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Interactive Learning Online: A Case Study of Front Office Teaching and Learning in Higher Learning Institution in Malaysia

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to conduct an interactive learning and teaching online activity particularly in front office course in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). A qualitative study will be conducted in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) specifically in Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, one of the prominent institutions of public higher learning in Malaysia. Students will be interviewed to get their feedback on software designed to be used in the front office course. The findings of the study is hoped to discover the relevancy of front office interactive learning online towards added value learning and teaching of students and lecturers in the university. The study attempt to address the level of understanding and the user friendliness software to lecturers and students in teaching and learning of front office interactive online.

Keywords: Teaching, Technology, Interactive, Front Office

Introduction

The “explosion” of interactive learning online has shifted the traditional learning process from chalk and blackboard into virtual classroom. The emerging of learning innovation suggested that distance learning included the use of technologies such as video, audio, computer and multimedia communications into aiding extended learning. According to Raiyn (2014), “Interactive teaching begins with a philosophy about teaching with technology and results in a new process of interactive teaching and learning” (p.14). In addition, Grant and Thornton (2007) noted the interactive stage is the most crucial by using technology to develop knowledge and concepts to enable greater interactive between lecturer and student. Moreover, Tuparov, Tuparova & Peneva (2004) explained that having a computer-based learning program is not only what the contents to be developed out of it are, but how the program can meet its learning objectives.

Prior studies highlighted that there are two types of e-learning; asynchronous and synchronous. Synchronous e-learning means the interaction between the lecturer and student are happening simultaneously (Archee, 1993), while asynchronous e-learning the lecturer and student can determine their own flexibility without having to follow a regiment plan of interaction (Hollenbeck, Mason, & Song, 2011; Tello, 2007).

It has been discussed that interaction is of paramount importance in stimulating learning online. In this study, although there is various online learning available, however there are still limited participation from technology savvy generation that enrolled on online learning experience. This study is conducted to fill the gap of learning from textbook to multimedia learning experience. Subsequently, with this online teaching and learning experience, current educators is suggested to shift from traditional teaching method to online teaching and learning that create innovative learning style. It has been noted that there are three types of interaction that can enhance the online learning namely; 1) interaction with content, including the ability of learners to access, manipulate, synthesize, and communicate content information; 2) interaction with instructors, or the ability of learners to communicate with and receive feedback from their instructors; and 3) interaction with classmates (Banna, Lin, Steward & Fialkowski, 2015).

Similarly, Manson (2007) opined a well guided learning environment will improve the quality of learning and giving more spaces for students to develop their full understanding of the subject learned. Subsequently, it helps to improve self-esteem and develop high level solving skills (Suh, 2011). Many institutions of higher learning in Malaysia still use traditional method of teaching and very limited usage in interactive teaching and learning online. Thus, this research is to seek how interactive teaching and learning online can complement the traditional learning and teaching process, particularly in front office course.

Issues

Despite the good intention of interactive learning online provided by the institutions of higher learning, there are several issues being highlighted by several researchers. Croxton (2014) pointed out there are continuous low enrolment than to the traditional face-to-face (F2F) courses. Likewise, students fail to complete online courses can be from the range of 10% to 75%. According to Croxton (2014), there are some factors contributing to the failure of completion in online courses. Among the contributing factors are unsuitable courseware, incompatible technology, lack of accountability, lack of interactivity, and the absence of lecturer to supervise (Thurmond, Wambach, Connors & Frey, 2002; Tu & Mclsaac, 2002; Willging & Johnson, 2004). Therefore, this study is conducted to monitor the effectiveness of the online courses through student participation and involvement.

Literature Review

The Internet and the World Wide Web have made significant changes to almost all aspects of lives including in current education practices. The Internet has made online learning possible, and many researchers and educators are interested in online learning to enhance and improve student learning outcomes, particularly in higher education (Nguyen, 2015). The growth of online education

and its potential in higher education has encouraged the researchers and educators to examine the effectiveness of online learning in educating students compared to traditional face-to-face learning.

Education through online becomes popular in this new era of globalization. Stakeholders become more creative and innovative in order to boost online learning simultaneously encourage competitiveness in higher education (Cheng, 2013). Educational institutions are in part embracing and struggling with how these media might be adopted, for teaching, learning and professional development purposes (Han, Wei, & Zhang, 2014). In Malaysia, the trend of online learning and implementation of online courses such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) supported the needs of social and promoting long distance learning. Besides to fulfill social agenda, online learning broadens the tertiary education opportunities in promoting lifelong learning (Ping, Cheng & Manoharan, 2010).

There is so much discussion around online learning that focus on the benefits and uses of online learning. Some of the most important ones are: its effectiveness in educating students, its use as professional development, its cost-effectiveness to combat the rising cost of postsecondary education, credit equivalency at the postsecondary level, and the possibility of providing a world class education to anyone with a broadband connection (De la Varre, Keane, & Irvin, 2011; Lorenzetti, 2013).

Ali, Murphy and Nadkarni (2014) points out that technology enabled learning which is also known as eLearning, online learning and digital learning has been extensively discussed by many scholars. This concept includes applications such as virtual learning environment, webinars, blogs, wikis, crowdsourcing, mobile learning and classroom use of social media. The development of information and communication technologies, such as the Internet, has revolutionized the concept of information accessibility and engage students with full of ideas. (Cheng, 2013; Ali, Murphy & Nadkarni, 2014). The unlimited accessibility of internet can contribute to the knowledge of people.

Furthermore, the rapid usage of smartphones has enabled the faster growth of online learning. Smartphones have evolved from devices that are just used for voice and text communication to platforms that are able to capture and transmit a range of data types, for example, using image, audio, and location. The adoption of these increasingly capable devices has enabled a pervasive sensing paradigm – participatory sensing. Smartphone made online learning much easier as participants can explore phenomena and events of interest using in situ data collection, reporting and participate in the required task

Multimedia Interactive Learning Online (MILO)

Online learning such as Multimedia Interactive Learning Online (MILO) as suggested in this research is one of software which provides efforts in adapting creative teaching method. MILO provides scenario on hotel guest check-in, check-out, cashiering activities which require students to answer through the designed software. The software encourages visual activities, enhances students' interest towards the course and creates good relationship between students and instructors. It can help to make the "classroom walls thinner" or wall-less (Cheng, 2013). The use of proposed software

builds a “learning community” (Cheng, 2013) where the online instructor can develop a virtual environment instead of providing the typical read-and-write online course (Zapalska & Brozik, 2006). Other than that, by applying the designed software, users can still communicate and interact with each other depending on the application and how they create and share content to others. Therefore, the implications for education are significant.

The Roles of Instructors / Educators

The existing of technology in the learning process is not to replace the functions of the lecturers or instructors. It is a part of teaching and learning network collaboration in different environment to share the knowledge (Cheng, 2013). In this study scenario, instructors play a role to encourage learners to interact with the subject matter aiming at constructing knowledge in the learning process (Ping, Cheng & Manoharan, 2010). In order to guide students to adapt with the online education, instructors at first must understand the flow, system and participate in the process of information (Zapalska & Brozik, 2006).

Technology Enabled Learning

The interactive approaches of technology together with an attractive media automatically become a pull factor for students to participate. Moreover, students have different learning styles, some students may learn best by watching and listening, others by reading, and others by practically movement or a hands-on environment (Zapalska & Brozik, 2006). Studies by Han, Wei and Zhang (2014) found that students are willing to use their own technologies for teaching and learning activities. Students valued anywhere, anytime and just in time aspects of using mobile technologies even for learning purposes.

Various channels and types of web-based resources, software and usage of the resources, interactivity and feedback capability, influence the learners’ interaction with online content. It is indeed important to encourage the level of participation and learners’ frequency of access to the online resources (Ping, Cheng & Manoharan, 2010). It can be said that with the emergence of fast growing technology in the education environment, online learning is receiving greater acceptance not only from educators but the students as well. Therefore, this paper addresses the question of “To what extent is online learning is effective towards students’ level of confidence in performing the work task compared to the traditional format?”

Methodology

Scope of the Study

The study will be carried out at the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam campus. This campus was selected because it offer degree course in Front Office Management.

Research Design

A qualitative case study approach will be used to obtain information from the respondents. This approach is appropriate in addressing what, how and why issues. Consequently, Creswell (2009) stated that qualitative data does not generalize data but to form an interpretation of events. In this study, a stratified random sampling was conducted on students presently enrolling in the hotel department of Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management (FHP). The following will be planned stages in conducting the study.

Table 1: Propose three-stage qualitative procedure to foster interaction; adopted from Banna, Lin, Steward & Fialkowski (2015)

Stages	Tasks	Semester implementation
Stage 1: Issue identification and strategy proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of student feedback from previous semesters during which the interactive front office software was offered • Identification of pedagogical strategies to address issues identified 	May 2018
Stage 2: Strategy implementation	Implement selected pedagogical strategies	June 2018
Stage 3: Feedback solicitation	Solicit qualitative student feedback in response to the new interactive front office software	July 2018

Population and Sample

The proposed study populations were students of FPHP UiTM Puncak Alam, Selangor. In determining the sample size, Creswell (2009) opined for a case study research, it is recommended that three to five participants will be interviewed along with other relevant data. Additionally, Simon & Goes (2012) stated the completion of data and the resulting sample size may be the result of data saturation, whereby after enough data have been collected to determine categories or themes the researchers may decide to stop and no further data collections are necessary.

In this research, the students were divided into three groupings namely; students taken front office course, students undergone practical training at the front office department and students with no front office background. Each grouping would have three students and a focus group interview was conducted after each grouping has completed using MILO software. Focus group as mentioned by Krueger, R.A. (1988) "... carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. It is conducted with approximately seven to ten people by a skilled interviewer. The discussion is relaxed, comfortable, and often enjoyable for participants as they share their ideas and perceptions. Group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments in the discussions."

Findings

The definition of E-learning is of, but not limited to learning such as computer-based learning, web-based learning, virtual classroom and digital collaboration (Raiyn, 2014). In the same way, the qualitative research findings for Multimedia Interactive Learning Online (MILO) are based on three different focus groupings, in which, each grouping were represented by three respondents. The first focus group interview is from students who has taken Front Office course. The following focus group is from students who has undergone some practical training in the Front Office department of a hotel. Subsequently, the last focus group is from students who has no hotel background and currently enrolling in the Front Office course. In total, there were nine students participating in this research.

Students taken Front Office Course

It has been noted that all the nine respondents are from Generation Z, where the usage of computer for learning is at its peak. In this focus group interview, the respondents agreed that learning flexibility and enhancing learning experience through multimedia are the most important aspects in cultivating continuous learning.

(Respondent 1) It is really like in the front office, the scene and the graphics are so real. It is so flexible that I can use it at any time. It really enhances my self-confidence.

(Respondent 2) ... ermm ... [sic] MILO is so fantastic, better than with lecturer [sigh]. It should be used together with theory lessons. Less misunderstanding.

In addition, Raiyn (2014) stated that “student-centered approach, interactive teaching and learning are supported by tools that actively engage both teachers and students.”

(Respondent 3) ...Well... the presence of lecturer is not needed. I can manage this software all by myself. It is so easy to use. And the best part is, it is not boring.

Furthermore, the asynchronous e-learning as stated [respondent 3] is allowing student to have greater flexibility in their own learning time without having to follow the rigid time table that was predetermined by their lecturer.

Students Undergone Practical Training at the Front Office Department

The three respondents who are in this focus group interview have undergone practical training at the Front Office department and are currently continuing with their studies in the same university. The three respondents agreed that MILO can help enhancing one’s knowledge, creating confidence and it’s very entertaining.

(Respondent 1) ...MILO...ermmm...[sic] can definitely help to improved my Front office skills. Am very delighted that this software has been produced. It really helps me to understand the hotel industry. The virtual reality in MILO is just like in practical training [laugh].

According to Thorpe & Godwin (2006) cited in Vu & Fadde (2013) “interactions in online learning help expand the learning relationships available and also help generate cognitive processes of explanation, reflection and internalization.”

(Respondent 2) ... the video and audio are very entertaining. I liked it....

Similarly, Pullen (2004) noted that by having quality audio and video are very vital for both online and onsite learners. This will definitely be helping the users to interact effectively in the learning process.

Students with No Front Office Background

The three respondents who are in this focus group interview does not have any Front Office background and are currently studying the course. The three respondents agreed that MILO helps in re-inforce learning, very flexible learning, interesting multimedia and may need the presence of lecturer to guide them initially.

(Respondent 1) ...I like it (exclaimed), so easy to use and to understand. It helps my practical classes. The audio and video are so good. Maybe in the beginning, lecturer presence is required.

As stated by Bernard et al. (2009), Lou, Bernard, & Abrami (2006), Norris, Mason & Lefrere (2003) cited in Banna, Lin, Steward & Fialkowski (2015) that “online interaction is now recognized as playing a crucial role in stimulating learning.” In a similar vein, Abrami et al. (2011) stated “student - content interaction may take on a number of forms, including watching instructional videos, interacting with multimedia, as well as searching for information.”

Besides stimulating learning, *(Respondent 3) this MILO is really preparing myself into the working world [sic].*

Moreover, according to Bernard et al. (2009) and Moore (1989) cited in Banna et al. (2015), learners will be able to access, manipulate, synthesize and communicate content information. At this end, respondents 1, 2, and 3 believes MILO can really help them in the learning process and preparing them into the working world of Front Office.

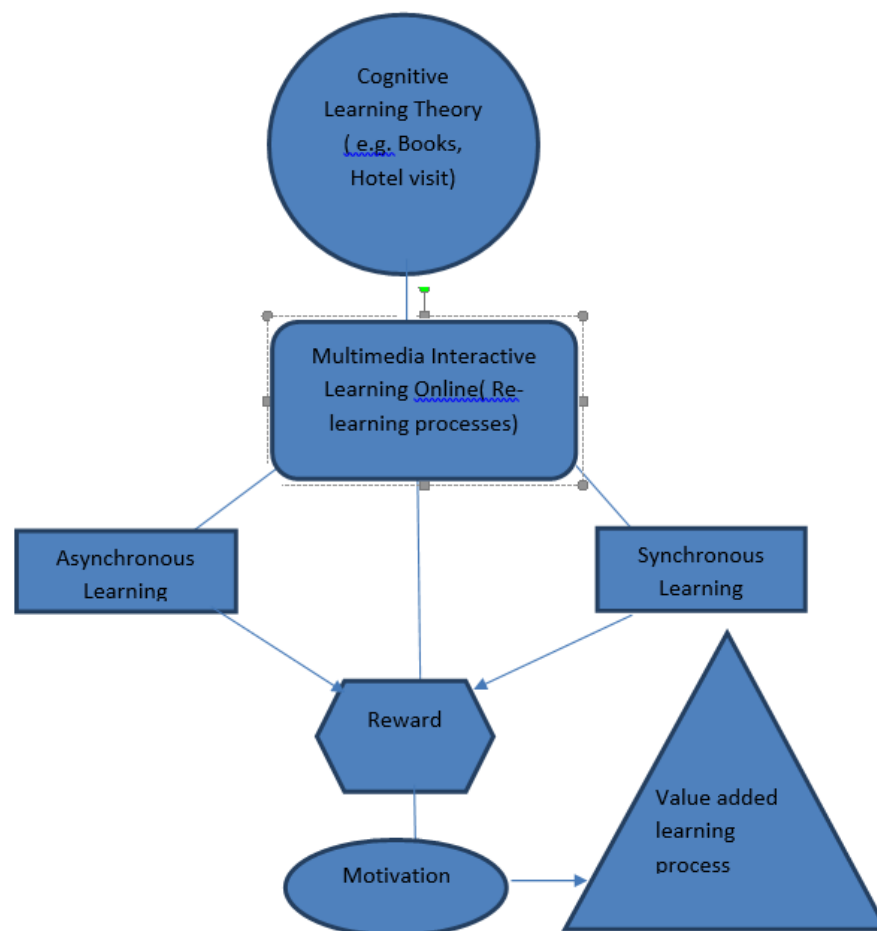
Discussion and Conclusion

Students feedback revealed Multimedia Interactive Learning Online (MILO) can help into facilitated the learning processes more easily; in terms of strengthening ones learning skills without having or limited lecturer’s presence and empowering oneself into thinking out-of-the-box upon viewing different scenes in the video. As previous study suggests, “...teachers are responsible for planning, teaching, and facilitating sequences integrated with technology. Students are responsible for constructing and demonstrating knowledge as well as collaborating with peers to create knowledge.” (Raiyn, 2014).

It was noted that, students are very motivated of the audio and video found in MILO. It allows them of becoming self-starter and executing the Front Office tasks with confidence. This in return making them all ready to work in the industry. Unlike in theory classes where there is only a single direction of instruction, MILO has been able to stimulate great interest in the Front Office course and enabling to enhance their knowledge into another level, whereby, students be able to watch and interact with the software. As Pullen (2004) pointed out with high quality of audio and video, asynchronous learners will have the same output as those who are in the synchronous study mode.

Of the many studies being carried out, there are very limited journals suggesting about using online learning as part of the reward and motivation factors. In our discussion, we tie together learning MILO with reward and motivation. Most of the students are very supportive of this idea. For future research, researchers may want to determine the quantum of reward to be given and to determine the degree of motivation level while using MILO.

Figure 1: Framework of Value Added Learning Process



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