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E-supervision using blog: The graduate students' reactions

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to investigate graduate students' feedback in using on-line supervision (E-supervision using blogs) in a research methodology course. The teaching methods used in the course were conventional, mainly utilizing "Face to Face"(F2F) mode which has its limitations in terms of space and time. One of the 'complaints' about the course is that the lecturers were too busy with their consultation work within and outside the main campus and the lack of time for 'face to face' consultations with students. Another problem is the difficulty of the students, especially those registered as part-timers and staying outside of Kuala Lumpur to meet their instructors regularly for consultations especially during the weekdays because of their work commitment. With the introduction of E-supervision using blogs, the problem of students unable to meet their instructors may be a thing of the past. E-learning via CMC is a concept where students no longer need to go through the physical process to communicate and interact with their instructors. What is required is just a computer or a tablet and an internet access. E-supervision could provide a more flexible method of learning for students especially for graduate students. With the availability of the on-line supervision, the difficulty that students face in meeting with their instructors would become a thing of the past. The graduate students were generally positive about the use of online supervision.

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Keywords: E-supervision; Blog supervision; Online learning; Face to face supervision; Computer mediated communication

1. Introduction

Teaching has undergone a dramatic change in the last 20 years, especially in the area of the study of learning (Dervan et. al 2006). This is especially true particularly with the advent of the internet. The role played by the internet in the teaching form has been enormous (Greenhow et. al 2009). As a result of the explosion of internet use, online instruction has seen a similar transformation. More and more courses at the tertiary level are now

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conducted online. The traditional way of teaching or commonly known as face to face (FtF) teaching has been criticized for a number of reasons. Among the criticisms are that it promotes passive learning, ignores individual differences and the needs of the students and does not promote critical thinking and other higher order thinking skills (Banapathy, 1982; Hannum and Briggs, 1982). The differences in the perceived learning between using online approach and face-to-face environment have been discussed for several years (Batts, D. 2008, Atan, et al., 2004). Coldeway (1995) maintains that there are four different approaches to using technology in higher education. They are:

1. Same time, same place – this is a traditional face-to-face approach where the instructor and learners are in the same geographical location at the same time.
2. Different time, same place – participants in the learning and teaching process interact in the same space but at a time they choose; for example, in asynchronous online discussions.
3. Same time, different place – this could be viewed as individual students working independently but at the same time, not located at the same place.
4. Different time, different place – learners and instructors are separated geographically and also by time.

Wu and Tsai (2006) maintained that students who are internet savvy tend to do better with the internet learning. In another study, Chin-Chung Tsai (2006) found that students' perceptions of the internet have a deep impact on their attitudes towards technology and this influences their learning efficiency. However, in another study conducted by Summers, Waigandt, & Whittaker (2005) they found that students who take online courses appear to be less satisfied with the courses compared with courses conducted traditionally on several aspects such as replies to immediate questions; non-verbal communication, and the language of the professor. Davies & Graff (2005) found that the use of online time does not have significant influence on students' achieving passing grade, but students who failed in the traditional classroom do not always fail in the online courses. Similarly, Maurino (2007) in his study maintains that classes using the online mode tend to create more interactions compared to classes that are conducted using the traditional method. However, according to Warren and Holloman (2005), there is not much difference in terms of the learners' achievement between courses run online and the traditional classroom mode. Conlon (1997), however, maintained that instructors and coaches do not support on-line teaching because they do not believe it can solve the learning and teaching problems. Whitman et al (2005) have claimed that computer-mediated-communication (CMC) and face-to-face (F2F) interactions are equivalent modes.

Wu & Tsai (2006) have also found that graduate students tend to show more interest in using the online mode. Oterholm's (2009) study provides important depth to the discussion of internet-supported field in education by blending synchronous and asynchronous methods and connecting these technologies to existing pedagogies of learning. His study found that using both formats provided more advantage to the students. Larson and Sung (2009) have maintained that there are not much differences between courses conducted online compared to courses run using the blended approach i.e. combining online and face to face instructions. In another study, Harrington and Loffredo (2010) found that students would prefer online courses compared to the traditionally run courses because the online course gave them the opportunity to be innovative and to use the computer technology. According to Artino (2010), the students did not need the face-to-face class experience or class participation. According to Redmond (2011), academics who have commonly taught in a face-to-face environment are under pressure to include ICTs into their face-to-face teaching and to work in blended and online modes.

Harasim (1990) suggests a number of key differences between computer-mediated communication and face-to-face approach namely in the areas of time dependence, place dependence, the structure of communication and richness of communication. An and Frick's (2006) reports a different finding. They maintain that face-to-face communication is faster, easier and more convenient than computer-mediated communication in the context of education. Dan Carnevale (2002) similarly reports that students who enrolled in online sections of a course at

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