Investigating the Lecturers' Acceptance towards the Implementation of Blended Learning in UiTM Pahang

Azniza Ahmad Zaini
Haslinda Noradzan
Fazlin Marini Hussain
Roger Canda

ABSTRACT

Adopting blended learning in teaching and learning is the process of combining the traditional face-to-face instructions and computer mediated instruction. This paper discusses the early investigation on the factors that influence lecturers' acceptance towards the implementation of blended learning in delivering lectures and conducting online assessment to students. Starting February 2013, eight hands-on training sessions have been conducted in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Pahang to promote blended learning approach in teaching and learning process. The data on the number of lecturers who attended the hands-on workshop and registered lecturers for blended learning mode were collected from i-Learn Center (i-LeC) UiTM Malaysia. Self-administered questionnaire were distributed to 53 lecturers from various faculties at UiTM Pahang using convenience sampling method and the data was analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings show that majority of the lecturers do accept the implementation of blended learning mode in their teaching and learning process although they are not ready to do so.

Keywords: *Blended Learning, teaching and learning approach, lecturers' acceptance, online assessment.*

Introduction

Nowadays, conducting the teaching and learning processes in universities has become a great challenge as time passed and the development of technologies take place. Many researches have been conducted in order to determine the significant changes in the education field with the technology development. From the studies, lots of methods have been introduced and being used to deliver the teaching and learning processes such as traditional teaching, online teaching and mixing both teaching methods which is known as blended learning. Traditional teaching focuses on face-to-face lecture sessions and allows students to engage with the lecturers. Meanwhile, online learning uses computer and internet as the platforms to deliver the lessons and blended learning combines the traditional teaching and the online learning. Blended learning or, known as, semi-attendance based learning offers flexibility of learning and utilizing the technologies in education.

Starting 2009, blended learning was initiated in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) and became compulsory for several courses. Envisioned by the Vice Chancellor of UiTM in his "Perutusan Tahun Baru Naib Canselor UiTM 2013", 30% of the total courses of the various programs being conducted online by June 2013 need to be achieved. In order to achieve the target, i-Learn Centre (i-LeC) has collaborated with the Academic Affairs Division (UHEK) in providing information and on-going training sessions to the lecturers from time to time to guide them applying blended learning in their teaching process. At UiTM Pahang alone, 8 hands-on training sessions have been conducted by i-LeC and iLQAM UiTM Pahang and were attended by 195 lecturers from various faculties and learning centre starting from February 2013 to July 2013. The trainings were focused on utilizing the UiTM's Learning Management System (LMS) which is known as i-Learn portal for blended learning, and also to help the lecturers in preparing and encouraging them to adopt blended learning in their teaching process.

i-Learn portal is an official portal that allows lecturers uploading huge amount of learning materials for various courses in UiTM. The portal also offers extended useful features that can support the blended learning approach such as "Group Forum" which is a platform to conduct discussions amongst lecturers and students and "Monitoring Group Forum" that allow the lecturers to observe the students' involvement in

online session. i-Learn portal also offers the online assessment and grading for quizzes, tests, projects and assignments.

From a random observation, some lecturers at UiTM Pahang were found to be complaining about the implementation of blended learning. Some of them claimed that they are afraid that they would need more time to prepare their lecture via online since they are committed with other non-academic works and they are also lack of IT literacy. Hence, in this study we would like to investigate the lecturers' acceptance towards the implementation of blended learning since most of the courses offered at UiTM Pahang have to be conducted using blended learning.

Literature Review

Basically, the term blended learning can be described as a learning systems combining face-to-face instruction with technology mediated instruction (Bonk & Graham, 2006 as cited in So & Bonk, 2010). Singh (2003) also defined blended learning as a way of allowing the students to engage in learning outside of the classroom with synchronous tools, for instance, *Sykpe*, group chats, web-conferencing and the asynchronous tools like discussion boards, blogs and social networking sites. However, there is no standard definition of blended learning as different people define blended learning differently according to their teaching needs and environment of the universities (Gutierrez, 2006).

As the blended learning approach is on the rise in UiTM, the academicians are recommended to embrace the traditional values of face-to face teaching and integrate the best practices of online learning as proposed by Mironov et al. (2012). Some of the advantages of adopting blended learning are to encourage the learners to be engaged in advanced interactive experiences in the classroom and at the same time could provide learners with multimedia-rich content at anytime and anywhere as long as they have internet access. Furthermore, the approach allows the instructors and learners to have more flexibility in delivering and receiving knowledge.

Other than that, a study conducted by Gutierrez (2006) at one of the most competitive private higher institutions in Mexico revealed that professors who always gave feedback to their students' requests, questions and doubts, have more impact on and help motivate their students' academic performance, unlike those who did not give immediate feedback to their students. This was also supported by Mouzakis (2008) who stated that ICT teachers in Greece who participated in the survey were satisfied with the knowledge they acquire from the training on blended learning and collaborative learning process. Most of the teachers also mentioned that they adapted well to the blended learning process requirements as they have already begun to integrate the ICT in their daily teaching practice.

Nonetheless, Gutierrez (2006) claimed that there are always challenges to something new like blended learning as blended learning courses are unfamiliar territory for many professors and instructors who are responsible for the learning and development in their traditional courses. One of the worst practices at the higher institution was some of the instructors mistreat the students when they do not reach the expected final learning outcome.

According to Poutanen et al. (2011), new skills from both students and teachers were required in order to change the traditional mindset of blended learning from technology- and teaching-oriented perspective to co-learning, co-creation and other self-organizing behaviour. Both students and teachers need to enhance their skills in the usage of technological tools and basic team-member skills.

Methodology

The questionnaire items used in this survey were designed based on previous studies. Closed questionnaire items such as demographic profile of the respondents, lecturers' view on blended learning approach, and online environment to support the online teaching and learning were addressed. The measurements for close - ended questionnaire were structured using a 5-point Likert scale; according to the degree of agreements, 5 for strongly agree and 1 for strongly disagree. At the same time, the respondents were also allowed to give their views and recommendations in the open-ended question.

The quantitative data were gathered from a sample of lecturers from various faculties at UiTM Pahang who had attended training course on blended learning starting from February to July 2013 conducted by i-Learn Centre and the iLQAM, UiTM Pahang. The total population was 195 lecturers and we calculated 30% of them as our convenience target respondents. The respondents were asked to complete and returned the questionnaire on the date the survey were distributed so that a high response rate could be obtained by the researchers. Out of 60 respondents, 53 lecturers returned the questionnaire and the response rate was 88.3%. The data from the questionnaire were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 21. Descriptive statistics such as mean and percentage were employed to measure how lecturers of UiTM Pahang would respond to the implementation of blended learning approach in their teaching and assessment activities.

Findings

A total of 53 respondents have participated in this survey and the number of female respondents was higher than the male respondents with 37(69.81%) to 16(30.19%) respectively. From the findings, 13(24.53%) respondents were from the Faculty of Computer Science and Mathematics, 10 (18.87%) respondents from the Faculty of Business Management, 9(16.98%) respondents from the Faculty of Sport Science & Recreation, 8(15.09%) respondents from the Faculty of Accountancy, 5(9.43%) respondents from the Faculty of Applied Science, 5(9.43%) respondents from the Academy of Language Studies, 2(3.77%) respondents from the Academy of Contemporary Studies and 1(1.89%) respondents from the Faculty of Civil Engineering. Majority of the respondents have been working at UiTM Pahang between 2 and 5 years (56.6%), followed by those who works less than 2 years and also more than 10 years at UiTM Pahang that have the same percentage of 16.98% respectively.

It was found that 43(81.13%) respondents do have internet at home and 67.92% of them frequently accessed the internet at their office or faculty. Only 17(32.08%) respondents stated that they are frequently connected to internet at home. From the survey, it was found that majority of the respondents (77.36%) have attended the hands-on training on blended learning but only 14 out of 53 respondents have registered for blended learning mode during the June-October 2013 semester. Table 1 summarizes the demographic profiles of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Profiles

Measure	Items	Frequency	Percent
Faculty	FSKM	13	24.53
	FPP	10	18.87
	FSR	9	16.98
	FSG	5	9.43
	FKA	1	1.89
	FPN	8	15.09
	APB	5	9.43
	ACIS	2	3.77
Year of Services	Less than 2 years	9	16.98
	2 to 5 years	30	56.60
	5 to 10 years	5	9.43
	More than 10 years	9	16.98
Gender	Female	37	69.81
	Male	16	30.19
Have Internet at home	Yes	43	81.13
	No	10	18.87
Frequently Internet accessibility	Office/faculty	36	67.92
	Home	17	32.08

Blended Learning Registration	Yes	14	26.42
	No	39	73.58
Attend Blended Learning Hands-on Training	Yes	41	77.36
	No	12	22.64

Based on Table 2, all lecturers responded favourably to all the items on the survey, indicating the implementation of blended learning mode is acceptable (Mean>3.50). Majority of the lecturers (Mean = 4.13) agreed that blended learning does provide flexibility to lecturers in conducting the course (anywhere and anytime); printing costs on teaching materials could be decreased (Mean=4.11); offers great potential in solving the problem of insufficient classsroom and lab (Mean=4.06); helps lecturers and students to prepare well for class sessions such as download notes and assessments(Mean=4.06); and i-Learn centre has provided sufficient information and training on blended learning (Mean=4.06). Interestingly, most of the lecturers did not agree that the blended learning approach could increase their workload (M=2.66).

Table 2: Mean Value for Lecturers' View on Blended Learning Approach

Items	Percentage					Mean
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
1. Sufficient information and training on BL provided by iLearn Centre	0.00	0.00	16.98	60.38	22.64	**4.06**
2. BL approach helps students learn better	0.00	5.66	20.75	62.26	11.32	3.79
3. BL provides flexibility to lecturers in conducting the course (anywhere and anytime)	0.00	1.89	5.66	69.81	22.64	**4.13**
4. BL offers great potential in solving the problem of insufficient classsroom and lab.	1.89	3.77	11.32	52.83	30.19	**4.06**
5. BL helps lecturers and students to prepare well for class sessions (eg: download notes and assessments)	0.00	1.89	15.09	58.49	24.53	**4.06**
6. BL increases the workload for lecturers	18.87	16.98	45.28	16.98	1.89	**2.66**
7. BL increases interaction levels between individual students and the lecturer outside class	1.89	9.43	18.87	54.72	15.09	3.72
8. BL supports cooperative learning amongst students	0.00	1.89	22.64	64.15	11.32	3.85
9. BL supports ideas and experience sharing amongst students	0.00	3.77	24.53	60.38	11.32	3.79
10. Online quizzes/tests easier to conduct	3.77	15.09	15.09	49.06	16.98	3.60
11. BL decreases costs disseminating teaching materials (printing)	1.89	1.89	9.43	56.60	30.19	**4.11**
12. BL offers variety of learning resources for students	0.00	1.89	9.43	73.58	15.09	**4.02**
13. Lecturer can obtain online responses/participations from students	0.00	5.66	11.32	71.70	11.32	3.89
14. BL approach is more effective than traditional approach (full time face-to-face)	1.89	9.43	41.51	33.96	13.21	3.47

15. BL approach encourages students to participate in the discussion(reduce inhibition)	1.89	11.32	28.30	54.72	3.77	3.47
16. BL helps the lecturers to respond to individual learning needs	1.89	7.55	22.64	62.26	5.66	3.62
17. BL approach enabling lecturers to understand different learning styles for students	0.00	1.89	32.08	56.60	9.43	3.74
18. BL approach provides platform for the lecturers to explore their creativity of delivering teaching process.	0.00	1.89	15.09	69.81	13.21	3.94

Table 3 indicates the lecturers' view on using i-Learn portal as a platform for blended learning mode. The percentages of the lecturers agreeing that the notes on i-Learn portal were useful in supporting their teaching and learning process, i-Learn portal was easy to access and the instructions provided on the portal were easy to follow were 84.9% (Mean = 4.02), 83.01% (Mean = 3.83) and 81.13% (Mean = 3.81) respectively. Nonetheless, the response rate with respect to i-Learn portal is user-friendly, the system admins do provide solutions to problems faced by lecturers regarding i-Learn portal usage and monitoring tools in i-Learn portal does help the lecturers to track the students' participation was a bit lower with the percentages of 79.24% (Mean = 3.75), 66.04% (Mean = 3.72) and 64.15% (Mean = 3.70). In addition, the percentages of respondents who are uncertain whether the functionalities provided on i-Learn portal are sufficient for blended learning mode and no technical problems happens when accessing the i-Learn portal were 54.71% and 37.74% respectively. On the other hand, there is no difference in terms of acceptance between lecturers who have registered and lecturers who have not registered their subjects for blended learning mode during the June-October semester.

Table 3: Mean Value for Lecturers' View on i-Learn Portal as Platform for Blended Learning

Items	**Percentage**					**Mean**
	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Neither Agree nor Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**	
i-Learn portal is user friendly portal	0.00	9.43	11.32	73.58	5.66	3.75
i-Learn portal was easy to access	**0.00**	**9.43**	**7.55**	**73.58**	**9.43**	**3.83**
Notes in iLearn portal help in teaching and learning process	**0.00**	**0.00**	**15.09**	**67.92**	**16.98**	**4.02**
No technical problems when accessing the i-Learn portal	3.77	20.75	37.74	32.08	5.66	3.15
The instructions provided on the i-Learn portal were easy to follow	**0.00**	**3.77**	**15.09**	**77.36**	**3.77**	**3.81**
The system admins (IT officers /iLearn trainers) provide solutions to problems faced by lecturers regarding iLearn portal usage.	0.00	0.00	33.96	60.38	5.66	3.72
Functionalities (group forum, course materials, etc) provided on the i-Learn portal is sufficient for BL	0.00	3.77	41.51	50.94	3.77	3.55
Monitoring tools in i-Learn portal helps in tracking the participations of students	0.00	1.89	33.96	56.60	7.55	3.70

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the earlier discussions, 46(86.79%) respondents prefer a balanced combination of online learning and face-to-face lecture time, followed by 5(9.43%) respondents who prefer to spend more time using online and have less face-to-face lecture session and another 2 (3.77%) respondents would prefer the traditional teaching that involves face-to-face interaction only with the students. However, none of the respondents prefers 100% online for learning and teaching process. It shows that most of the lecturers do accept the implementation of blended learning approach although some of them are not ready to do so. Some of the lecturers did not register for blended learning mode during the June-October 2013 semester although they have attended the training course on blended learning. In contrast, a few of the lecturers were also found to have registered for blended learning although they never attended for any blended learning training course.

Changing the approach in fulfilling teaching and learning processes requires in-depth understanding on the key concept of the new approach. The lecturers should have knowledge on how the approach is being implemented and grab the opportunity to expand their creativity in teaching while practicing it. During the experimental period of practicing the new approach, the lecturers might be able to identify the most effective technique to deliver the teaching sessions. Thus, ongoing hands-on trainings should be conducted regularly to update the lecturers with the latest information on blended learning implementation in UiTM and the basic activities that can be done using the existing features in i-Learn portal. Trainings on the Web 2.0 various applications in education will significantly help the lecturers to explore their creativity delivering lessons by utilizing the information technology through Internet connection.

Apart from that, i-Learn Centre should come out with a systematic enhancement plan on functionality and reliability of the existing LMS. Some of the lecturers found that conducting online assessments such as quizzes and tests using i-Learn portal requires them to assist the students further due to the technical issues. Suggestion in embedding suitable educational applications in the portal should be considered by the UiTM for supporting the blended learning activities. It is important for the lecturers to use i-Learn portal as frequent as possible to get them familiar with all the features and comfortably using the portal. The functionalities on i-Learn portal are also updated from time to time and therefore lecturers should be alert with the changes all the time. Some of the lecturers suggested that i-Learn portal could allow the lecturers to customize the interface accordingly with their preferences such as preferred theme, font type, and colour. Some of them also recommended that extended features should be provided such as email notifications that will be sent automatically to their mobile devices like smartphones, tablets and iPad. The feature will help them know immediately as their students have responded to their discussion forum on i-Learn portal or when the students have submitted their assignments via i-Learn portal.

It is also suggested that the lecturers have to be more creative in using online teaching in order to encourage their students to fully utilized the usage of i-Learn portal. The students would somewhat find the learning process dull and boring if the lecturers are not able to adopt different methods in their teaching and learning process. The notes and activities online should always be updated from time to time as students will be able to compare the notes with other UiTM campuses.

In the future, we are interested to extend this study in order to investigate the possible methods or activities that academicians could apply when adopting blended learning mode. It is hoped that academicians are given more ideas to embrace both online and traditional teaching activities to support a successful implementation of blended learning in the future. This could also help to achieve the objective of UiTM to have 30% of the total subjects offered at UiTM to be conducted online.

References

Gutierrez, F. M.(2006). Faculty Best Practices Using Blended Learning in E-Learning and Face-to-Face Instruction. *International Journal on Elearning*, 5, 3. Retrieved 22 June 2013 from ProQuest Education Journals.

Mironov, C., Borzea, A., & Ciolan, L.(2012). Blended-Learning – An Effecticve Tool for the Professional Development of Higher Education Teachers. *The 8th International Scientific Conference eLearning and Software for Education Bucharest.*

Mouzakis, C. (2008). Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of a Blended Learning Approach for ICT Teacher Training. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 16, 4. Retrieved 21 June 2013 from ProQuest Education Journals.

Poutanen, P., Parviainen, O.,& Berg, L.A.(2011). Conditions for Self-Organizing and Creativity in Blended Learning Environments. *Journal of On The Horizon*, Vol. 19 No.4.

Singh, H.(2003). Building Effective Blended Learning Programs. *Educational Technology*, Vol 43, No. 6, pp 51-62.

So, H.J., & Bonk, C. J.(2010).Examining the Roles of Blended Learning Approaches in Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) Environments: A Delphi Study. *Educational Technology & Society*, 13 (3), 189-200.

AZNIZA AHMAD ZAINI, HASLINDA NORADZAN, FAZLIN MARINI HUSSAIN, ROGER CANDA, Universiti Teknologi MARA (Pahang).
nizazaini@pahang.uitm.edu.my,haslindanoradzan@pahang.uitm.edu.my, fazlinmarini@pahang.uitm.edu.my, rogercanda@pahang.uitm.edu.my.