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THE EFFECTS OF BLENDED LEARNING IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH
THROUGH SHORT STORY AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of blended learning within academic achievements, motivation and learner autonomy constructs. The scope of this study is meant for the teaching of English through short story. A quasi-experimental study was conducted among 116 samples and two different teaching pedagogies were utilized; a blended learning classroom for the treatment groups and conventional learning classroom for the control groups. The data for students' academic achievement were collected from a post-test conducted. Whereas, data for motivation and learner autonomy were collected through sets of questionnaires adapted from preceding literatures. The differences subsist between the two groups were then analysed using the t-test. The findings revealed that there was no significant difference in the academic achievements. However, there were positive effects both on learner autonomy and student's motivation constructs in blended learning compared to conventional learning. As a conclusion, blended learning has improved learner autonomy and students' motivation for the teaching of English through short story. The implication of this study suggests that blended learning is suitable to be implemented for English subject within secondary schools if financial, equipment and technical support are provided.

KESAN PEMBELAJARAN TERADUN DALAM PENGAJARAN BAHASA INGGERIS MELALUI CERPEN DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR SEKOLAH MENENGAH

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini dijalankan untuk melihat keberkesanan pembelajaran teradun dalam konstruk pencapaian akademik, motivasi dan autonomi pelajar. Skop kajian ini adalah untuk tujuan pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris melalui cerpen. Kajian kuasi-eksperimen yang melibatkan seramai 116 sampel telah dijalankan dan dua kaedah pedagogi telah digunakan iaitu pembelajaran teradun untuk kumpulan eksperimen dan kaedah pembelajaran konvensional pula adalah untuk kumpulan kawalan. Data pencapaian akademik dikumpul daripada ujian pasca, sementara data untuk motivasi dan autonomi pelajar telah dikumpul melalui set soalan kaji selidik yang diadaptasi daripada kajian literatur. Perbezaan antara dua kumpulan dilakukan dengan menggunakan ujian-t. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa tiada perbezaan yang signifikan dalam pencapaian akademik tetapi terdapat keputusan yang positif bagi konstruk autonomi dan motivasi pelajar dalam pembelajaran teradun berbanding pembelajaran konvensional. Kesimpulannya, pembelajaran teradun dapat meningkatkan autonomi dan motivasi pelajar dalam pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris melalui cerpen. Implikasi kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa strategi pembelajaran teradun sesuai dilaksanakan bagi mata pelajaran Bahasa Inggeris pada peringkat sekolah menengah sekiranya bantuan dari segi kewangan, peralatan dan teknikal adalah mencukupi.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ELTC	English Language Teaching Centre
F2F	Face-To-Face
GPS	<i>Gred Purata Sekolah</i>
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
KBSM	<i>Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah</i>
K-NET	Knowledge-Net
LMS	Learning Management System
MRSM	<i>Maktab Rendah Sains MARA</i>
MSLQ	Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire
PMR	<i>Penilaian Menengah Rendah</i>
PT3	<i>Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3</i>
SBA	School Based Assessment
SPM	<i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</i>
T&L	Teaching and Learning
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



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1.1 Introduction

This chapter will present a study in contribution to the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) namely blended learning in education aiming at the teaching of vocabulary to the second language learners. The study is directing its focus within Malaysian secondary level only as it is by far the least of research interest being discussed. It will also make its contribution in the research area expanding the existing context to the understanding of the concerning issue. In this particular chapter, the emphasis on the understanding of the existing demand of the proposed notion will be presented. In later section, problems subsist within the status



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quo will be addressed, along with the conceptual framework of the entire proposal, limitations and later defines the scope of this study.

1.2 Research Background

The integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education is no longer a new matter in today's sphere. It is an ever-growing effort by many faculties in ensuring the success of these two elements namely technology and education to create more efficient and effective learning objectives. Teaching and learning process have been made simpler than ever before enabling communication to take place between teachers and students at schools in a very advanced way without difficulties. In addition, the use of technology has made teaching and learning process becoming more flexible and innovative (Vogel & Klassen, 2001) which at the same time attracting the learners to be interested with the lessons presented. According to Pajo and Wallace (2001), the use of ICT in education nowadays is impermissible than ever before since its powerful capacity to influence changes within learning environments subsists in education. The most essential elements offered by ICT are; a powerful learning environment besides transforming teaching and learning process allowing students to deal with knowledge in an active, self-directed and in a more constructive way (Volman & Van Eck, 2001) making it relevant to be considered. Among other benefits of the ICT integration in education based on available studies as listed by Rodriguez (2012) are; the possibility of implementing different teaching

strategies which able to cater to different types of students, the widespread of information to countless learners and institutions in global context, the optimization of meaningful learning with the use of authentic and up-dated contents, as well as opening up opportunity to cooperative learning milieu.

However, apart from all of the advantages mentioned before; technology on its own way is undeniably harmful if no proper measure is offered at hand. A careful planning has to be made in tailoring learning programs embedding the use of technology within. As Carr (2011) highlighted, technology has its own “potential detrimental effects on cognition, diminishing the capacity for concentration and contemplation”. This means learners will have a very short attention span in focusing on a topic after some period of time as they easily get switched off. Nevertheless, it is believed that everything that exists has its own advantages and disadvantages; strength and weaknesses. The same cycle goes to food, if it is not taken in moderation it can eventually lead to health problems. Vice versa with technology, if it is not used in proper way without proper planning and measures to handle problems that might arise; it can either be harmful to learners or just a surplus of time, effort and money invested.

Instead of focusing too much on the disadvantages of using technology in education, it is worth focusing on what the technology could do in improving learning process as well as on how to overcome problems that might occur. Among other challenges will and is now faced by the school teachers is the existing gap between the

generations. Imagine if children as early as one year old are now exposed to gadgets such as smart phones and tablets at home, what would the learning be in the future? Should the teachers persist with the conventional way of chalk and talk in delivering knowledge to these digital natives or also known as the Net generation? Should technology be neglected in this scenario? Learners of this generation are conditioned to the use of interactivity provided by the advancement of technology. This is the biggest challenge within the education system to adapt with. Whether it is highly likely or not, students are attuned to attractive images, animated characters and interactive effects and many more a technology can offer. All these are easily made available at home through smart phones, computers, video games or even television itself. Since children are accustomed to such interactivities which are accessibly available, according to Seattler (as cited in Sharma and Barrett, 2007) “books will soon be obsolete in the schools.... It is possible to teach every branch of human knowledge with the motion picture. Our school system will be completely changed in the next ten years”. Thus, affecting learners to expect language school teachers to offer opportunities to use technology in the lessons (Sharma & Barrett, 2007). Even worse, according to Baharin (2000) it is found that students who are not performing well at schools are due to inability to adapt with the teaching and learning process available. This could be the result of the demanding pressure from the ever-growing technology expansion. Human possess limited capacity of working memory during learning which is called the cognitive load thus forcing effective instructional strategies to accommodate this limitation (Reiser & Dempsey, 2007). Since there are separate channels in the memory system to process its own cognitive load limits such

as visual or pictorial information and auditory or verbal information as further examined by Reiser and Dempsey (2007), this supports the use of technology within learning as it is able to cater to these diversities in classrooms. As thoroughly articulated in the cone of learning by Edgar Dale (1969), only a few or very little of what is read, heard and seen in a conventional learning classrooms will be stored in the memory as opposing to action-learning techniques (which includes the use of technology) resulted in up to ninety percent retention of knowledge being transmitted to the brain. It is now the educator's role to shift and re-design the current instructional strategy being practised to integrate technology into classroom without dismissing the important role of a teacher.

Indeed, technology in education is seen as a powerful tool to allow students learn in a more interactive and non-threatening environment that enables them to give responses without feeling afraid of making mistakes especially to second language learners. Besides that, such innovative learning strategy helps to motivate students to be interested particularly in the learning process retaining more than what is expected. Additionally, note to be taken that ineffective classroom training is an example of delivery of plenty information that does not in any way foster learning (Reiser & Dempsey, 2007). Thus, a definition of an effective learning would include not only the importance of delivery media embedded in a lesson but as well as the instructional methods used to build the lessons supporting the achievement of the intended learning objective (Clark, 1994; Mayer, 2003; Reiser & Dempsey, 2007). This is therefore the most crucial element in crafting an effective lesson whereby the presence of

psychological events that leads to learning is set forth. As mentioned by Mayer (2003), the use of words and pictures harnesses learning rather than from words alone; proposing what is called a Multimedia Principle. However, as thoroughly examined by Reiser and Dempsey (2007) later on, even though visuals and audio can be highly essential in improving learning promoting effective cognitive processes in learners; irrelevant words, graphics and background music or sound effects may distract and do not necessarily motivate deeper learning and may also distract learners. It has also been identified that, the integration of technology in education focusing on the teaching of language has been regarded as more motivating, interactive, promotes discovery learning, allows meaningful feedback to occur, sanctions non-threatened interaction that allows communication, autonomous, time and money saving, besides the use of authentic and up dated materials in a learning process (Sharma & Barrett, 2007). Having mentioned the benefits and its' causative impacts on what is to be regarded as highly effective and ineffective, it is therefore crucial for educators in considering to plan as well as crafting more meaningful and most importantly effective lessons incorporating ICT within learning proposing Blended Learning to take in place.

Thus, looking at how influential technology in education can be; Malaysian government has taken imperative measures in ensuring the expansion of ICT in education as mentioned in the preliminary Education Blueprint 2013 into a stern position. This blueprint is developed specifically directing the Malaysian education system towards the understanding of current performance and challenges in the



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education system with a focus on improving access to education, raising standards (quality), and in closing achievement gaps (equity) as stated in the blueprint. Technology in education is seen as a powerful medium to thrive one of the nation's aspirations in achieving a system in maximising students' outcomes as expected. Among the aforementioned efforts are to leverage ICT to scale up quality learning across the nation constituting internet accessibility, providing virtual learning environment, augmenting online best practices content on a video library, and maximum use of ICT for distance and self-paced learning for a more customised learning experience.



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This effort has opened up a new pathway for the teaching purposes in the nation especially to be expanded widely without constrain. At the same time, this transformational shift is seen to expand opportunity to the flexibility and creativity in the teaching of English course primarily as concerning issues from the report revealed that; only 28% of students achieved a minimum credit in the 2011 Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) or Malaysian Certificate of Education for English paper against Cambridge 1119 standards. On top of that, poor English proficiency among fresh graduates has, also been consistently ranked as one of the top five issues facing Malaysian employers since 2006. Apart of the proposed solutions, international research reckoned that more exposure time than the current 15-20% is required for students to achieve operational proficiency if the nation wants to focus on the success of learning the language.



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In the effort of integrating ICT within the education system, the study seeks to embrace this change with a clear objective in refining the current conventional teaching and learning strategy to uncover the potentials of blended learning in Malaysian context. Despite the fact that blended learning is still at its infancy stage in Malaysia, the use of technology in teaching and learning process has been widely practised by almost all teachers in the country without having the consciousness of its existence. Unfortunately, there is no proper theoretical framework that serves to guide these teachers in conducting a more constructive learning strategy with the use of technology. Although blended learning has been long established since the birth of blended learning, the sentience of its potentially powerful capacity in transforming the current education system being practised particularly in Malaysia is still in vague.

1.3 Problem Statement

There has been an alarming issue on the declining of English proficiency level among MRSM Felda students predominantly. The aforementioned issue has been statistically supported based on the previous Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) or Lower Secondary Assessment whereby out of 8 subjects namely Mathematics, Science, Islamic Education, Geography, History, Study Skill, English, and Bahasa Malaysia; English scored the last ranking with a GPS of 1.4242 in 2012 meanwhile a slight improvement on the grade with a GPS of 1.2270 in 2013. In spite of the slight improvement on GPS grade in 2013, English subject remains in the bottom ranking

compared to other seven subjects especially Mathematics and Science with the GPS grades of 1.0184 (in year 2012) and 1.0061 (in year 2013), meanwhile 1.0736 (in year 2012) and 1.1030 (in year 2013) respectively.

Due to the existing statistical difference, English subject thus has been regarded as the most critical subject as to be compared to other core subjects namely Mathematics and Science in the concerning school. In accordance to our findings, based from the item analysis provided, it has been evaluated that from both the essay writing section (paper 2) and multiple choice question (paper 1); vocabulary has always been one of the major causes from preventing the students to score good grades for the paper. Additionally, similar situation has been somewhat prolonged and this can be seen within Sijil Pelajaran Menengah (SPM) results among the upper secondary level students with a GPS of 1.7044 (in year 2012) and a drop of 0.6670 with a GPS of 2.3714 (in year 2013). It is therefore seen that in order to overcome this situation, the study will highlight on the teaching and learning of vocabulary through literature component primarily short story as a preventive measure for intervention purposes.

Having that, it is therefore seen that in order to overcome this situation, it is crucial to identify and understand the suitable pedagogical practices for teaching literature component. Advocates of the nation argue that this new generation has grown up in media-rich digital environment and therefore researcher believed that the students have a greater interest if blended learning pedagogical practices are

implemented to improve the overall English result. Indeed there is a growing corpus of research suggests that blended learning have been found to be significantly related to students' academic performance from early childhood education to tertiary education. In response to this situation, researcher has hypothesised that blended learning pedagogical practices could be found a good pedagogical practices for secondary students especially in learning short story.

Apart from the existing problems additionally, studies have identified various problems attached to the English language learning. Among the problems are subjected to students' motivation, attitudes and awareness of the target language (Muffah & Rafik, 2013). Arising from this motion, it is deemed more accurate to teach English through short story with the new blended pedagogical practices. Indeed, from the literature, it appears that many technology based studies have highlighted the importance of blended learning in the process of improving students' motivation, attitudes and awareness and thus improve their academic results.

Furthermore, so far, very little in the past studies have been paid to the position of blended learning in assessment. This study is a step towards understanding how far the new blended pedagogical practices could contribute to school based assessment (SBA). According to the Ministry of Education, SBA is an effort towards educational transformation plan substituting the previous examination-based assessment which was known as Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) to School Based Assessment (SBA) or as Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3 (PT3) among the lower secondary students; a

new pedagogical reform is envisaged within the conventional teaching practices. SBA is an effort towards a more holistic achievement-standard assessment and is still at its infancy stage undergoing its developmental processes in Malaysia. Conversely, this newly introduced learning system has indirectly questioned the kind of system that these students will undergo in upper secondary learning. Does the implementation of School Based Assessment require necessary amendment within the upper secondary learning syllabus in order to accommodate the new system? If so, will conventional teaching being practised by the teachers still be relevant in the future? There are a few number of issues concerning the implementation of SBA nevertheless, this study will only be focusing on the pedagogical transformation in the classroom setting. At the same time, the study seeks for possibilities to further enhance and discover a possible support system to affluence the newly practised curriculum for the betterment.

Alongside, there is a paucity of research that describe how blended learning on learner autonomy. Indeed to acculturate learner autonomy among the students it is highly recommended to craft a more active and challenging learning environment involving the 21st century learning skills that will equip and prepare the students for a more demanding future. As MRSM is established as one of the high-performing schools in Malaysia; such issue should not be the main concern or at least not as critical as it is being moulded into. This has been a worrying issue among the teachers and management in the institution therefore in order to improve the situation; a practical resolution needs to be identified in order to unravel this situation.

1.4 Research Purpose and Objective

The focus of this chapter is to highlight on the purpose of the study and its direction in the improvement of current teaching practices exercised by the teachers involved. The aim of this research paper is to investigate the effectiveness of implementing blended learning among boarding school students in learning English through short story. Objectives of the study are:

1.4.1 To investigate whether blended learning can improve students' academic achievement in learning English compared to conventional learning practices.

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1.4.2 To investigate whether blended learning has greater impact on students' motivation in learning English through short story compared to conventional learning practices.

1.4.3 To investigate whether blended learning is more effective in inculcating learner autonomy among students compared to conventional learning practices.

1.4.4 To understand the strengths and weaknesses that might occur in conducting blended learning from teachers' and students' perspectives.

1.5 Research Question

- 1.5.1 Can blended learning improve students' academic achievement in learning English compared to conventional instruction method?
- 1.5.2 Does blended learning have greater impact on students' motivation in learning English through short story compared to conventional instruction method?
- 1.5.3 Is blended learning effective in inculcating learner autonomy among students?
- 1.5.4 What are the strengths and weaknesses that might occur in conducting blended learning from teachers' and students' perspectives?

1.6 Research Hypothesis

The research hypotheses are as follows:

- H1: There is a significant difference in the academic achievement of learners using blended learning compared to conventional instruction method.
- H2: There is a significant difference in the students' motivation and the use of blended learning in learning English through short story.
- H3: There is a significant difference in the learner autonomy and the use of blended learning in learning English through short story.