Blended Approach Environment Shift in Higher Education

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INTRODUCTION

The use of educational technology at university and college campuses has grown and changed substantially in the last decades. The province of computer and other forms of technology are now being used for multiple functions in diverse educational settings. At many universities, the lecturer uses the software available to organize lecture notes and e-mail and electronic forums to communicate with their students. Inside the classroom, computer projection systems are replacing traditional overhead transparencies, making it possible to harness the interactive and visual capabilities of the computer for lecture and group activities.

The problem faced by any university '*is how to structure itself so that it's central academic activity is facilitated, not undermined by technological development*' (Laurillard & Margetson, 1997). Even though universities appear to be more comfortable with traditional forms of teaching and learning, it appears that a shift toward a blended approach is taking place by universities that are trying several different forms of educational technologies to find the right fit. Students often do not want to lose the unique attributes of face-to-face teaching, but they do wish for the benefits of educational technology such as edutainment learning.

BACKGROUND

The landscape of higher education in Malaysia is rapidly being reconfigured as new media technologies are supplementing conventional teaching practices (Bajunid, 2005). The acceleration of e-learning facilitated by information and communication technology (ICT) is stimulated by dismay with current didactic practices which appears to stem from ancient times, as faculty today seem to teach in the same way as Aristotle or Plato did. Despite initial resistance by some academics who fobbed e-learning off as a passing fad, proponents have embraced the use of ICTs for the many pedagogical promises that it holds (Rosenberg, 2001).

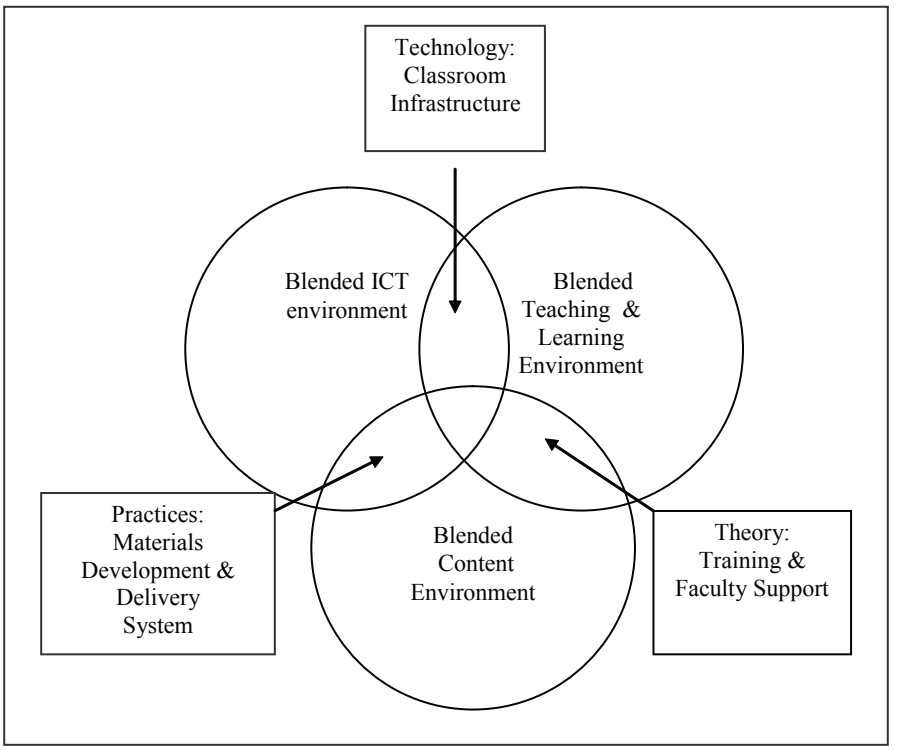
Even though higher education has appeared to be more comfortable with traditional forms of teaching and learning (Laurillard, 2002), it appears that a shift towards a blended approach to training is taking place as higher education institutes are trying several different forms of technology to find the right fit. Reports from the higher education sector identify similar trends. Learners most often do not want to lose the unique attributes of face-to-face teaching, but they do wish for the benefits of online learning (Bates, 2003). Thus, other research has shown that students who have participated in blended learning were more likely to take an online course in the future even though blended learning is not simply a matter of the combination of face-to-face and online instruction, but it has to have elements of social interaction (Heinze & Procter, 2006). There are three factors based on the three types of blended environment: blended IT environment, blended teaching and learning environment, and blended content environment, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 represents the conceptual design of the research and the specific phases of research that will be conducted. As Figure 1 illustrates, the blended IT environment can be categorized by using technology platforms from a variety of sources. Meanwhile, for blended teaching and learning environment, instructional technology and pedagogical methods strategies that reflect on teaching and learning situations are used. Blended content environment is used towards the development of content to accommodate a variety of learning styles, teaching approaches, and available technology tools. The blended approach can be useful if the educators will understand the conceptual phases in their strategies towards the blended approach in an e-learning environment for higher education.

BLENDED APPROACH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The term "blended learning" has been defined as method of educating that uses technology combined

Figure 1. Diagram of conceptual design for the blended approach



with traditional (stand-up) education or training (Smith, 2001) or "learning that employs multiple strategies, methods, and delivery systems" (Saunders & Werner, 2002). Meanwhile, Troha (2002) describes the term "blended learning" as combining the best features of online learning with the best features of classroom instruction. The blend may be a single instructional method combined with a presentation and distribution method, or a combination of multiple methods. In this article, the blended approach is taken into consideration as a combination of traditional or current educational technology that is provided for the educators and also some constituents of instructional process are facilitated online while other constituents are offered conventionally.

The critical factors for success will change with the implementation of the blended approach; prior experience of using technology; the and technological infrastructure. The lecturer will be the new key element in the success of the learning experience. Universities can help students achieve success by a combination of theory, technology, and practice. First, the blended ICT environment, or the functionality of technology infrastructure, should be ensured before the course is implemented. This should be backed up by technical support from either the lecturer or technological expert. Second, in the blended teaching and learning environment, human resources should be committed to the project at an early stage and lecturers should be selected based on their attitudes towards technology, teaching style, and ability to control the technology. Finally, in the blended content environment, where subject domain which material development and also the delivery system suitable the method approach. This is a paradigm elaborated in debates about existence, significance, and causes of the shifts towards neo and post-Fordism in the organization of work to which ICTs are argued to be central (Edwards & Usher, 2000).

Blended ICT Environment

E-learning systems open up new perspectives on knowledge transfer. Providing valuable content and elaborate interactivity structures could encourage the learner to discover knowledge on one's own initiative in a constructivist fashion. Applying Semantic Web