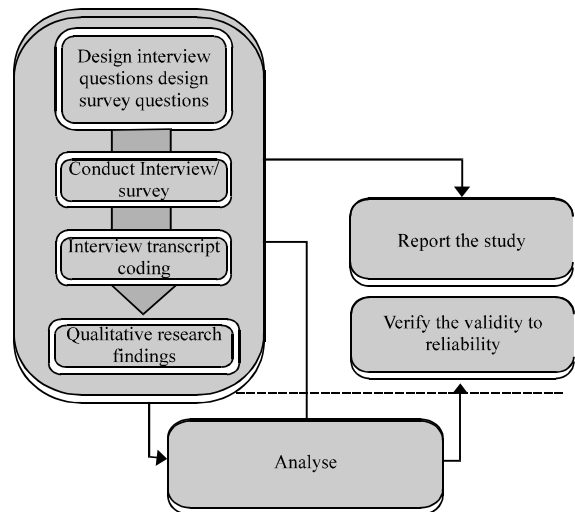

Fig. 2: Research framework

Fig. 3: Data collection procedure

would strengthen the research and the information gathered will not be seen in one lens. The 10 students were given survey questions regarding the online learning that they had taken. Survey question was created by the researcher and was not adapted or adopted from and sources. Seven girls and three boys took the survey. It was conducted on 30th Feb, 2016. They were randomly chosen. There were no time limit, it was distributed to students and was asked to return back once they had finished.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Is the change initiative provides importance in the college in a wider context?: The introduction of Moodle in the college has a few advantages. First, it is an open source and freely available platform. There is no licensing or upgrade cost involved. It is a popular world-wide with online community support of dedicated users and developers. Base from the interview, it was identified that the online learning encourages continuity of the subject resources taught by different lecturers. Besides, it will not replace the already established classroom lectures. It is introduced as it is known as blended-learning. It is a classroom based education system which enhanced with online learning. For a dynamic and more engaging teaching and learning process, this is one solution. The total student learning time for this course is 40 h whereby 28 h is face to face and 12 h of online/independent learning.

Is the implementation of the initiatives effective and successful?: As Fig. 4 shows, efficient learning takes place when learners are energetically occupied in constructing knowledge (i.e., creating or doing) rather than passively reading, memorizing or viewing. Most

students favoured a face-to-face approach, along with online material (supplemental materials) and activities (like e-mail or chat sessions, etc.) (Ahmad and Khanjari, 2011). The survey has identified that running this subject online has its advantages. In the process of introducing Moodle to students, indirectly attracts them to online learning. It could be a pulling mechanism to the college in future. Both blended and online offerings stimulate students to work harder and engage more fully with the course (Daniel, 2016).

Figure 4 shows the effectiveness of online learning in the study, in the present study context the usage of Moodle into seven outcomes. This hybrid learning has shown good result as it encourages effective learning, inquiry base and discovery base approach is initiated, followed by supplemental of material has made learning experience better, students observe and interact among themselves which encourages collaborating and learning environment and finally foster creativity and innovations.

Interview with the head of program agreed the advantage of e-Learning, "One cannot deny that student's have better collaboration and communication when online learning is in process." Survey conducted with students identified a few benefits and drawbacks of online learning in Fig. 5.

Creativity and innovations also enhance teaching and learning as the survey identified that students felt that it is based on student's own understanding and research. Holbl and Welzer (2015) reported in their study of Moodle that the manner and acceptance of students were positive when using Moodle as a learning tool and they were satisfied that it was a suitable approach to modern teaching and learning. They believed that while e-Learning is very useful, it could not replace face-to face learning, entirely.

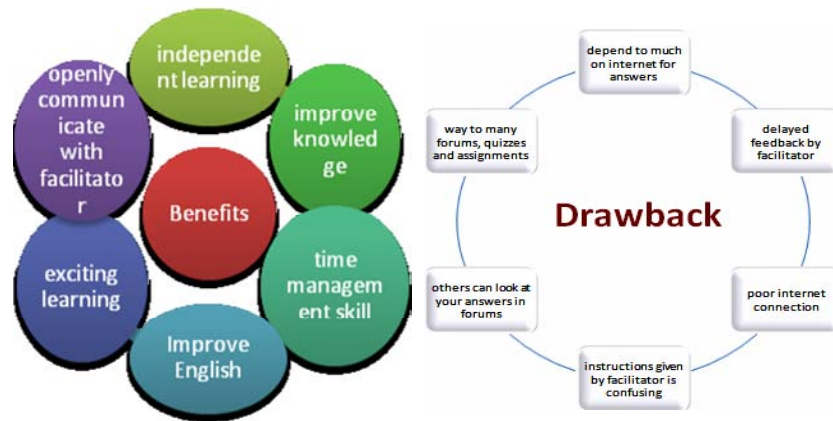Fig. 4: Effectiveness of online learning (Moodle)

Fig. 5: Benefits and drawbacks of online learning

This was quoted by the Head of program during the interview, "However, I do feel, face-to face is important as well. Online learning has its limitations". Similar respond can be identified in the present study as out of the ten participants in the survey, eight of them preferred face to face learning rather than online learning.

Technology has substituted traditional classroom teaching with discussion boards, synchronous chat, electronic bulletin boards and e-mail, however the effectiveness of virtual learning is not without doubts (Ni, 2013). Has identified delayed feedback, limited discussion after feedback and group looks at other participant's work are some of the weaknesses of online learning (Fig. 5 for drawbacks). Interview data identified that the head of program felt that the time difference is one factor, that students get delayed feedback from instructor.

What are the critical factors involved for the sustainability of the initiative?: The knowledge that has been gained in this course: UE111 adult learning orientation which is an additional requirement programs will is useful for students who are currently and will be sitting for 10 core courses conducted by Trine University lecturers. These courses use the paperless concept whereby quizzes. Mid-term exams and final term examination are conducted through Moodle. The teaching materials, questions, assignments all will be uploaded by the course lecturer.

The initial 1credit hour module, adult learning orientation was released in 2015 and will be piloted within academic programs. The course has been implemented within a course or courses of study. It has been through a proof-of-concept stage and has been judged on the basis of evidence produced as beneficial to teaching and learning. This was quoted in the interview conducted with the head of program.

"It is compulsory subject because the students will be sitting for 10 subjects under Trine lecturers from USA. These lecturers use the Moodle for their students to download their lecture notes, involve in forums, takes quizzes, mid-term and final examinations. The students will also know how to use the e-Library".

The present e-Learning platform and resources have proven crucial to be adopted and possibly adapted for use beyond the actual development environment. Maintenance, use and further development of the e-Learning concept do not remain dependent (Gunn, 2010). As seen in the present study, with the positive feedback from the students and a successful adoption of Moodle by the teachers, it was possible to present a case, about the effectiveness of using technology in a business college, to the institute's management. As quoted by the head of program, "one cannot deny of the importance of collaborative learning especially for our college. And we need to find ways to comply the required qualifications needed in order to give students an international degree. Of course, we are going in phrases to improve our facilities and mode of delivery." Since, then the institute has implemented Moodle on a larger scale for all its full time courses, thus making it an effective change agent.

What are the ethical considerations used in the initiative taken?: Ethics is about what people should do (Schultz, 2005). Starratt sees ethics as a study of the underlying beliefs, assumptions, principles and values that support a moral way of life. Instructional ethics has a special place since teachers bear the responsibility of teaching and applying ethics in their fields. Academic honesty among students enrolled in online courses and programs is a central issue (Foster, 2008) when it comes to ethical considerations of online education. Students are

required to be disciplined. There are certain expectations of students including grading policies, submission of assignments (base on survey questions, if there is delay, the marks will be deducted), marking base on rubrics and students are required to submit their tasks base on expected timelines. They should model effective communicate skills and maintain records of applicable communication with students about assignments and questions. They should provide timely, constructive feedback to students about assignments and questions (base on survey conducted, facilitators did provide feedbacks, but a few found the instructions confusing). In the sense of technology, intellectual property and copyrights should be given serious considerations. The issue of intellectual property rights is one of growing importance and increasingly discussed topic among e-Learning experts (Duncan and Ekmekcioglu, 2003).

CONCLUSION

What this new age requires is hybrid learning where the whole system is redesigned to create a happy blend of student-teacher conversations and online learning. In the current study it is identified that the e-Learning course has been a success even though there were certain issues and barriers. Nonetheless, the course will be offered to student's every semester. The main factors would be that the technology used has to be reliable, simple and easily accessed by the students. For future work, there is a need to investigate the e-Learning issues and barriers from the instructor's perspective and with more student's participation.

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