A STUDY ON THE APPLICATION OF NICENET FOR LEARNING

KANG SIAN LEE

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SPECIALLY DEDICATED TO MY BELOVED FAMILY, HANN AND FRIENDS.

THANK YOU!

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to investigate how KUiTTHO students use an online forum in the process of learning; how KUiTTHO students communicate with their lecturer and the socio-linguistic aspect of using and online platform. The participants of this research were students from Electrical Department who were taking the subject-Electric and Magnet subject in KUiTTHO. The number of the students in the sample class was 63. This research is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The researcher used four methods in the data collection. They were interview, observation, content analysis and questionnaire. The online platform used to conduct this research was Nicenet. At the end of this research, the finding suggests that online classroom should be applied into the process of teaching and learning in institution of higher education in Malaysia such as KUiTTHO.

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ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini dijalankan adalah untuk menyelidik bagaimana memanfaatkan pembelajaran melalui kelas maya; bagaimana pelajar-pelajar berkomunikasi dengan pensyarah dan aspek social dalam mengikuti kelas maya di kalangan pelajar-pelajar KUiTTHO. Peserta-peserta untuk pembelajaran melalui kelas maya ini ialah pelajar dibawah Jabatan Kejuruteraan Elektrik yang mengambil subjek -Elektrik dan Magnet. Bilangan pelajar di dalam kelas yang dipilih sebagai sampel kajian adalah seramai 63 orang. Kajian ini adalah kombinasi daripada kaedah kualitatif dan kuantitatif. Penyelidik menggunakan empat jenis kaedah metodologi iaitu: temuramah, pemerhatian, analisis kandungan dan borang soal selidik. "*Online platform*" yang digunakan dalam kajian ini ialah Nicenet. Di akhir kajian ini, dapatan menunjukkan bahawa pembelajaran melalui kelas maya harus diaplikasikan ke dalam proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran di Intitut Pengajian Tinggi Awam Malaysia seperti KUiTTHO.

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CHAPTER I

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Recent developments in computer hardware, software, and communication technologies create exciting new opportunities for the educational use of these technologies. Throughout the history of human technologies, advances in technology have powered paradigmatic shifts in education (Frick, 1991). Technology changes both what we can do and what we decide is best to do and big shifts in culture cannot occur until the tools are available.

Development of the technology lead colleges and universities today in transition. Factors contributing to that transition are economic pressures from mounting costs, demands by the business world for graduates who are able to function in a knowledge society, and greater diversity among students who go on for higher education. The response of many institutions to these changes is the development of online learning. The online classroom is a potentially powerful teaching and learning arena in which new practices and new relationships can make significant contributions to learning. In order to successfully navigate the power of this medium in education, institutions must be trained not only to use technology, but also to shift the ways in which they organize and deliver material. This shift can maximize the potential for learners to take charge of their own learning process and can facilitate the development of a sense of community among learners. (Palloff, R. M and Pratt, K., 2002)

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Nowadays, the internet already offers a great education a wealth of global information such as remote libraries, discussion groups, and computer conferences, but also connecting among students and between teachers and students beyond traditional classrooms. There are numerous cases documented in the past using computer-mediated communication (CMC) to connect a teacher and students at a distance or to facilitate active learning by implementing text based discussion among students outside the classroom. Successful integration of CMC into the curriculum, however, depends on one's ability to design and uses CMC applications that meet course goals, delivery goals or both. With the internet, students can be connected not only to the students on the same campus but also to those who are in different universities or even in foreign countries. Computer mediated communication (CMC) actually refers to any exchange of messages through electronic media that involves the use of computers, which encompasses: electronic mail, electronic bulletin board systems (BBS), news distribution systems and conferencing systems. In CMC, most communication is done in only textual mode, removing social contextual cues which are apparent in face-to-face communication.

The type of change enabled by computer mediated communication (CMC) does not just involve adding new technology to old ways of organizing teaching and learning (Moore, 1993). CMC promotes a type of interaction that is often lacking in the traditional teacher-based classroom. It allows learners the freedom to explore alternative pathway to find and develop their own styles of learning. Computers are not a threat to the teacher (although the role of the teacher must change when using them), but computers may threaten the chalkboard. Computer technologies allow professionals to share with students tools that being used daily. Further, educators can also provide guidance to help students develop meaningful ways to construct their own knowledge.

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1.2 Statement of Problems

It cannot be denied that technology has advanced rapidly over the last few years. With ever increasing amount of information for students to process, it is no longer acceptable for colleges and universities to only teach facts. These educational centers are being challenged to equip students with the skills necessary to be life- long learners. The focus now is to develop students' reasoning skills so that they can synthesize, analyze and integrate material in the process of learning. To meet these challenges, many faculties have moved away from a teacher-centered, lecture format for dispensing knowledge to a collaborative, students centered environment for creating knowledge.

From an interview done with the students who are now studying in KUiTTHO (2002), the researcher found the following problems faced by them while they were studying in KUiTTHO.

- They felt that traditional way of learning consumed a lot of time.
- They were shy to express their opinions in class.
- The Internet and computer facilities provided were not enough.
- They spent a lot of money and time in printing and binding the assignments.
- They faced problems in getting extra reading materials for lack of books in the library and also the books were not the latest.
- They felt that traditional way of teaching was not appropriate with modern times but it depended on subjects taught.

In this research, the researcher wanted to investigate whether the application of online classroom such as in the teaching and learning process among KUiTTHO students will bring benefit to the teaching and learning process.

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1.3 Purposes of the Study

The purposes of the research are:

1. To investigate how KUiTTHO students use an online forum in the process of learning.
2. To investigate how KUiTTHO students communicate in a virtual environment..
3. To investigate the socio-linguistic aspect of using an online platform among KUiTTHO students.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions of the research are:

1. Does the use of an online platform help KUiTTHO students in undestanding their study?
2. What is the trend of students-students communication?
3. How do they behave inside and outside the online classroom?
4. What were the topics discussed by KUiTTHO students inside the online classroom?

1.5 Limitations of Study

Sample of the research is the chosen class in KUiTTHO. The subject chosen in conducted an online classroom is Electric and Magnet. Due to the limitation of time, the experiment was only carried out with the students for about eight weeks.

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1.6 Definition of Terms

1.6.1 Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)

CMC signifies the ways in which telecommunication technologies have merged with computers and computer networks to give us new tools to support teaching and learning. CMC describes the ways we humans use computer systems and networks to transfer, store, and retrieve information.

1.6.2 Face-to-Face (F2F) Communication

Face-to-Face is a direct way of communication. It is considered essential in effective outcomes in business, education and personal relationships (Irani, 1998). In this research F2F communication refer to the communication between students and lecturer in the normal class.

1.6.3 Computer Conferencing

From a behavioural perspective Computer conferencing allows for interactive, though not real time, group communication, group learning or group decision making. From a technical perspectives computer conferencing refers to a type of networked computer software that facilitates structured asynchronous communications accessed by a personal computer via a computer network or modem.

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1.6.4 Nicenet

Nicenet is a free web server that hosts classrooms on the internet. By using Nicenet, an instructor may create a classroom, post topics, run discussion groups, add informational links, make announcements and so forth.

1.6.5 Collaborative Learning

An instruction method in which students work in group toward a common academic goal. Collaborative learning processes assist students to achieve deeper levels of knowledge generation through the creation of shared goal, shared exploration and a shared process of meaning-making. In this research, collaborative learning refers to learning process through online classroom.

1.6.6 Autonomous Learning

Autonomous learning is self managed learning. It means that the learner has much of the responsibility for planning and organizing their learning, for doing it, for assessing its value to him or herself and even for suggesting the mark that the work produced should get. In this research, autonomous learning refers to the topics of conferencing that being posted by the participants of the class shows that they are learning independently.

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1.6.7 Authentic Learning

Authentic learning says that... we should learn what happens in the 'real world', and become cognitive apprentices to the expert. It allow students to explore, discover, discuss, and meaningfully construct concepts and relationships in contexts that involve real world problems and projects that are relevant and interesting to the learner.
In this research, authentic learning refers to the topics which are related to their real life that being discussed by the students inside the Nicenet.

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CHAPTER II

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CHAPTER II

LITERTURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

According to Berge and Collins (1995), computer Mediated Communication (CMC) is changing instructional methods in several ways, including: (1) generating improved technological tools that allow classes to use fuller range of interactive methodologies, and (2) encouraging instructors and administrators to pay more attention to the instructional design of courses. Both of these factors can improve quality, quantity and pattern of communication in the skills students practice during learning.

Berge and Collins (1995) also stated that educators often categorize the use of CMC in three ways: for conferencing, informatics and computer assisted instruction (CAI). Computer conferencing provides e-mail, interactive messaging, and discussion. Informatics include library online public access catalogs (OPACs), interactive access to remote databases, program/ data archieve sites, campus wide information systems (CWIS), wide area information systems (WAIS) and information managers, such as Gopher and Veronica. In CAI, the computer is used to structured and manage both the presentation of information and the possible responses available to the human user.

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2.2 Uses of Computer Conferencing, Informatics and Computer Aided Instruction (CAI)

The uses of computer conferencing, informatics and CAI are:

- Mentoring such as advising and guiding students.
- Project based instruction, either within the classroom or in projects involving community, national or international problem solving.
- Didactic teaching that is supplying course content, posting assigmrnts, or other information related to course work.
- Retrieval of information from online information archives such as OPACs, ERIC an commercial databases.
- Interactive chat used to brainstorm with teachers or peer and to maintain social relationships.
- Facilitating collaboration
- Individual and group presentations.
- Practice and experience using emerging technologies that may be intrinsically useful in today's society.

2.3 Computer Conferencing

Computer conferencing involves using computers for communications between the members of a group. In the context of higher education, students would typically use a computer to take part in a discussion of issues relevant to their course, with their lecturer acting as moderator of the discussion. Such a description would include the fashionable concept of video conferencing in which all participants are involved at the same time from different locations. However, the form of conferencing discussed here relies on much less advanced technology, with the advantage that it can be implemented on many more computers and allows students to participate without time constraints.

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