MANAGEMENT STUDENTS' READINESS AND EFFECTIVENESS IN ADOPTING BLENDED LEARNING IN ENGLISH FOR OCCUPATIONAL PURPOSES CLASS AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL: A CONCEPT PAPER

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ABSTRACT

Blended learning, a combination of online and face-to-face teaching has gained a foothold in tertiary institutions worldwide. It is vital to acknowledge that there are several factors such as the institution, instructors and students' readiness affecting the quality of blended learning implemented especially to low English Proficiency students. The purpose of this conceptual paper is to propose a case study to be carried out on the management students' readiness and effectiveness in adopting blended learning in English for Occupational Purposes class at the tertiary level using a proposed framework modified from a framework introduced in "A framework for investigating blended learning effectiveness" (Wong, Tatnall, & Burgess, 2014). The said framework is based on OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) model of "Readiness, Intensity and Impact" to investigate the adoption and use of eBusiness technologies. English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) is chosen because there is a need for management students to be competent in English as the medium of content delivery and references are in English. The case study will then validate the move towards blended learning in the teaching of English subject to the faculty.

Keywords: blended learning, readiness, effectiveness, framework, English for Occupational Purposes

1. INTRODUCTION

Blended learning is "a coherent design approach that openly assesses and integrates the strengths of face to face and online learning to address educational goals" (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). It can simply be identified as a mixture of both traditional methods of teaching such as face-to-face interaction and online teaching. Blended learninghas the potential to enrich educational goals of higher institution and students' experience in knowledge acquisition which will enhance their ability to perform better when they enter the working world. However, blended learning implementation is not always successful if several factors are not considered such as the readiness of the institution, instructors or the students themselves does not co-exist to support each other. A modified framework from "A framework for investigating blended learning effectiveness" (Wong, Tatnall, & Burgess, 2014) is chosen for its relevance and practicality to the chosen target group. Therefore, this concept paper proposes that a case study is carried out on management students to investigate the students' readiness and the effectiveness of blended learning and to see whether it is possible to be carried out on a larger scale to the whole faculty

in the teaching of English Language before the whole of the institution itself accomodate to blended learning as a mean of Teaching and Learning.

2. READINESS, INTENSITY OF ADOPTION, AND EFFECTIVENESS OF BLENDED LEARNING

2.1 Readiness

Readiness or e-readiness (electronic readiness) is a measurement of the degree to which a country, nation or economy may be willing, prepared and ready to gain benefits from information and communication technologies (ICT); to gauge how ready a country is to be involved in electronic activities such as e-commerce and e-government(Dada, 2006). In the field of education, the measurement is known as "eLearning readiness" (Abas, Kaur, & Harun, 2004). Abas et al. (2004) mentioned that eLearning readiness in Malaysia is examined according to several criteria; one of them being "learner readiness: level of time committment, discipline and interest in e-Learning". This learner readiness reflects the learner's attitude. The learner here refers to the students.

2.2 Intensity of adoption

When students adopt technological innovations in learning, the innovations might not be adopted entirely. To understand the adoption of blended learning by students, it is useful to consider one of the theories of technological innovation (Al-Hajri & Tatnall, 2007); one of them beingInnovation Translation theory (Wong et al., 2014). The theory stated that "...innovations are often not adopted in their entirety but only after 'translation' into a form that is more appropriate for use by the potential adopter" (Wong et al., 2014). Citing Latour (1986), people would have different reaction to innovation, in the sense that they could modify, add to it, use only certain parts of it, or ignore it. Wonget al. (2014) meanwhile stated that it is up to the students themselves to adopt certain aspects of the blended learning approach which they deemed as useful for them and this intensity (in adopting) signifies the student readiness in adopting blended learning.

The intensity of adoption of blended learning by the institution as well as the instructors is also worthwhile to be mentioned since it is related to student readiness. The adoption depends on the level of online resources used as exemplified by the blended learning enhanced continuum in Figure 1 which begins with completely traditional, face-to-face method with no ICT support, then progresses to basic ICT use to support face-to-face teaching before finally reaches intensive use where there is minimal face-to-face interaction (Wong et al., 2014). The idea behind the continuum could be viewed in two ways: the first is that the institution could gradually move from traditional approaches in teaching to the use of "E-intensive approach" with complete modules delivered and moderated online, while the second is the instructors could select from across the continuum, the option of learning module suitable to their needs which might include face-to-face tutorials, the use of presentation software such as PowerPoint in lectures (basic ICT use) and online discussions (E-focused) (Wong et al., 2014).
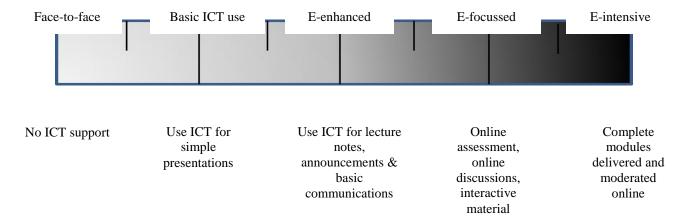
Face-to-face	Basic ICT use	E-enhanced	E-focussed	E-intensive
No ICT support	Use ICT for simple presentations	Use ICT for lecture notes, announcements & basic communications	Online assessment, online discussions, interactive material	Complete modules delivered and moderated online

Figure 1: Blended Learning Enhanced Continuum
Source: Jones et al. (2009, p. 15) in Wong et al. (2014, p. 234)

2.3 Effectiveness of Blended Learning

Effectiveness of blended learning could only be gauged if it is linked to students' readiness and their intensity in adopting blended learning. Once institutions and instructors have adopted a range of options across the blended learning enhanced continuum (Figure 1), it is students' readiness that influences their intensity of adoption, and thus the impact on their learning (Wong et al., 2014). Perera and Richardson (2010) stated that the quality of the actual time spent online might influence the learning outcomes. The outcome might be positive as Williams et al. (2012) found out that students who attempted the online quizzes many times performed better than those who attempted them fewer times. The outcome might also be insignificant, as discovered by Abdolmohammadi et al. (2003), in which responses by students in Student Evaluation of Teaching Survey showedthat the implementation of a web-assisted course enhanced learning did not find any significant difference in students' level of understanding of the subject matter.

3. ADAPTED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The framework is derived from a framework introduced in "A framework for investigating blended learning effectiveness" (Wong et al., 2014). The said framework is based on OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) model of "Readiness, Intensity and Impact" to investigate the adoption and use of e-business technologies.Instead of only measuring student readiness by the intensity of adoption of blended learning options from the blended learning enhanced continuum, student readiness towards blended learning are also proposed to be measured by taking into consideration their attitude towards the following two learning aspectsin order to know whether they are ready. The aspects are availability of technology and study management (Chun & Lee, 2013). The reason these aspects are taken into consideration is because a study by Chun & Lee (2013), "Readiness for Blended Learning: Understanding Attitude of University Students" suggests that there are six learning aspects through which student attitude can be examined to study adaptability to blended learning; learning flexibility, online learning, study management, technology, online interaction and classroom learning. The authors have considered two that play a big influence among the students in the target tertiary institution of this study.

3.1 Available Technology
This refers to student readiness to use available technology. Technology has provided possibilities for students to learn anytime and anywhere. Learners being familiar and could easily access the digital technologies is the basic requirement for blended learning to be implemented successfully (Chun & Lee, 2013).

3.2 Study Management
This refers to how students manage their study. Students plan, manage, direct learning activities and share learning responsibilities with their instructors, where they learn to be autonomous and responsible in learning; this contributes to self-discipline and self-motivation, whereby one could see how well students manage their time (Chun & Lee, 2013). Being able to manage time in their study also contributes to the readiness in adopting blended learning.
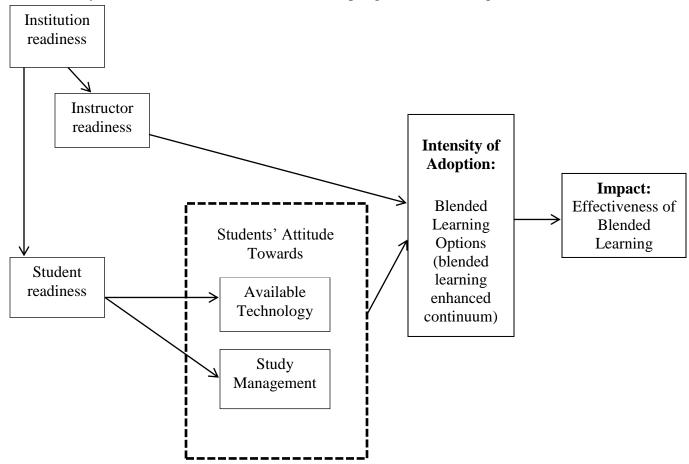

Figure 2: Adapted Theoretical Framework: Measurement of Student Readiness and Effectiveness in Adopting Blended Learning

4. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY
The research design is qualitative methodology which is case study. It will be conducted on the proposed respondents, a group of management students who are undertaking EOP class for one semester. The background of the students are they have low English proficiency. The reserach will examine the intensity of adoption of blended learning option from the blended learning

enhanced continuum (Figure 1) by the students. The research will start with a series of survey to identify the students' attitude towards the learning aspects: availability of technology and study management. Next, it will examine the options of blended learning available and used in the target tertiary institution. This step is taken to validate students' readiness towards blended learning. The impact, which is done to know the effectiveness of blended learning after it is implemented, is the last stage. The effectiveness level is measured to know whether blended learning has improved the students' critical thinking. The effectiveness level might be significant or insignificant.

5. CONCLUSION

It is anticipated that once students are ready in term of availability of technology and their ability to manage their study, then only they are ready to adopt blended learning options. Once the intensity of adoption is identified, then their readiness for blended learning can be validated.Hopefully, blended learning will be able to be implemented at thewhole university level to create a more critical thinking graduands who are able to utilize technology well and able to communicate effectively via latest technology since it is tested in EOP.

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