

Students' Readiness in using E-learning Application for English subjects Among Undergraduates in Malaysia

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Abstract. Covid-19 is declared as a global pandemic that has been affecting the economy, society, policy as well as education sector. One of the badly affected countries is Malaysia. Covid-19 had struck the country and affected its education sector. Undergraduates in Malaysia are required to learn their subjects throughout the semesters via e-learning involuntarily. The utilization of e-learning for the teaching and learning at tertiary level came after the announcement from the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia as the initiative to curb the spreading of the virus. However, the usage of e-learning had led to few difficulties and dissatisfactions especially in the learning process among the undergraduates. Thus, this paper attempted to investigate students' readiness in using e-learning application specifically for English language subjects among university undergraduates. This study also explored students' perceptions towards the components of e-learning and to see whether this new norm can be administered in the future especially in an emergency state like a pandemic outbreak. This study utilized a questionnaire on students' readiness in using e-learning to elicit data from 236 respondents. The respondents were both diploma and degree students of one private university in Malaysia, who underwent online classes specifically for English language classes during the Movement Control Order (MCO) period in Malaysia.

Keywords: e-learning, English language, Covid-19, readiness

1 Introduction

Studies on e-learning and the usage of it among the students are not foreign in the education field. E-learning which comes from the abbreviation of electronic learning is one of the mediums for learning that is used especially in the tertiary education as an aid to the face to face learning. In fact, with the current advancement of technology, the e-learning application has becoming more user friendly in order to cater to the students' as well as the teachers' need. It quickly became a prominent platform for the students once the impact of Covid-19 afflicted the education system. This could be seen in the education scene in Malaysia.

Covid-19 has been declared as a global pandemic and one of the most affected countries is Malaysia. Even though the number of cases is still rising to this date, Malaysia is considered as one of the countries that is handling the pandemic very well with its own line of frontliners. One of the measures that was taken by federal government of Malaysia was by announcing total

lockdown or also known as Movement Control Order (MCO) which was a cordon sanitaire implemented as a preventive measure which was enforced on 18th of March 2020. According to Dr. Noor Hisham Abdullah, Director General of Health Malaysia, in one of his daily Covid-19 press conference in Malaysia, the government was still closely monitoring the data in order to see the hope and the changes that could happen. “We have not won the war yet, but neither we have lost the war”.

The massive impact that this pandemic had caused to the country which includes economy, societies, policies and most importantly the education sector as well. All university students were required to return to their hometown in order to curb the spreading of the virus as university is considered as a high-risk place due to its high potential as gathering spot. Semesters were still carried out as usual depending on the management of the university. Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia (MOHE) announced that every subject was to be conducted via online learning up until December 2020 or until further notice except for a certain category of students. This leads to students having little or no preparation in fully utilizing the online learning for their subjects.

According to Saifullah Baiduri, President of Gabungan Mahasiswa Islam Se- Malaysia (Gamis), the implementation of the online classes had caused both academic staff and students to adjust to the new norms of teaching and learning. “Indeed, the best learning method is face-to-face because it is more familiar and understood by the students. With the implementation of online classes, they will be experiencing problems asking questions, especially those who have difficulties speaking out in a crowded environment, both face-to-face and online methods”

2 E-learning as A Medium for Learning Amid the Pandemic

E-learning is an alternative teaching method where students access the learning materials via online computer systems. It is seen to be an effective way of delivering materials to previously unreachable students with previously unavailable access and presentation methods [1].

E-learning or also known as non-face to face guided learning has always existed in the implementation of teaching and learning in higher institution. However, e-learning is only being used as a supplementary to the physical lectures and as additional sources to the students. Hence, once the pandemic occurred, the students had to fully utilize e-learning as it was the only feasible way to fulfil the requirement for their university courses. Problems and challenges were expected to appear during this sudden transition from conventional learning to e-learning.

Hence, it is vital to conduct the present study to determine the students’ perceptions and readiness towards all the components of e-learning in order to ensure an effective teaching and learning conducted through the semesters. Readiness is a powerful factor in successful e-learning implementation [2]. The success of the learning is determined by the role of the students hence it is necessary to conduct a study in order to explore their readiness towards the implementation of e-learning specifically for English courses. The attitude of the users, especially students, is a key factor in determining the success or failure of e-learning [3].

The two objectives guiding the present study are:

1. To identify the readiness in using e-learning application specifically for English language subjects among undergraduates
2. To explore the undergraduates' perceptions on the components of e-learning during the teaching and learning process.

3 Students' Readiness in Using E-learning Amid the Pandemic

A questionnaire survey for data collection was adapted from a study by [4] which investigated students' readiness in using e-learning in Higher Institutions was used to identify their readiness towards the usage of e-learning for English language subjects. It consisted of 39 items that covered 4 components of e-learning which are availability of technology, use of technology, self-confidence and acceptance. Items were adapted based on the current situation in Malaysia as well as the pandemic that occurred during the period of the study. The questionnaire used a 3- Likert scale ranging from disagree, undecided and agree. The respondents were ESL undergraduates of both diploma and degree students from different programmes in one private university in Malaysia. The questionnaire was distributed at the end of the semester to 236 undergraduates undertaking the English language classes using e-learning during the Movement Control Order (MCO) period which was from 18th of March 2020 until 9th of June 2020. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Form. The data were tabulated and statistically analysed using SPSS version 26.

The findings revealed that in general, the respondents were able to get access to the technology. 48.3% of respondents agreed that they did have access to computer and 39.4% were able to connect to the internet whenever they needed it. However, majority of the respondents were unsure whether they had problems with the internet access, both in terms of the speed and the stability of the internet, with 41.1% and 44.9%, stated undecided for both items respectively.

This study also investigated the use of technology and found that most of the respondents were able to use the technology and were well-aware about the existence of such technologies. 76.7% of respondents agreed that they used office software during the e-learning class. Meanwhile, 83% of respondents used instant messaging and 75.9% of the respondents also able to use learning management systems for the online class. 81.8% reported to use mobile technologies such as smartphones to connect to the internet. This shows that majority of the respondents did have access and were able to use the technology for e-learning purpose.

Another component that was studied was self-confidence towards the usage of e-learning. 67.3% reported that they were aware what e-learning is about. 60.6% noted that they were able to use office software for content delivery and demonstration in fulfilling the task of the e-learning. Besides, majority of the respondents (66.9%) were able to use search engines when searching for information. Respondents were also confident in using the university's learning management system with 62.3% reported that they were able to use it during their online classes. However, it was also found that the respondents were somehow not ready with the implementation of e-learning with 37.7% stated undecided, and 26.3% stated not ready to use it.

Items on acceptance towards e-learning was also included in the questionnaire to determine students' readiness towards the usage of e-learning. It was interesting to note that most of the respondents disagree with the statement stating that e-learning was more effective compared to the traditional classroom-based approach with 39% of respondents showed disagreement and 33.9% stated undecided. Besides, respondents (51.7%) agreed that they needed training on e-learning and believed that their classmates also needed it as well (56.8%).

4 Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the findings, it was found that the students responded positively towards the accessibility of the technology in general. One of the aspects to be fulfilled when it comes to readiness is the accessibility of the subject via online platform. The availability of both computer as the tool and internet as the connectivity with the subject showed that the students somehow were ready with the implementation of e-learning. This could be due to the fact that students nowadays are those who grew up using digital media and live their daily lives through Internet. Chances for easy access to technology including computers and the Internet creates the possibility to be able to obtain information and aided their daily lives with the help of technology [5]. However, it was also noted that there could be a significant problem with the stability and the speed of the connection as majority of the students appeared unsure. This could be due to the geographical factor of students' whereabouts where different areas may have different speed and stability of the internet connection. Students who live in the rural areas tend to face difficulties in securing a good internet connection compared to those who live in the city area. Low connectivity will dampen the productivity of the online classes significantly.

Another aspect that need to be taken into account when it comes to students' e-learning readiness is the students' ability in using the technology. It appeared that most of the students responded that they were familiar with all the technologies involved such as office software, instant messaging and learning management systems in which they were able to use it in order to fulfil their task requirement for their English subjects. Learners of 21st century are called as digital natives. Digital native is characterised as learners who associated technology with interaction for both school and outside school for teaching and learning, social interaction and entertainment [6]. Thus, there is no doubt that all these emerging applications are in their controls as they practically live with them and utilize them in their daily lives.

The respondents also appeared to be confident with their ability to utilise the technologies. Their ability to manoeuvre different online platforms such as learning management system, web 2.0 tools and others aid the communication between instructors and learners to effectively conduct the online classes. Optimum usage of the e-learning platforms could help the students to submit their works to instructors easily, downloading the course objectives to their own computers and most importantly to engage with their classes actively despite being carried out online. Therefore, it is the instructors' responsibility to opt for the most suitable and appropriate tools according to the learning needs of digital natives [7].

Finally, in order to conclude the students' readiness towards the implementation of e-learning is their acceptance of it. It was reported that the students tend to have second thought when it comes to the effectiveness of e-learning in comparison to traditional classroom. This could be

due to the different frequency of face to face interaction between instructor and student, the nature of the course communication as well as the student's academic course load [8]. Besides, traditional classroom allows on-ground instructions in which affords students the opportunity to have questions answered and for instructors to elaborate it on the point when the students experience difficulty [9]. Accustoming to a new norm could be hard for students to fully accept the new learning approach as proximity or the usage of the approach is still novel to them. Besides that, even though the findings showed that the students did have the accessibility as well as the ability to use the technology, training is still needed to ensure the usage of e-learning will be at optimum level. Exposure to e-learning is important to ensure that the students are well aware and able to accept the implementation whenever it is needed especially in situation like Covid-19 pandemic.

Hence, despite the emergency state-like pandemic, nowadays learners whom are accustomed to living digitally appeared to be able to adjust to the new norm as it is not foreign for them to rely on the technology. They are more comfortable with the use of technology and able to integrate these rapid and emerging technologies both into their daily and academic life [10]. Even though the effectiveness of the e-learning is not addressed in this study, it is safe to assume that the implementation of e-learning in the students' method of learning could be done effectively as the students seemed to be prepared in integrating it into their medium of learning.

5 Implication and Recommendation

The findings in this study bring awareness to the real reality of the sudden implementation of e-learning due to the pandemic. It also helps the government to better understand the real situation faced by the students due to the ad hock changes of policy and how they actually perceived the system. This also helps the management of the university to see the void that the students felt with the current implementation of the e-learning.

However, future research is needed to explore the effectiveness of e-learning to the productivity of the classes. More study is also needed to investigate the challenges and problems that students faced when implementing the e-learning application as their medium of learning for their subjects.

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