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## Engaging Vocational College Students through Blended Learning: Improving Class Attendance and Participation

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### Abstract

Perfection is difficult to achieve if one is teaching knowledge skills to the students in Vocational College for their time courses using the conventional learning methods currently practiced. Blended learning combines two methods for e-learning and also face-to-face inside or outside the classroom. Previously, the students had undertaken a traditional face-to-face classroom delivery for a module on teaching and learning. Attendance for the lectures was poor and interaction between the lecturer and students was limited. Using the collaboration concept of the “sharing is caring” which is the potential a student can achieve given the guidance of a teacher and the collaboration of others, the module focused the learning sessions on scenarios where students worked in groups to achieve an answer to the problems within the scenarios. The core of the module is an e-learning package on mentorship in vocational learning which is named “Voc-Learning”. Built around this are a series of face-to-face group work sessions, short lectures, web application and an online reflective discussion using Web 2.0 technologies. Some of the applications that were utilized in Web 2.0 have been explored but not much research has been done in the vocational field.

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### 1. Introduction

The rising of student attendance and absence prevention have always been parts of concern for teachers as well as society members and parents (Abdul Rahim & Chia, 2014). Students who are not in school cannot learn and frequently drop out. Attendance problems and truancy are usually signs to dropping out of school. Students with

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attendance problems are likely to develop negative social behaviours and personal practices not acceptable in the skill world (Zaliza, Mohd Safarin & Ridzwan, 2014).

Vocational Education is a practice-oriented approach to education and emphasises on what to do in the workplace as a result of either learning to meet the requirements of the career or improving student performance on the skill level to be possessed. Students must follow the lessons and skill test based on the standards set by a field of work.

The role of the Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) should be considered as a medium that can be combined with elements of e-learning in educational technology and give a better impression on the students, vocational college (VC) and also in terms of careers (Muhamad Azhar, Mohamad & Amri, 2013). The phenomenon at work today is different from the past. It is characterized by global competition, cultural diversity, new technology and new management processes that require employees to have problem solving and critical communication skills and high level of workmanship according to the study done by Jamaliah, Rohana and Aede Hatib (2012).

This study aims to investigate the use of e-learning using Web 2.0 technology based applications in terms of the improving class attendance and participation among vocational students and teachers in VC under the management of the Ministry of Education (MOE). The training program for vocational students has been greatly changed by the passage of time in the curriculum and teaching methods in the classroom (Ahmad, Syed, Mohd & Mohammad, 2012). Career excellence vocational education will be achieved through work-based learning oriented training programs by allowing the content knowledge and skills available to students and constantly being adjusted to conform to the new requirements in the industry, business and society (Hyland, 2007; Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2011).

The current student generation has been exposed to the technology of the Internet and smart phones since early teenage years as stated by V. Gialamas, K. Nikolopoulou, and G. Koutromanos, (2013) who hold that most of the students have experience using the Internet before they enter the educational institution (Gialamas et al., 2013). A study by Sandars dan Murray (2009) showed that students prefer to use technologies that they are familiar with such as mobile network, social media and blogs to interact and get information. Valtonen and friends (2012) suggested if teachers have their own environment to negotiate the learning needs of students and how it is supposed to connect with students and what form should the communication between students and the learning environment that teachers need to take, then teachers need to make full use of existing facilities. The study by Crie (2006) emphasised that blogs are highly motivating to students, excellent opportunities for students to read and write, effective forums for collaboration and discussion and powerful tools to enable the learning or mentoring to occur. In the past five years of social media, many applications such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+ and Wikipedia have come to dominate the ways in which digital technology is now used around the world (eBizMBA, 2014; Ellis & Cohen, 2009).

One of the strongest effects of the technology in that study was its ability to promote class discussion among students. This method, which is more effective communicative learning should be sought and practiced in VC so it could be more relevant to improve class attendance and the needs of the students and teachers at present (Muhamad Azhar et al., 2013). The study conducted by Mohamad Amin Embi, (2013) listed 40 types of Web 2.0 applications suitable for the use in the teaching and learning (T&L). This application can help teachers and students to face the changing patterns of learning in the new millennium. E-learning strategies are still not being explored extensively in the system of vocational education for the learning process.

## **2. Problem statement**

Vocational courses indicate that students enjoy the class a great deal, yet attendance is low. It is a problem familiar to many vocational teachers. Moreover, when students were in attendance many were inattentive, either dozing off or otherwise occupied for at least part of the class period. The methods of using information technology in vocational education have sought to prevent students from being left behind in their learning. The findings by Azhar, (2011) was in line with the study by Hamdan dan Nor Hidayah (2008), which found that teachers felt that students with focus and effort are weak in terms of school attendance. From this point the researchers see a better way of learning that can be applied to solve problems that occur in VC.

To address the problem, the MOE has provided Vocational Transformation Plan to strengthen the training for skilled students. The implementation process of education transformation requires new approaches and strategies so

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