ONLINE LEARNING: LEADING E-LEARNING AT HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: In the 'Information Age' where the demand of knowledge raises, the students are expected to retrieve more information to support and develop their learning process. Some universities have progressively opened up to the opportunity of e-learning concept, and they are currently integrating e-learning in their teaching to accommodate the diverse need in learning and providing more interactive materials that allow easy access to information. E-learning has the potential to transform the way of teaching and studying across the board. It can develop standards, and improve involvement in learning. This cannot substitute teacher or lecturer role, but in addition to existing methods it can develop the quality and decrease the time spent. This study is to explore learners' and lecturers' perceptions towards e-learning and how to deliver classes without face-to-face meetings at higher education by using an exploratory research approach. The findings showed that technical preparations are needed prior to e-learning and emphasized on the importance of using localized examples and cases for class discussion. The results also suggested to enhance the curriculum and raise standards at the lecturer level on various specific aspects, such as materials and activities.

Keywords: e-learning, information, higher education

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, internet has revolutionized the way we work and is now ready to change education since it is adopted and further developed as a means of communication. Academics have realized its vast potential as a learning tool and several universities have become increasingly passionate about the possibility of online learning to provide accessible and up-to-date education to all ages and social backgrounds, regardless of time and place. Elango et. al. (2008) have argued that the internet is the only way education can break down barriers to injustice, provide opportunities for young people to truly become 21st century learners, and enable them to learn in ways that meet their learning needs and styles. And to accomplish this, teachers are the key to apply technology to give students the opportunity to learn anything, anytime and anywhere.

In this information age where the students are required to obtain the need for increasing knowledge, internet is seen as the key to provides access to more information, and allows them to use their own initiative to find it. 'e-Learning' is considered by many to be the only viable solution to the problem of sending the resources needed to facilitate lifelong learning (European Commission, 2010). According to OECD (2005), e-learning refers to the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to enhance and/or support learning in tertiary education. E-learning is also believed to help improving students' computer literacy and the skill needed when they start working (Addah, 2012).

E-learning could include a varied kind of systems, from students use e-mail or access course work on line. In Fang's (2007) study on what Singaporean polytechnic students find useful, enjoyable and effective in their e-learning experience, the study found that "Younger Singaporeans who had been exposed to widespread use of computers in school, at home and in society did enjoy Cyber Culture among other activities." Similarly in Al- Fadhli's (2008) study Kuwaiti students found e-learning to be better than the traditional way of teaching and that e-learning is more enjoyable compared to the traditional method.

However, current theories and practices in e-learning are not simple or coherent, which means that the application of this solution occurs irregularly, randomly, and with varying degrees of success. Despite the enthusiasm and commitment shown by academics and teachers, there is still a lot of apathy, confusion and skepticism about e-learning among students (Chapman, Masters, and Pedulla 2010). Although most recognize that e-learning has the potential to improve learning and learning experience at all levels, many feel that the current shortcomings are still too big to do so many things.

With the growing importance of lifelong learning, e-learning has become a popular tool which is well received by 21st century learners. Kasworm (2011) agreed that e-learning allows flexibly in learning and accessing materials according to students' needs and provides more interactive materials that allow easy access to information and feedback from students. Presently, some universities have integrated e-learning in their teaching to accommodate the diverse need in learning (Turney *et. al*, 2009).

In Indonesia, the development of e-learning or online education is now in a quite encouraging stage. At present there are quite a number of universities that make learning innovations using information and communication technology, including UT, UI, ITS, UGM, ITB, IPB, Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia and many others. In addition, the development of e-learning is also increasingly visible with the existence of the Kemenristekdikti Online Learning System (SPADA) and Student Centered e-Learning Environment (SCELE). As a result, teaching and learning activities can be done remotely and more digitally. This can be realized based on Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No.24 of 2012 concerning the Implementation of Distance Education by Universities.

This paper aimed at giving a general overview of the extent to which e-learning is being used in one of private university in Lampung, how it was used and its potential and pitfalls. It also examined e-learning from the point of view of students and lecturers.

METHODOLOGY

The study was to explore learners' and lecturers' perceptions towards e-learning and how to deliver classes without face-to-face meetings in tertiary education. In achieving this aim, an exploratory research approach was adopted.

Design and Procedures

The study was conducted in a private university in Lampung. Two online Reading courses were designed using online platform (SPADA). The first course was taken by first year student (N=18) and the second course was addressed to second year student (N=17). They attended the courses once a week for six weeks. All courses were conducted online without face-to-face meeting. They are also given e-learning materials including learning contracts, power point slides are between 10 to 15 minutes in length, study guides, and example. The online activities include online forum discussions, individual and group-based assignments. Online quiz and practice were designed in each course to evaluate SPADA as an assessment tool. At the end of the course, they were invited to participate in a survey and a focus group discussion. They were asked to respond to a questionnaire using Likert scale (where 5 strongly agree, 4 agree, 3 neutral, 2 disagree, and 1 strongly disagree). Open ended questions and free responses were used to assess areas of weakness and strength in SPADA and e-learning.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

A questionnaire focusing on the students' perception about e-learning which was tested for internal validity was given to them. The questionnaire was designed in two parts, that is, the students perception concerning to e-learning materials and students' perception relating to e-learning activities. The responses were collected from the students along with their suggestions. Then, data entry and analysis were done using SPSS. In order to answer research questions, descriptive statistics were calculated.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Learners' perceptions of e-learning materials

The findings on learners are divided into three sub-sections, the materials, the activities and the learners. Among the 35 adult learner respondents, 57.47% of them are female and 42.53% are male. Majority of them (60.04%) are between the ages of 18 to 20, 37.68% are between 21 to 23 years old and only 2.28% are above 23 years old.

In the survey, the students were first asked whether they agree with the statement that "The following learning materials are helpful in my learning". Table I shows the learners perception of the helpfulness of the e-learning materials. None of them chose the "strongly disagree". The result shows that most of the students perceived the various e-learning materials provided to be rather helpful. Among the e-learning materials, all respondents agreed that the textbook is helpful and 97.37% of them thought that online lectures are helpful. For learning contract (91.43%) and, close to 90% of the respondents chose "agree or strongly agree" options. However, about 26.31% of the respondents had some doubts about the helpfulness of e-textbooks.

The students were enthusiastic when learning because teaching materials or materials were easily accessed online and were relevant for use. The material

uploaded allows independent learning. This is in accordance with the characteristics of e-learning in tertiary institutions according to Elyas (2018) which states that e-learning using self-learning materials is stored on a computer so that it can be accessed by lecturers and students anytime and anywhere if the person concerned requires. This opinion is supported by the opinion of Lin and Lin (2015) stating that e-learning can be seen as an innovative approach to provide well designed, student centered, interactive, and facilitate learning environments to anyone, anywhere, anytime by utilizing the characteristics and resources of various digital technologies for learning materials.

Table 1. Helpfulness of e-learning materials

Material	Diagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Textbook	0%	0%	58.97%	41.03%
E-textbook	5.26%	21.05%	57.89%	15.79%
Learning contract	2.86%	5.71%	42.86%	48.57%
Online lecturers	3.57%	0%	65.79%	31.58%

Based on the qualitative responses through focus groups, the researcher identified characteristics of e-learning materials that respondents are satisfied with and areas where improvements are needed. First of all, the qualitative responses further confirm some of the survey findings. For example, many expressed their satisfaction towards online lectures. One of the comments was, "The online study unit…. let us experience the wonder of multimedia lecture". Another mentioned that "Recorded explanations of topics covered are very useful. Students will be able to log into the website to learn at their own available time". At the same time, some also pointed out that although the online lectures are useful, some improvements needed to increase its efficiency and effectiveness.

Some of the suggestions include providing downloadable slides with scripts; creating more lively presentations and technical issues such as the clarity, speed and volume of voice. One commented that "If these could be streamlined then that would improve the course materials". Some mentioned that they found that the learning contract is sufficient to give a clear explanation related to the course.

Learners' perceptions of e-learning activities

In the survey, the student participants are then asked whether they agree with the statement that "The following learning activities are helpful in my learning". Table II tabulates the learners' perceptions of the e-learning activities. The result shows that majority of the participants perceived the e-learning activities provided to be rather helpful. All participants agreed that case study is a useful e-learning activity.

Students looked enthusiastic when working on assignments and collecting assignments because the work process was done online and the collection process was also online via a link or google form so it saved costs. This is in accordance with the opinion of Kučírková (2012) which stated that the use of information technology allows teaching to students more efficiently and can reduce the cost of time and energy and make it easier to connect with students in academic matters.

Tabel 2. Helpfulness of e-learning activities

Activities	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Individual assignment	0%	0%	8.33%	50%	41.67%
Group assignment	0%	3.57%	14.29%	50%	32.14%
Forum	3.57%	3.57%	17.86%	50%	25%
Quiz	0%	5.26%	5.26%	68.42%	21.05%
Case Study		3.57%	0%	65.79%	31.58%

Unluckily, there were some students encountered some difficulties related to online learning environment. They felt online learning did not really help them understand learning material more easily because they experienced the learning environment in online lectures did not support the learning atmosphere. For example, in face-to-face lectures, if students have difficulty understanding the material, then the student can ask questions directly to the lecturer or other students. And if the student still doesn't understand, then he can keep asking questions until he understands. But this is hard to happen in online lectures. They argued that the learning environment in face-to-face lectures is more fun and more helpful in the learning process.

Moreover, the students provided many suggestions of improvements. Forum is the most mentioned topic among all the e-learning activities. Majority of the students indicated that forum may be useful when there is system consistency, sufficient and technical support. The suggestions on forum include: lecturer should set some house rules, e.g., relevant comments only and lecturer should try to bring the discussion back to the theoretical models. One typical comment was "I think forum can be livelier to encourage participation and to engage students". They also mentioned that forum is useful consultation tools. Unfortunately, some students prefer responding to questions and discussion directly rather than via online. According to them, by answering a question directly, they will get a direct response from both the lecturer and other students. In contrast to answering online, the responses given require time.

However, many studies have shown that students need to increase the level of their technological and communication skills to be able to benefit significantly from the opportunities offered by e-learning. The lack of confidence and experience in using technology might be extra obstacle for other students. In e-learning process, students work independently and some students might find it difficult to understand their contents, due to the lack face-to-face contact with lecturers and other students.

Consequently, in order to appropriately progress and successfully use all e-learning tools to effectively access online information, some students need the necessary hardware and self-regulatory behaviours skills. Oliver (2014) contended that self-regulatory behaviours include the ability to set goals, to effectively manage time, to solve problems on one's own, and to know when to seek advice from instructors. Certainly, e-Learning would increase the motivation and engagement of students for learning and help them to become self-directed independent learners. On the one hand, teachers need to develop and restructure their courses in a way that suits online requirements.

E-learning lecturers perspective

A focus group discussion was conducted with the six lecturers. Regarding to the e-learning materials, the lecturers commented that the textbooks were easier to follow. They also commented that although textbook publishers usually provide pre-existing online lectures, they do not cover all the learning outcomes. Thus, they suggested that recording lectures and ensure all materials are in line with each other.

Regarding the e-learning activities, the lecturers were concerned about the low participation rate, especially for forum discussion. They suggested incentives to encourage participation. They also recognized the difficulty in online environment. One typical comment was it is difficult to engage students in the discussion. Not able to control students well. Students are easily distracted.

The advantages and disadvantages of implementing e-learning

The implementation of e-learning in the subject of reading in the Department of English Education has several advantages. The log-in process is very easy for students because log-in is done by filling in the admin ID and immediately entering the password so that the log-in is done simply. According to Elyas (2018), the requirement to develop e-learning is to use a simple principle that is to facilitate students in utilizing existing technology and menus, with ease on the panel provided, the learning time of participants will be more efficient.

Based on interviews with some students stated that the advantage of implementing e-learning is that it makes easier for students to obtain material clearly because there are material downloading features so that the material used is readily available and relevant for use. This is in accordance with the benefits of e-learning learning according to Fang (2007) which states that e-learning learning can simplify and increase the time of interaction between students and learning materials, as well as facilitate the improvement and storage of learning materials. The material presented in the form of soft files making it easier for students to access. In accordance with the opinion of Oliver (2014), the benefits of using e-learning are students can also share information and access teaching materials any time and repeatedly, with such condition students can further strengthen their mastery of learning materials.

Based on the results of group discussion about the task submission process, the task submission through e-learning is not in accordance with the specified deadline or the task submission becomes slow because it is not scheduled and is not monitored face to face. This is in accordance with the opinion of Elyas (2018) which states that the formal delivery of tests or assignments must be done according to the specified schedule, so assignments must be demanded so that they are given on a scheduled deadline.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conceptually, this study provides the understanding of e-learning perceptions of learners within the higher education level. The results suggest that technical preparations are needed prior to e-learning and infrastructure needs to be improved. The findings also emphasize on the importance of using localized examples and cases for class discussion. The practical implications include strategic planning by the management and enhancing the curriculum and raising standards at the lecturer level on various specific aspects, such as materials and activities.

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