

Great expectations: Promoting factors in the use of eLearn@USM

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Abstract

21st century marked the advancement of teaching and learning environment. E-Learning has been regarded as part and parcel of educational platform that is recognized by many institutions. University Sains Malaysia, as one of the renowned higher educational institutions in Malaysia has introduced eLearn@USM an online learning platform. This paper explores the possible factors that promote the use of eLearn@USM among local and international postgraduate students. Through qualitative methodology, two local students and two international students were interviewed. The findings showed that there are various factors that promote the use of eLearn@USM among local and international postgraduate students. From the analysis, international students have more intrinsic motivation factor such as the curiosity to learn, the challenges of the eLearn@USM activities, the cooperation from students and instructor for some subject. Meanwhile, local students are more influenced by the extrinsic motivation such as marks and also the obligation to instruction order. Initiated from the findings, the study concludes that there is a need for new directions and strategies on the use of eLearn@USM for both instructors and students. This will eventually raise more interest among the students to use eLearn@USM. Overall, apart from setting up an e-learning platform from sharing and collaborating and further solving issues and sharing resources, more importantly, there is a need to know the promoting factors of the platform towards the learners. Therefore, this study is significant to enlighten the motivational factors among students in using online platform.

Keywords: *Self-Regulated Learning, Online Learning, e-Learning, Challenges*

1. Introduction

There is no exact meaning of self-regulated learning across study, due to multidimensional construct which is difficult to describe [1]. According to Zimmerman [2], self-regulated learners are “Metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviourally active participants in their own learning process”. A metacognitively self-regulated learner is a person “who plans, organizes, self-instructs, self-monitors, and self-evaluates”. Motivationally self-regulated learners “perceive themselves as competent, self-efficacious, and autonomous”. Since this study took place in an e-learning environment, the third construct (behaviourally active) for self-regulated learning would be the e-learning environment. “Behaviourally active” is defined by Zimmerman² as applying to a person who “selects, structures, and creates environments that optimize learning”.

There is evidence that at the tertiary level, Malaysia is moving away from didactic approaches to teaching and learning [3, 4]. This study especially aims to examine the significant differences of students’ perception and level of self-regulated learning among local and international postgraduate students, to examine the factors that promote self-regulated learning of local and international postgraduate students.

The “engine” behind e-learning is i) Instructional Technology, ii) the variable of knowing how student think [5]. The best instructional technology applied will not be effective and efficient with-

out knowing how students think needless to say self-regulated learning and furthermore, e-learning. Therefore, it is important to study what are the factors that promote the use of eLearn@USM to help towards improvising eLearn@USM.

2. Methodology

This research explored the promoting factors among local and international students in the use of eLearn@USM. The qualitative approach has been selected because the aim is to provide a rich picture of experience of all involve during the study. In qualitative interview, precision in description and stringency in meaning interpretation equal to exactness in quantitative measurement. 2 local postgraduate students and 2 international postgraduate students were chosen in the study. Twenty one open-ended questions has been design and tested. These same questions then are asked to all participants. The answer then being transcribed and analyzed. Each instructor in Centre for Instructional & Multimedia uses eLearn@USM as their main platform to share their notes or assignments, as a platform to students submit the assignments, to share students mark etc. Some of the subjects required their students to participate in their e-forum that is in the eLearn@USM. According to a research by Masood and Musman [6] from the research by Atan and Alias [7], the average of 24% of students and lecturers accessing the system in daily basis. Therefore, this study is important to find out the promoting factors in the use of eLearn@USM.

3. Findings

There are the possible factors that promote the use of eLearn@USM among local and international postgraduate students to use eLearn@USM. The themes were categorized to internal motivation and external motivation. Internal motivation factors are challenge, curiosity, control, fantasy, competition, cooperation and recognition, while external motivation which are integrated regulation, introjected regulation, and external regulation and identified regulation. In this study, the findings revealed that the promoting factors are challenge (intrinsic motivation), curiosity (intrinsic motivation), control (intrinsic motivation), cooperation (intrinsic motivation), obligation (extrinsic motivation) and reward (extrinsic motivation).

Challenge is one of the most powerful individual factors that influence intrinsic motivation. For example, it is happen when they do activities in the eLearn@USM towards goal, or uncertainty goal, get the feedback, or their self-esteem. There are only International1 and International2 that positive towards activities in eLearn@USM. They love the activities and suggest for more activities. According to International1, the activities in the eLearn@USM is the main factor that encourage him for accessing it.

“It is definitely the activities that encourage me to access eLearn@USM. With the activities I must use the eLearn@USM. For example we have forum and we have to participate.

“The course that I usually access is Course1, because of the activities. The lecturer uploaded the activities and some materials in the eLearn@USM. That is why I accessing it”

“I will motivate to use eLearn@USM in order to do the activities. It just like a goal, I need to use eLearn@USM to achieve my goal.”

Agreed with the International1, International2 also like the activities in eLearn@USM.

“Activities in eLearn@USM motivate me because it is rich of sources of information that can be accessed in a short time.”

“The lecturers are eager to do some activities with the students in eLearn@USM that encourage me to interact and it’s challenging me.”

With regard to curiosity, it can be referred to the inner drive that motivate student to use eLearn@USM as a learning medium. Finding from the interview have found that, International1 has emphasize that the key factor that he use eLearn@USM is his curiosity to learn.

“If there is no mark given I will still participate in eLearn@USM activities because it is about learning”

“Some of students are participating in the activities in eLearn@USM, but some of them not participate because some of them maybe do not really like to learn. But for me, if I don’t like to learn, I had travelled all the way from my country. The degree that I already have will be enough.”

On the other hand, International2 like the forum discussion because she knows the important of the learning that happen in the discussion forums.

“I like to have discussion because I know through the discussion the information is exchange and kept for a long term”

Under intrinsic motivation, control is another factor that has been discovered. Local1 stated that, all the content in the eLearn@USM is ease his student life.

“Most of the content in e-Learn to make me motivated such as submitting assignments. If I have submitted my assignment on time, and I’m eager to know what the next message by lecturer will be.”

On the other hand, cooperation happens when the students feel satisfaction in helping their friends to achieve their goals. Besides when students get cooperation from others, it will increase the innate feeling of engagement, pleasure and satisfaction in achieving goal. According to International2, she is really enjoying discussion in eLearn@USM forums’.

“When we get feedback in the activity in eLearn@USM, we will find different advice ideas that help us without feeling frustrated and bored.”

Besides, International2 really motivated in the forum as she said “I like to engage myself with my colleagues in the discussion” For International1, he really motivated to a course when the instructor is use the eLearn@USM mostly for the activity.

“..... Usually when we go to her class, she already uploads the lecture and some activities. So we do the activities and submit.”

One of the introjected regulations is obligation. Introjected regulation factor is driven by the internal factor like obligation or guilt. The interview has found out International1 feels like all the activities uploaded by the instructor with or without mark is a must for him.

“For me, everything uploaded by the lecturer is a compulsory for students”

As for Local2, he accessing eLearn@USM because of the obligation of the instructor instruction.

“I’m accessing eLearn@USM only for the assignment or discussion. I accessing it only because of the instruction from the lecturer.”

Another external motivation factors is extended regulation which can be driven by reward or punishment. Local1 believed he only use eLearn@USM for submitting assignment and do online activities require by the instructor for marks.

“I have been doing my normal routine from my bachelor days until now, such as submitting my assignment, online activities for mark such as group discussion and more.”

Local2 also emphasize that marks is the only key factor for him to participating in e-learning activities.

“eLearn@USM is burdensome but the only thing motivate me is the mark that I will get from the assignment. That is why I must participate in the activities”

International2 also state that some students participate in the only for marks.

“Some of the learner participate in the forum is only to get marks”

Agreed with that, International1 also state that others student only active in forum that marks will be given to whom participate in the forum.

“It is sad when there is in online forum, where I am the only one who start the forum, but there is no one replying on that, because there is no mark given for it”

International1 also state that mark will encourage him to participate in the eLearn@USM activities.

4. Discussion and conclusion

There are possible factors that promote the use of eLearn@USM among local and international postgraduate students. The first factors are the activities in the eLearn@USM. For some courses the instructor are utilizing the eLearn@USM, they upload the activities, notes and also submit the assignment using the eLearn@USM. Both of international students was encouraged by the activities that offer challenge in the eLearn@USM. It shows that when the instructor is fully utilizing the eLearn@USM it will encourage students to participate. The goals and performance feedback are the important element in the each challenge that will enhance self-esteem to the students that involve in the activity [8]. Another possible factor also relate to marks given by the instructor when students participate in the activities and also the obligation to the instructor. Both local students and International1 are motivated by the rewards given for the involvement in eLearn@USM. When the instructors upload the activities in the eLearn@USM, they make the involvement of students as compulsory and the marks will be given according the involvement. The external and internal pressure will force the student to involve in the activities in the eLearn@USM. Another factor is the intrinsic factor which is the curiosity to learn. The finding has found that both international students have the curiosity to learn. Both of them love to learn. Eventhough there is no mark given; they still have the willingness to join the activities in the eLearn@USM. Malone & Lepper [8] state, curiosity can be stimulate by the designing environment. The sense of curiosity to learn is the key factor they come over to Malaysia to study for their master's degree.

As the conclusion, international students have more intrinsic motivation factor such as the curiosity to learn, the challenges of the eLearn@USM activities as well as the cooperation from students and instructor. Meanwhile, local students are more influenced by the extrinsic motivation such as marks and also the obligation to instruction order. It can be concluded that there is a need for a new directions and strategies on the use of eLearn@USM for both instructors and students to raise interest among the students to use eLearn@USM. Apart from setting up an e-learning platform, more importantly, there is a need to explore the promoting factors of the eLearn@USM as an online platform.

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