INVESTIGATING TEACHING PRESENCE IN ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUMS

AIDA BINTI MUSTAPHA
(2002103323)

DISertation SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION IN TESL

FACULTY OF EDUCATION
UiTM SECTION 17 CAMPUS
SHAH ALAM, SELANGOR

DECEMBER 18, 2005
ABSTRACT

The discussion forum is a vital component of online courses. Studies by Berge (1997), Gunawardena et al. (1997) and Garrison et al. (2000, 2001) showed that these asynchronous forums have the potential to promote critical thinking, meaningful problem solving, and knowledge construction. This case study investigated how four E-PJJ instructors at UiTM Terengganu Kampus Dungun used their online discussion forums to facilitate online students in their studies. In this study, the researcher looked into the aspects of teaching presence based on the instructors posted messages and compared them with Garrison & Anderson’s (2003) teaching presence indicators. The study discovered the discussion forums were under utilized and they were used mainly for class management and assessments handling instead of academic discussions on course contents. This was mainly because online discussions were not part of the students’ assessments. It was also found that non-language forums were more active compared to language forums.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank Allah the Almighty for giving me the strength and inspirations to write and complete this study. Secondly, I would like to thank my loved ones, my four wonderful kids, Luqman, Fatimah, Firdaus & Fatin who truly inspire me. To my husband, thank you for your support and allowing this to happen and to my parents and sisters, who have helped me take care of my two young children, “Thank You!”.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Faizah Mohamed who guided and helped me with this thesis. Last but not least, I want to thank my lecturers at the Faculty of Education, Dr Bum, Dr. Zee, Dr Haz and Dr. Bib for moving me a step forward to improve myself, personally and professionally. To my dearest classmates (especially to Suzanah Selemat) thank you!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................ iii
List of Tables & Figures ......................................................................................................... vii

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 1

1.0 Background ..................................................................................................................... 1
1.1 Objectives of the Study ................................................................................................. 3
1.2 Statement of the Problem .............................................................................................. 3
1.3 Research Questions ......................................................................................................... 5
1.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study .............................................................................. 5
1.5 Significance of the Study .............................................................................................. 6
1.6 Operational Definitions of the Study .......................................................................... 7
1.7 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 8

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................................. 10

2.0 Introduction ................................................................................................................... 10
2.1 Definitions of E-learning and Online Discussion Forums ........................................ 10
2.2 Online Teaching and Learning ...................................................................................... 12
2.3 UiTM E-learning Model ................................................................................................ 13
2.4 Interactions in Virtual Classrooms .............................................................................. 15
2.5 Computer Conferencing and English Language Teaching ........................................ 21
2.6 Roles of Online Instructors ......................................................................................... 22
2.7 Learning Activities in Virtual Classrooms ................................................................. 29
2.8 Assessment in Online Learning .................................................................................. 31
2.9 Teaching Presence in Virtual Classrooms ................................................................. 33
2.10 Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 41
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY ................................................................. 43
3.0 Introduction ............................................................................ 43
3.1 The Population ...................................................................... 43
3.2 The Primary Data – Qualitative Content Analysis .................. 43
3.3 The Secondary Data – Face-to-face Interviews ..................... 44
3.4 Data Collection Procedures .................................................. 45
3.5 Data Analysis Procedures ..................................................... 45
3.6 Unit of Analysis .................................................................... 47
3.7 Limitations of the Study ...................................................... 48
3.8 Why Garrison & Anderson (2003) Teaching Presence was Chosen ........................................................................ 48

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION ............................ 56
4.0 Introduction ............................................................................ 50
4.1 Frequencies of Instructors’ Postings ..................................... 50
4.2 Functions of Online Discussion Forums ............................... 51
4.3 Design & Organization Categories ....................................... 55
4.4 Facilitating Discourse Categories ........................................ 56
4.5 Direct Instructions Categories ............................................. 57
4.6 Problems Encountered by Instructors & Students ................ 58
4.7 A Synthesis of Findings ....................................................... 59

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS ............ 62
5.0 Introduction ............................................................................ 62
5.1 Summary of Findings ........................................................... 62
5.2 Implications of the Study ..................................................... 63
5.3 Recommendations for Future Research .............................. 64
5.4 Conclusion ............................................................................. 64

REFERENCES
Appendix 1: Face-to-face Interview Questions with the instructors