STUDENTS’ PREPAREDNESS FOR BLENDED LEARNING THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORK SITES: INSPIRING ACTIVE LEARNERS

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Abstract
Transformation of Malaysia’s higher education had been a national focus since the introduction of the Industrial Master Plan 3 (IMP3) in 2006. The higher education sector was identified as one of the key engine for the nation's economic growth and development. It was expected that the number of international students will reach 200,000 by the year 2020. Malaysia's ability to realise this target is subject to the institutions ability in offering and ensuring quality education. The implementation of blended learning environment had been identified as one of the main strategies that can ensure quality education and produce active learners. There are numerous models for the execution of blended learning environment across the globe. One of the increasingly dominant modes is the execution of blended learning environment via Social Network Sites (SNS). Success of this model is largely subjected to the acceptance level among the students. However, there are still a limited number of studies that explore students’ acceptance of blended learning using SNS. This paper seeks out to bridge some of the gaps in the literature. Specifically, the study aims to determine the students’ preparedness for blended learning through SNS. This was done via a survey that gauge their perception based on their prior knowledge and experiences. Moreover, the students were asked to reflect on how much the SNS tool inspired them into becoming active learners. The paper also discusses the benefits and challenges in executing of blended learning environment via SNS.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Active Learner, Social Network Site (SNS).

1 INTRODUCTION
Transformation of Malaysia’s higher education had been a national focus since the introduction of the Industrial Master Plan 3 (IMP3) in 2006. The higher education sector was identified as one of the key engine for the nation's economic growth and development. It was expected that the number of international students will reach 200,000 by the year 2020. Malaysia's ability to realise this target is subject to the institutions ability in offering and ensuring quality education. The implementation of blended learning environment had been identified as one of the main strategies that can ensure quality education and produce active learners. There are numerous models for the execution of blended learning environment across the globe. One of the increasingly dominant modes is the execution of blended learning environment via Social Network Sites (SNS). Success of this model is largely subjected to the acceptance level among the students. However, there are still a limited number of studies that explore students’ acceptance of blended learning using SNS.

1.1 Blended Learning
Blended Learning “...is the combination of face to face learning and online learning.”(Hisham, Che, & Abu Bakar, 2006). The Ministry of Education shifted the policy in the year 2010 promoting ICT for education. The shifted strategy included the alternative pedagogical model called - blended learning. Blended learning incorporates conventional approach that uses ICT as the mediated-tools (Graham, in press; Reay, 2001; Rooney, 2003). ICT or e-learning tools provide a supportive learning experience (Graham, in press; Reay, 2001; Rooney, 2003). Implementation of blended learning needs to be considered with the capabilities and acceptance from both educators and students. Therefore, there are three components of enabler that need to be considered during implementation of the blended...
learning: Connection, Content, and Confident (Mohd Yusof, Daniel, Low, & Aziz, 2014; Ponter & Brown, 2007; Yusof & Aziz, 2010; Yusof, Daniel, Low, & Aziz, 2013). Based on Fig.1, the concept of blended learning focuses on general conceptual model between 3C enabler and policy of blended learning.

![Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Blended Learning modified from Yusof, Daniel, Low, and Aziz (2011).](chart)

### 1.2 Social Network Sites

According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), the Social Network Site (SNS) is a web portal that provides service for individuals to create a public or semi-public identity profile within the system coverage. Moreover, the profile was blended with the other users that share the same connection Based on Fig. 2, Boyd and Ellison (2007) mapping out the timeline of SNS starting from 1997. The user can view and negotiate their list of connection and those created by others in the same system. The SNS includes Facebook, Google+ and LinkedIn integrating real-time module to easy update the status and to be attached with text, audio, message, and video.

### 1.3 Blended Learning through Social Network Sites

The Social Network Sites become the key enable to utilize the technology and the sites are applied in teaching and learning in higher education (DeSchryver, Mishra, Koehleer, & Francis, 2009; Veletsianos & Navarrete, 2012). It becomes one of the alternative communication tools favoured by Generation Y (Gen-Y). The characteristic of Social Networking Sites are described in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaging</td>
<td>Real time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>Simple steps for the students, Low cost technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Online PC / Laptop / Tablets Smartphones; Android and iOS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User accessibility</td>
<td>Lecturers / Experts Students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Elements of Social Networking Sites.
2 PRELIMINARY STUDY

2.1 Purposed
The study was conducted to identify the student’s acceptance of the blended learning environment in studio-based classroom. The setting of studio-based classroom was implemented in an institution that focuses on creative technology as the ideal learning environment.

2.2 Participation and Instrument

For the preliminary study (Please refer Fig. 3), the online survey instrument was conducted among 80 students in three different groups of studio courses taught by first author in Faculty Creative Technology and Heritage, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia. Seventy seven percent of the participants are female students. In the faculty, the ratio between males and females was one to three (1:3). The data was gathered through a survey among these students. Moreover, the interview was also conducted intending to capture level of acceptance on SNS for student’s learning environment.
2.3 Finding and Discussion

Firstly, the level of ICT knowledge among these students was collected. The result in Table 2 indicated the capabilities of students in the institution utilizing the ICT knowledge for academic purposes. Only Fifty percent of the students applied the basic ICT knowledge on academic purposes such as report writing, preparation the presentation, and browsing for information via internet browser. Forty nine percent found in intermediate category that utilizing the ICT knowledge for developing, designing and creating creative contents. Table 3 shows the comparing hours of ICT usage for both academic and personal purposes. The usage of students for the personal purposes recorded higher percentage comparing to those done in academic areas.

Table 2: Level of ICT Knowledge Applied in Academic Purposed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: The Usage of ICT within A Week.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Less than 5</th>
<th>6-10</th>
<th>11-15</th>
<th>16-20</th>
<th>21-25</th>
<th>26-30</th>
<th>31-35</th>
<th>more than 35</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on Table 3, the majority of students use notebook computer as their ICT tools to connect their social networking sites. Thus, smartphone becomes the alternative ICT tools because of the higher level of mobility of the device.

Table 4: ICT Devices Frequently Used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Devices</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desktop computer</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notebook computer</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eReading device (Kindle, iPad)</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handheld mobile browser (iPod Touch, etc.)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smartphone (web-enabled iPhone, Palm Pre, etc.)</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows that the percentage of SNS account subscribed by the active students in the institution. Facebook was recorded as the highest because; the management of faculty utilizes Facebook as one of communication tools to make announcements.

Table 5: Percentage of Social Networking Site Account.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SNS</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Google+</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>Youtube</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3.1 Benefits

The interviews among students were also conducted to identify the student's acceptance on social media as tools in blended learning environment. It is found that students are capable of sharing their knowledge to various group. Moreover, the information could be faster in distribution among others.

Student 12: “…gain the information from any group. That’s the easy way to get the lecture slide from that group”

Student 20 said that the capabilities of social network absorbing the knowledge from others who share the information through the social network site are magnificent. They keep updating and checking the information regularly.

Student 20: “by communicating with lots of people in social networks can share knowledge with them and it helps me to enhance my knowledge”

Moreover, the students believe that taking note using SNS could minimize their time to spread information comparing to verbal means. The type of information includes text, image, sound and movie clip.

Student 45: “Yes, we could take note through SNS without troubling anyone and it is faster than telling people verbally. Students can obtain knowledge faster.”

2.3.2 Challenges

The students also expressed that the SNS was not an appropriate option for the studies in academic purposes because the information was not reliable.

Student 25: “No. I do not like SNS because it does not have to do with learning and it is only for the purpose of conveying messages and more reckless.”

The overload of unimportant messages distracts the flow of access in related information to the topic their study.

Student 26: “SNS help me a bit but too much unimportant message from a group chat makes ones or people distract to gain knowledge and information”

3 CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, the social network sites are potential in communicating the students among themselves and communities outside the institution. The institution was plans to use SNS as a platform of learning tools. However, the reliability of information is still questionable when the unimportant messages are heavily blended in the SNS.

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REFERENCES


