ISSN 2348-3156 (Print)
International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research ISSN 2348-3164 (online)
Vol. 6, Issue 4, pp: (194-209), Month: October - December 2018, Available at: www.researchpublish.com

Discovering Challenges of Blended Learning among Premier Polytechnic English Lecturers

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Abstract: **This study aims to identify challenges in implementing BL from the perspective of English lecturers in three premier polytechnics in Malaysia. Two research questions were addressed in this study and four constructs were tested using a survey method. Data was gathered from 64 lecturers through the self-administered questionnaires and supported by the email interview from five lecturers in acquiring an in-depth understanding of the study. The result indicates the challenges in adopting BL are mainly concerned with the increase in workload, teaching design, facilities and technical support. In term of online pedagogy, majority of the respondents are unsure with their ability to use technology in presenting effective learning content and additional information. Other challenges which reflect greatly on the role of administration support include lack of appropriate platform to share lessons and teaching materials, lack of pedagogical training and facilities to support BL implementation. Several aspects were also identified to be improved under pedagogical, technological and administration support in ensuring successful implementation of BL in Malaysia polytechnics.**

Keywords: **Challenges, Blended learning, English lecturers, Polytechnics.**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction:

E-learning has been extensively applied in today's educational world especially in higher learning institutions. Though e-learning has proven to be effective in assisting students in the learning process, it also poses a threat and stress on teaching and learning itself. [16] had highlighted many major problems with e–learning such as lack of direct interaction with lecturers and also difficulties in monitoring students' progress. [8] further proposed the importance of combining traditional learning with e-learning so teachers and students may experience the benefits of both approaches. The need to integrate traditional classroom teaching with computer learning has led educators to favor blended learning approach (BL). [8] defined BL as education with communication technology that involves face-to-face contact with online-learning. Many educators prefer the BL method as it had received a high level of satisfaction among students as recorded by [22]. Moreover, BL does not only foster active students' participation but also assist to nurture higher order thinking skills [17]. Another reason to consider BL was clearly stated by [8] that students in higher educational institutions are digital natives that spend most of their time with digital technology and electronic gadgets.

1.2 Background of the problem:

Blended learning is believed to be a suitable teaching approach for Malaysia higher education institution (HEIs) in achieving learning objectives as it combines online learning with direct teaching. According to the Ministry of Education or MOE the Internet penetration in Malaysia currently stands at 67% and it is the seventh highest penetration rate across Asia [26]. Due to the high percentage and expanding usage of Internet among Malaysians, the government through MOE has seen this development as a great opportunity to utilize the power of online learning. Blended learning model was introduced as the main staple of pedagogical approach in all higher education institutions (HEI) and that all HEIs are encouraged to develop Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) according to their area. The importance of BL is further emphasized by MOE when all HEIs are required to use 50% of blended learning models for all the programs [7].

In Malaysian educational context, BL has been widely accepted in higher education institutions including polytechnics. The operational definition of BL set by MOE is a mixture of online and F2F learning, with 30%-80% of the course content and activities are done through online or as a support or replacing the direct interaction [7]. Several higher institutions in Malaysia have started the implementation of BL in their education context. University Teknologi MARA, Tun Abdul Razak University, Multimedia University and Open University are examples of higher education institutions in Malaysia that have successfully incorporated BL in teaching and learning session [24]. In contrast, a study conducted by [18] identified one specific local university where only 13% of the academicians use BL in their teaching. The problems underlying the implementation process are related to perceived usefulness of the system, learning goals, and educational technology preference [18].

Another study conducted by [5] revealed that BL was implemented in Open University Malaysia (OUM) and it was a major success. BL has made learning interesting, encouraged active participation among learners and increased the learning experience among students. OUM has successfully balanced the use of computer technology to reach a wider audience [5]. Similar result was also recorded by [24] that found BL caters to all different learning style and that BL is presented in buffet style where it is able to accommodate different individual learning styles. [27] further stated that BL has successfully promoted active learning that encourage students to practice speaking, listening and thinking. Through BL, students are given option to switch the learning mode of independent or collaborative learning instantly. Essentially, BL approach presents the opportunity for students to access the learning content in a variety of mode to accommodate different learning styles and offers flexibility of interaction beyond the classrooms boundaries [27]. Clearly, the strength of BL as reported in previous researches has outnumbered the weaknesses of BL.

The successful implementation of BL relates closely to several contributing factors that have yet to be investigated especially in polytechnic setting. From the researchers' perspective, the implementation of BL in Malaysia educational setting is not fully utilized and explored in the teaching and learning process. The emphasis on BL by the government through MOE is an excellent starting point for an in-depth exploration to uncover BL potentials. There are many challenges pertaining BL that need to be discovered and addressed in ensuring effective implementation of BL in the future.

1.3 BL in Malaysian Polytechnic Institutions:

Polytechnic institutions in Malaysia are established under the Ministry of Education (MOE) and are supervised by Department of Polytechnics Education (DPE), Ministry of Education, Malaysia. Premier polytechnics refer to 'leading polytechnics' that are identified to be 'polytechnic university' by the MOE [10]. The premier status is also to acknowledge the degree courses established in these polytechnics. There are three premier polytechnic in Malaysia namely Politeknik Ungku Omar (PUO), Politeknik Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah (PSA) and Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan (PIS).

Under the Economic Transformation Program (ETP) polytechnics are seen as the main platform in producing semi-skilled workers for 10 of the 12 National Key Economic Area (NKEA) sectors. In meeting the demand of industrial sector, the Ministry highlighted the importance of English language mastery that leads to massive transformation of polytechnic curriculum. Under the new syllabus introduced by the ministry, English language learning in polytechnics is known as Communicative English 1 (DUE1012), Communicative English 2 (DUE3012) and Communicative English 3 (DUE5012). Content and lesson in Communicative English classes are structured to meet the demand of Outcome Based Education (OBE) which targeted in producing graduates who are competent in English language thus making them valuable to the industries [10]. Students' competency level is determined using various form of communicative assessments such as individual and group presentation, role play, interviews and class forum. Since polytechnic institutions are specialized in Technical Educational and Vocational Training (TVET) which emphasizes on practical training, thus face to face (F2F) interaction is integrated with online learning that will cover the theoretical aspects of a lesson [7]. The implementation of BL in Malaysia polytechnics is a result of KPI (key performance indicators) set by the MOE. Based on the MOE's requirement in 2014, at least 50% of the total teaching hours should be completed using BL approach [9]. The integration of BL in polytechnics is primarily to support the teaching itself as clearly most of the assessments require physical presence of both students and lecturers in class.

In ensuring smooth executions of BL in teaching and learning, polytechnics have created its own virtual learning platform known as Curriculum Information Document Online System (CIDOS). CIDOS has established its own Learning Management System or LMS that allows online interaction between lecturers and students[7]. Through this platform, lecturers are expected to post their teaching materials such as lecture notes, online quizzes, supplementary learning materials and assessment questions for students. Through this centralized learning system, lecturers are able to save, upload and share all the teaching materials with other lecturers. Lecturers who actively participate in CIDOS platform and achieve highest hits of access by students are acknowledged and awarded through eDOLA or CIDOS Inspiring Learning Awards [11]. Additionally, polytechnics are ranked according to the frequent access of CIDOS. CIDOS is closely monitored by Department of Polytechnic Education (DPE) administrators in ensuring active participation among lecturers in "blending" their teaching method. With lecturers are constantly reminded and pressured to integrate BL in their teaching thus it is crucial to consider the lecturers' perceptions and to discover the challenges in implementing BL in Malaysian polytechnic classrooms.

1.4 Statement of the Problem:

The execution of BL in the current education system was introduced by The Ministry of Education (MOE) under the ninth shift in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015 – 2025 or also known as MEB. In line with the National e-learning Policy (Dasar e-pembelajaran Negara or DePAn) the implementation of BL is to enhance the teaching and learning quality, reduce delivery cost and widen the access to good quality content. As BL has been widely accepted within Malaysian polytechnics' context, the current situation indicates numerous difficulties and constraints faced by lecturers in executing this teaching approach. This is apparent when the status of BL implementation in all polytechnics was recorded at only 29% by the Curriculum Development and Evaluation Division under the DPE in 2015. The Individual Polytechnic Score Card (BLX) recorded inactive participation among polytechnics and status of 50% BL for all polytechnics is recorded as unfulfilled. Most polytechnics have low BL activities at level BL0 to BL1 as compared to the targeted level of BL5 [9]. Moreover, the effectiveness of BL in polytechnic education is not yet known due to insufficient study in the area. In a study conducted by [34], the use of CIDOS among polytechnic lecturers was found to be restricted due to the low internet access and unclear functions of CIDOS system. Thus, although e-learning is accepted among polytechnic lecturers the implementation status proves to be challenging.

Lack of skills is also deemed as one of the main problem in blending lesson among polytechnics lecturers. A study conducted by [17] revealed that lack of computer training and continuous support from the authority, failure of infrastructure and high dependency on technical supports are some of the problems that hinder the use of effective BL among higher institutions in Saudi Arabia. Similar to the Malaysian context, the technical aspects of using CIDOS system and lack of training have led to low level of motivation among lecturers in using BL in their teaching. Another common problems highlighted by lecturers are lack of facilities and poor internet connection that hinders the notion of BL to be used in teaching. The findings from [17] were also supported by [21] as the findings obtained from the study had also indicated two administrative reasons that are problem in load shedding and insufficient computer facilities and technical help.

Time constraint also proved to be one of the reasons not to use BL as lecturers need to spend hours in developing new materials and activities to be posted online. This was supported by [19] where it was stated that content development in online learning proves to be costly and time consuming, whereas the result may have reduced time or easily outdated. Furthermore, lecturers are advised to spend more of their teaching hours through online learning, however, it is viewed negatively by some lecturers as direct communication with students is limited thus results in difficulty in accessing students' competency progress [16]. Additionally, BL is considered unnecessary by many English lecturers as nearly all assessments in Communicative English modules require observation and decision. Hence by going online will limit the practice needed by the students. This has led to many lecturers questioning the initial objective of BL in contrast with the English curriculum requirement. As lecturers are directly involved in planning and executing lesson, their view will provide a better insight of BL implementation at polytechnics level.

1.5 Research Objectives:

The research objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To discover the challenges faced by premier polytechnic English lecturers inimplementing BL in teaching Communicative English modules.

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International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research ISSN 2348-3164 (online)
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2. To identify aspects that need to be improved in ensuring effective use of BL among premier polytechnic English lecturers in teaching Communicative English modules.

1.6 Research Questions:

With regard to the objectives of the study, two questions were identified:

1. What are the challenges faced by premier polytechnic English lecturers in implementing BL in teaching Communicative English modules?

2. Which aspects that need to be improved in ensuring effective use of BL among premier polytechnics English lecturers in teaching Communicative English modules?

1.7 Challenges:

In view of complexity, BL pose challenges in various aspects. In his study, Badrul Khan proposed the eight aspects of Blended Learning that proves to be essential in ensuring effective implementation of BL among HEIs. All the aspects are inter-related and connected to each other thus, [23] presented all these aspects on an octagonal framework known as Khan's Octagonal Framework. (Refer to Figure 1). According to Badrul Khan, there are 8 important aspects pertaining to BL: ethical, institutional, pedagogical, technological, interface design, evaluation, management and resource support. A further study was conducted by [12] in which it supported the need in addressing these aspects among Malaysians HEIs. [12] posit that understanding each factor is crucial in creating a better BL environment. The 5 evaluation components of BL presented by [19] and Khan's Octagonal Framework signify the aspects that require serious attention in BL environment. The mixture of these aspects is further described and perceived as challenges in implementing BL.

Figure 1: Khan's Octagonal Framework

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed method approach specifically sequential explanatory design. In this study, the mixed method involves quantitative data collection through survey and followed by a qualitative email interview as support. The quantitative method was dominant in this study and it was conducted earlier than the e-mail interview. This design was used due to the fact that the integration of a survey and an interview will provide a better understanding of the research problem than either of each method alone. The survey design is cross-sectional as data was collected at one point in time. Purposive sampling technique was used and the sample was selected among lecturers who have taught English courses in the three premier polytechnics. The English lecturers selected in this study came from various state and race. They also possess different qualification ranging from degree to PHD and their teaching experience varies according to their age. Nonetheless they are experts and well- experienced in teaching Communicative English modules within the polytechnics

setting. The qualitative approach was utilized to further examine the personal opinion regarding adoption of BL among English language lecturers in three Malaysian premier polytechnics. In acquiring the data, an e-mail interview was sent to five respondents that were chosen purposively in this study. The wide range of age and teaching experience will provide valuable and diverse perspectives of BL adoption particularly in premier polytechnics. All the respondents have agreed to participate voluntarily in this study. Through the e-mail interview, the lecturers were asked to answer open-ended questions regarding their personal opinion and experience in adopting BL. The detail description of the five respondents is as below:

L1: A 55 year old female senior lecturer in PSA and has more than 20 years of teaching experience.

L2: A 36 year old female lecturer in PSA and has 12 years of teaching experience.

L3: A 27 year old female lecturer from PUO and has 4 years of teaching experience.

L4: A 40 year old female lecturer from PUO and has 16 years of teaching experience.

L5: A 37 years old male lecturer from PIS and has 8 years of teaching experience.

2.1 Instruments:

The main instrument employed in this study was a set of questionnaire and supported by an open ended question via e-mail. There are four constructs developed specifically in addressing the aim of this study: pedagogy, online pedagogy, instructional design, administration support and needs. The constructs were formulated based on Khan's Octagonal framework [23] and [19]. The questionnaire was adapted from [3] which was originally from Alsenaidi, Lin and Poirot (2009) that covers challenges in BL adoption in terms of pedagogy, online pedagogy, instructional design, administration support and needs. A total of 25 items were included. All the questions are objectives and 5-likert scale is used as an-option ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree and strongly agree for each statement stated in the questionnaire. The questions were designed based on the objectives of this study that cover personal teaching preferences (BL vs F2F), pedagogy, personal classroom observation and important aspects to be improved in adoption of BL.

2.2 Findings of the Study:

The findings are presented in two sections: (i) descriptive information regarding the demographic profile of the respondents (English lecturers in three premier polytechnics) and (ii) findings based on the research questions mentioned previously in this study. A total of 64 lecturers responded to the survey with an encouraging response rate of 87%. Table 1 presents participants' return rate from the three polytechnic institutions, all three participating institutions had a high response rates: PUO with 87%, PSA with 92%, and PIS with 82% valid response rate respectively.

Table 1: General Response Rate

Institutions	Surveys Sent	Surveys Returned	Valid Percent (%)
PUO	30	26	87%
PSA	26	24	92%
PIS	17	14	82%
Total	73	64	87%

2.3 Demographic profile of English language lecturers in premier polytechnics:

The first section in the survey instrument contained six items: name (optional), gender, name of polytechnic, age, academic qualification and teaching experience. As shown in Table 2, of the 64 respondents more than 80% (n=53) are female lecturers and only 11 of them are male lecturers. This figure is common in polytechnic institutions as most male lecturers in polytechnics are designated in engineering department whereas English language subject is under non-technical department known as General Studies.

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International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research ISSN 2348-3164 (online)
Vol. 6, Issue 4, pp: (194-209), Month: October - December 2018, Available at: www.researchpublish.com

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	Frequency (*n*)	Percentage Response (%)
Gender		
Male	11	17.2%
Female	53	82.8%
Institutions		
PUO	26	40.6%
PSA	24	37.5%
PIS	14	21.9%
Age		
20 – 29	8	12.5%
30 – 39	38	59.4%
40 – 49	11	17.2%
50 and above	7	10.9%
Academic Qualification		
Bachelors	36	56.3%
Masters	26	40.6%
Doctorate	2	3.1%
Others	None	
Years of English Language Teaching		
1 – 5 years	12	18.8%
6 – 10 years	26	40.6%
11 – 15 years	10	15.5%
16 or more	16	25.0%

Based on table 2, PUO ranked first with total respondents of 25 (40.6%) followed by PSA with 24 respondents or 37.5% and PIS with 14 respondents of 21.9%. Majority of the lecturers were within the age range of 30-39 years old with the highest percentage of 59.4% and only seven of the lecturers were more than 50 years old at 10.9%. Eight of them were considered as young lecturers within the range of 20-29 years old and 11 of them were in age range of 40-49 years (17.2%). In terms of academic level, the biggest group was represented by the bachelor group of 56.3% (n=36) as compared to 26 (40.6%) lecturers with masters qualification. The smallest number was recorded for doctorate holder of two lecturers or 3.1%. For the final item in section A, the respondents were asked to indicate their teaching experience in polytechnic. The result shows that majority of the lecturers have been teaching in polytechnic for 6 -10 years with 40.6% (n=26). The second group comprises of 16 lecturers with more than 16 years of teaching experience as compared to 12 lecturers with less than five years of experience. Respondents with 11-15 years of teaching experience were recorded as the smallest group of ten people or 15.5%.

RQ1: What are the challenges faced by premier polytechnic English lecturers in implementing BL in teaching Communicative English modules?

The challenges in implementing BL are addressed through four constructs in the questionnaire: pedagogy, online pedagogy, instructional design and administration support.

2.4 Pedagogy and Online Pedagogy:

A total of four questions were addressed under pedagogy and followed by seven questions for online pedagogy. As BL is an approach that combines traditional and online learning simultaneously, the separated constructs are established to differentiate the general challenges in teaching BL and the online pedagogy focuses on more specific tasks while conducting lesson online. Further results on pedagogy and online pedagogy are described in Table 3.

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Table 3: BL Challenges in Term of Pedagogy and Online Pedagogy

Items	N	Mean	SD
Pedagogy			
1. There is very little direct interaction with students through e-learning.	64	3.4	0.8
2. It is difficult to monitor students' progress through e-learning.	64	3.0	1.0
3. Lecturers have to spend extra time to respond to students' inquiries via online.	64	3.8	0.8
4. CIDOS is unreliable to conduct BL.	64	3.0	1.0
Online pedagogy			
1. I am able to create an online environment which allows students to build new Knowledge and skills	64	3.7	0.6
2. I am able to implement different methods of teaching online.	64	3.7	0.8
3. I am able to moderate online interactivity among students.	64	3.7	0.7
4. I am able to use online student assessment to improve my teaching Instruction	64	3.7	0.7
5. I am able to use technology to predict students' skills and understanding of a particular Topic	64	3.4	0.6
6. I am able to use technology to create effective representations of content that depart From textbook knowledge	64	3.8	0.6
7. I am able to use technological representations (i.e multimedia, visual demonstrations, etc.) To demonstrate specific concepts in my content area)	64	3.8	0.6

Scale for items: 1=*Strongly disagree*, 2=*Disagree*, 3=*Undecided*, 4=*Agree*, 5=*Strongly Agree*

The results relating to pedagogy and online pedagogy are surprisingly similar in numerous ways. The uncertainty experienced by majority of the respondents in deciding on pedagogy and online pedagogy statement may relate closely to the lack of computer training and knowledge as reported earlier. When the lecturers feel that the training and knowledge on computer and ICT are not enough, it may consequently affect their confidence level and credibility in teaching BL. Generally in term of pedagogy, majority of the respondents ranked the first challenges in implementing BL is to spend more time in answering students' online enquiry (M=3.8, SD=0.8). This is followed by the lecturers' concern in having limited direct interaction with students (M=3.4, SD=0.8) and difficulties in monitoring students' performance through online learning (M=3.0, SD=1.0). Additionally, the lecturers also feel that CIDOS system is unreliable in conducting BL (M=3.0, SD=1.0).

In term of online pedagogy, majority of the respondents felt to be uncertain in two particular areas: their ability to use technology in presenting effective learning content and additional information (M=3.8, SD=0.6). Moreover, the respondents were unable to decide on their ability in the following statements that shared the same mean score of 3.7 respectively: to create online environment that motivates new knowledge and skills among students (SD=0.6), to implement variety of online teaching methods (SD=0.8), to monitor online students' interaction (SD=0.7) and to use results of online assessment in improving teaching instruction (SD=0.7). Lastly, the lowest mean score of 3.4 (SD=0.6) is recorded for lecturers' ability in predicting students' knowledge and performance through technology. In general, the uncertainty results in pedagogical aspects might relate closely with respondents' computer skills and classroom control. This can be clearly identified based on what was described by the respondents through the email interview:

L2: *It requires more preparation, consumes more time and need more control and monitoring.*

L4: *More training in terms of using more advanced technology/digitized materials for classroom training.*

L5: *Pedagogy wise, I do not think so. Not so much of a problem. Just, MAYBE, when it comes to control and monitoring. Since it is open, so anything is possible.*

Although the data displayed significant challenges in adoption of BL in both sections, all the results are perceived positively as none are below 3.0 therefore the right intervention would certainly help in improving the pedagogical aspects of BL.

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2.5 Instructional Design:

Table 4: BL Challenges in Term of Instructional Design

Items	N	Mean	SD
1. There is lack of convenient time for CIDOS training.	64	3.2	0.9
2. Extra time is needed to create e-learning courses.	62	3.8	0.8
3. The teaching materials found online are inappropriate in meeting students' needs.	64	2.7	0.9
4. There is lack of courses regarding instructional building through ICT.	64	3.0	0.9
5. Appropriate platform should be provided for lecturers to share instructional designs And materials	64	4.0	0.7
6. CIDOS should be more user friendly.	64	4.0	0.9

Scale for items: 1=*Strongly disagree*, 2=*Disagree*, 3=*Undecided*, 4=*Agree*, 5=*Strongly Agree*

Table 4 describes the challenges in implementing BL particularly in instructional design. Based on the feedbacks given, emphasis should be placed in providing appropriate platform for the lecturers to share their lessons and teaching materials used in BL classrooms (M=4.0, SD=0.7). This notion is further supported as stated by L3: "*More Online materials and teaching techniques to be shared in specific teaching platform."* Additionally, L1 also shared the same view in regard of this matter: *"A lot of hours can be saved preparing what can be made available by the institution. Also by having these available, a more standardized implementation of T&L may result."* Another concern reported by majority of the respondents is that CIDOS should be more user friendly with mean score of 4.0 (SD=0.9). The response towards appropriate portal to be shared raise questions as reported earlier, the centralized learning system is already established through CIDOS system (CeLT, 2014) this implies that professional development is needed to fully utilize the existing system and that continuous upgrading of the system is required.

The third challenge perceived by the respondents is regarding the lack of time in creating e-learning courses (M=3.8, SD=0.8) and CIDOS training (M=3.2, SD=0.9). In regard to lack of time in creating e-learning courses, L2 informed that "*heavy workload, too many classes, different modules to teach and big classrooms"* contribute to the lack of time in producing quality lesson. Similarly, lack of time was also mentioned by L1 due to insensitive administration: "*The administration plays an important role in enabling teachers to function optimally. Leave teachers to concentrate doing what they are paid to do. Having teachers doing clerical and menial tasks that take their time off T&L* (teaching and learning) *will pose a huge burden on them."* In addition, the respondents were unable to decide on lack of courses in instructional building through ICT. It seems that courses on instructional building are plenty and the real challenge is time constraints in attending the courses offered. A strong disagreement is also noted for the statement regarding inappropriate teaching materials found online with the means score of 2.7 (SD=0.9). The feedback denotes that the content found through the internet is highly useful for the respondents.

2.6 Administration Supports:

Table 5: BL Challenges in Term of Administration Supports

Items	N	Mean	SD
1. There is lack of administrative support for adopting e-learning into teaching.	64	3.2	1.0
2. There is lack of access to essential hardware and software.	64	3.6	0.9
3. There is lack of adequate financial support to develop technology-based activities.	64	3.9	0.8
4. There is lack of technical supports in managing e-learning classroom.	64	3.9	0.9
5. My polytechnic administration should allow ample time for lecturers in preparing E-learning materials	64	4.2	0.7
6. My polytechnic administration should provide adequate computers for students' Usage	64	4.5	0.7
7. My polytechnic administration should ensure uninterrupted internet connection all The time	64	4.6	0.6
8. Greater incentives are needed to motivate lecturers in incorporating in their BL teaching.	64	4.3	0.8

Scale for items: 1=*Strongly disagree*, 2=*Disagree*, 3=*Undecided*, 4=*Agree*, 5=*Strongly Agree*

Administration plays an important role in any educational institutions including in polytechnics. One apparent statement that showed uncertainty was regarding lack of administration support (M=3.2, SD=1.0). This suggested that the administration support in implementing BL can be seen in term of policy enforcement but was lacking in term of financial, facilities and time as described in the following results. The highest mean score was recorded for internet stability at 4.6 with standard deviation of 0.6. According to the respondents, it is crucial for polytechnic administration to ensure uninterrupted internet connection as the whole process of planning and teaching BL requires internet connection. This opinion is also strongly reflected through the email interview as stated below:

L1: "S*tudents find the network service running slow are just some of the shortcomings that have to be addressed for BL to run smoothly".*

L3: "Technical facilities and low internet coverage have made BL lessons not suitable to be used in classrooms." The impact of low internet connection is severe considering 50% of BL lesson should be done online. Apart from Internet connection, administration also needs to ensure technical assistance (M=3.9, SD=0.9) and financial support (M=3.9, SD=0.8) are provided to ease teaching and learning process. Some of the lecturers are known to purchase their own hardware and software in building BL lesson as there is no allocation from the administration. In dealing with technicality aspect of BL classroom, hardware such as computers, LCD projectors and speakers should be managed by technicians. Unfortunately most of computer laboratories and classrooms exist without proper supervision. This dilemma was evident as commented by L1: *"It is frustrating when you have sacrificed your time preparing a good lesson when the hardware available in class do not function the way it should and you waste precious time looking for technical support."* The same argument was also highlighted by L5: "*Once the facilities are there, the supports need to be there too as to ensure the smooth sailing of the implementation."*

The data also suggested that ample time should be given to lecturers in preparing online materials (M=4.2, SD=0.7). One solution was proposed by L4 to curb this problem: *"Reduce paperwork and number of classes – we shall have more time to prepare for classes".*

RQ2: Which aspects that need to be improved in ensuring effective use of BL among premier polytechnic English lecturers in teaching Communicative English modules?

RQ2 aims to determine the aspects that should be improved for an effective BL adoption. In achieving this, the highest and lowest mean score (according to context) of the survey data was identified and perceived as the aspects that requires improvement. For better understanding the aspects are categorized under technological support, pedagogical support and administration support.

2.7 Technological Support:

When the respondents were asked regarding their level of readiness in implementing BL, the highest score reported revealed the need for more computer skills training (M=4.5, SD=0.8). Learning management system that functions as the main ground in BL teaching should be well maintained and upgraded. This is crucial as majority feel that CIDOS system is not user friendly (M=4.0, SD=0.9). All the tasks and BL activities should be easily conducted or uploaded through CIDOS system. In ensuring successful BL adoption, the existing system used in polytechnics should be able to accommodate the needs of both students and lecturers.

2.8 Pedagogical Support:

The third section in the questionnaire addressed pedagogical support required by premier polytechnic English lecturers. The biggest concern highlighted is increased workload and time spend to assist students online (M=3.8, SD=0.8). This is further supported by confessions made through the email interview that denotes BL implementation requires proper planning, technical facilities and most importantly time to integrate technology into teaching and learning. It is undeniable that the implementation of BL in polytechnics will result to failure if assistance is not provided especially in pedagogy aspect.

2.9 Administration Support:

The role of administration is diverse as described by [29]; [31]; [6]. Majority of the respondents placed a high concern over facilities provided by polytechnic administration. Ensuring stable internet access and adequate computers for students' usage are also vital according to the respondents. It was expressed by two lecturers through the email interview:

L1: "*What motivates me to make my lessons interesting is the availability of PROPER AND FUNCTIONING facilities. Most mature polytechnics have facilities that are either outdated, obsolete, run down or in dire need of maintenance and repair."*

L5: "*The 'show' can't be run if the facilities are not up to par."*

High percentage was also recorded for this statement: Greater incentives are needed to motivate lecturers in incorporating BL in their teaching. (M=4.3, SD=0.8)

Incentives are one of the aspects that may have direct effect in BL adoption if taken seriously by the polytechnic administration. From the interview, the type of incentive desired by respondents ranging from better facilities, unlimited internet access, functioning hardware and logistic support as described below:

L1: *Incentives? Dream on. What do they know about incentive? For as long as I can remember a group of so called experts think of ways to modify teaching & learning strategies then shove it down the throats of teachers. Do they care if teachers have logistics support? I have been lugging hardware to class, students find the network service running slow are just some of the shortcomings that have to be addressed for BL to run smoothly.*

L2: *More budgets should be given to maintain internet connection and computers with updated software*.

L3: *In implementing BL at polytechnics, the ministry has to seriously take the action on equipping each polytechnic with a good internet coverage and latest teaching software for teachers.*

L4: "*Free and unlimited internet access, computer labs with appropriate software's for learning. We are expected to integrate technology in our T&L by poly but the facilities are not up to date. We still need to share/take turn using projector/lab etc."*

L5: "*Personally, incentive is rather unnecessary. I would prefer if the institution is equipped with the necessary top notch well maintained and functioning equipment, gadgets, network etc, thus it will ease the whole process. I would stress more on free Wi-Fi with excellent capability where the students and lecturers can have hassle free access to whatever they need to do during blended learning sessions. Or maybe, the lecturers can be given internet access allowance as to ensure that they can subscribe to the needed network."*

The responses may provide an idea to the administration of what is actually required by the lecturers in adopting BL approach. The purpose of RQ2 is to highlight aspects that require improvement in ensuring successful adoption of BL among premier polytechnic English lecturers. The aspects identified were discussed based on three categories: technological support, pedagogical support and administration support. The aspects that needed improvement include: facilities, professional training in computer skills and teaching design, Internet access and incentives for the lecturers.

3. DISSCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The challenges in implementing BL were addressed through four constructs in the questionnaire: pedagogy, online pedagogy, instructional design and administration support. The results relating to pedagogy and online pedagogy are surprisingly similar as lecturers are uncertain in deciding on pedagogy and online pedagogy statements in the questionnaire. In term of pedagogy, majority found that the biggest challenge in implementing BL is to spend more time in addressing students' online enquiry. This result is also consistent with past study lead by [25] that found excessive workload is burdening lecturers both physically and cognitively.

In term of online pedagogy, majority of the respondents are unsure with their ability to use technology in presenting effective learning content and additional information. Unlike the study conducted by [2] that found their respondents possessed the ability to produce e-learning materials, but was hindered by time challenge. Correspondingly, the same dilemma was also reported in Malaysian context by [1]. Moreover, concern is also placed in lacking classroom control through online learning. Contradicting to this believe, lecturers are indeed still in control of learning as proven by [4] in their study. [4] found that lecturers had gained more control over the learning process as they are able to check on the students' progress through what was obtained in their learning folder. Digesting online information before coming to class has enabled the students to be more active and independent in learning as compared to being spoon-fed in traditional classroom [4].

The importance of administration role was mentioned by the respondents several times in this study. Firstly, it is crucial for polytechnic administration to ensure uninterrupted internet connection as the whole process of planning and teaching BL requires internet connection. This commotion is also evident in studies done by [29]; [19]; [1]; [32]. Secondly, the data also suggested that administration should give ample time to lecturers in preparing online materials as it involves various complicated steps as described by [30] in their study. Thirdly, the administration should ensure the facilities and technical support are available when needed. The aspects presented by [19] cleverly summed up the role of administration in supporting BL implementation. The fourth aspect that needs to be improved was regarding professional development among the lecturers in conducting BL classrooms. The importance of pedagogical training was also emphasized by [17] and [30] in their studies. In relation to this, [13] further denote that lack of computers skills will eventually affect the confidence level in conducting BL lesson. Incentive is the last aspect requires administration intervention. The incentives preference is somewhat similar to what m[had discovered in his study especially in term of teaching load and professional development.

Implications of the study:

Based on the results of this study, majority of the lecturers had stressed on the importance of professional development particularly in computer skills and instructional design. Without the required training and exposure, lecturers are unable to function effectively in planning, designing and conducting BL lessons. One of the ways that lecturers should consider is by getting support from other experienced lecturers. Another point that is worth to be considered is to establish BL support unit as proposed by [31]. The rationalization of this unit should be perceived by the stakeholder as the first step towards a more standardized instructional and materials design across all polytechnics.

The result of this study proves that lecturers' uncertainty in pedagogy and online pedagogy is predominantly associated with problems in integrating technology in teaching. As highlighted by [29] the integration of technology in teaching requires constant upgrading of pedagogy and technical knowledge. In this context, the importance of TPCK should be made aware to all lecturers. Seminar, courses and discussion should be conducted to instill TPCK knowledge among lecturers. Most importantly, in aiding the lecturers, the hands-on experience of TPCK lesson and design activities as suggested by [6] might be a solution. As discovered by both researchers, the hand-on experience will enable deeper understanding in the process of integrating technology in teaching and increase the confident level in conducting BL classrooms.

As BL approach integrates technology in teaching and learning, the feedbacks gathered from the respondents should form a basis in determining necessary support by the stake holder. In this context, MOE through DPE should consider to conduct needs analysis across all polytechnics in ensuring the support given matches the demand in implementing BL. The enforcement in policy should be complemented by complete facilities, technical supports, stable Internet access and compatible hardware and software.

Recommendations for future studies:

Since the study was conducted among three premier polytechnics, future researcher is encouraged to include more polytechnics as the sample of the study. This is crucial as to acknowledge any the difference in the perspectives of the rest of the 31 non-premier polytechnics. By gaining more samples and population for the research the result tabulated will be more accurate in describing the BL scenario in Malaysia. The contrast and similarities should be acknowledged by the stakeholder and measures should be taken to ensure successful implementation of BL in all polytechnics.

This study focused on uncovering the challenges in adopting BL from the lecturers' perspective, hence it only capture one part of the story. As HEIs are moving toward OBE that emphasized on students, it is highly recommended for future studies to focus on students' view in experiencing BL. It is crucial to determine BL from the students' angle to achieve some balance as well as to complement the findings of this study. Several areas that require more investigation include students' engagement in BL classrooms; strategy used in independent learning and teachers' role in BL and perceived usefulness of BL among students.

The adoption of BL in polytechnic is very recent and yet has proven to be beneficial especially to students, thus future research should focus on the impact of BL towards students' performance in learning Communicative English modules. After all, the success of any learning approach depends entirely on students' performance as the outcome of the learning.

Conclusion

The current scenario in adopting BL has been viewed from the perspective of English lecturers in three premier polytechnic. The findings displayed a promising situation for BL adoption in achieving a better teaching and learning environment for English subject. Certain challenges that deter the learning process should be taken into consideration especially by the stake holders and all parties involved. The enforcement in policy by the polytechnic administration should be continuous and concurrently supported by complete facilities, unlimited accessibility and technical help in ensuring successful implementation of BL in teaching Communicative English modules across all polytechnics in Malaysia.

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ISSN 2348-3156 (Print)
International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research ISSN 2348-3164 (online)
Vol. 6, Issue 4, pp: (194-209), Month: October - December 2018, Available at: www.researchpublish.com

APPENDIX A

Blended Learning Among Malaysian Premier Polytechnic English Language Lecturers:

Discovering Challenges in the Implementation of BL

Dear respondents,

I would like to ask for your kind co-operation and time in answering this questionnaire regarding the implementation of Blended Learning (BL) in English language teaching in polytechnics. This questionnaire aims to explore the Malaysian Polytechnic English language lecturers' views in terms of **challenges** and **implementation** of BL in teaching communicative English modules in polytechnics. All information provided will only be used for research purposes and anonymity of response is guaranteed. Your participation is highly appreciated. Thank you.

Section A: Demographic Details

Please provide the following details and tick (/) where appropriate.

1. Name: _____

2. Gender: Male ☐
   Female ☐

3. Name of Polytechnic: _____

4. Age:
   - 20 - 29 ☐
   - 30 - 39 ☐
   - 40 - 49 ☐
   - 50 and above ☐

5. Highest academic qualification in English language teaching.
   - Bachelor ☐
   - Master ☐
   - Doctorate ☐
   - Others (please specify) ☐_____

6. Years of English language teaching.
   - 1- 5 ☐
   - 6 - 10 ☐
   - 11 - 15 ☐
   - 16 or more ☐

Section B: Challenges in using BL in Teaching Communicative English.

Please choose your position regarding the following statements using the scale provided.

Kindly tick (/) only one box per row.

ISSN 2348-3156 (Print)
International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research ISSN 2348-3164 (online)
Vol. 6, Issue 4, pp: (194-209), Month: October - December 2018, Available at: www.researchpublish.com

1 – Strongly disagree

2 – Disagree

3 – Undecided

4 – Agree

5 – Strongly agree

No.	Items	1	2	3	4	5
	Part 1					
1.	There is very little direct interaction with students through e-learning.					
2.	It is difficult to monitor students' progress through e-learning.					
3.	Lecturers have to spend extra time to respond to students' inquiries via online.					
4.	CIDOS is unreliable to conduct BL.					
	Part 2					
5.	I am able to create an online environment which allows students to build new knowledge and skills.					
6.	I am able to implement different methods of teaching online.					
7.	I am able to moderate online interactivity among students.					
8.	I am able to use online student assessment to improve my teaching instruction.					
9.	I am able to use technology to predict students' skills and understanding of a particular topic.					
10.	I am able to use technology to create effective representations of content that depart from textbook knowledge.					
11.	I am able to use technological representations (i.e. multimedia, visual demonstrations, etc.) to demonstrate specific concepts in my content area).					
	Part 3					
12.	There is lack of convenient time for CIDOS training.					
13.	Extra time is needed to create e-learning courses.					
14.	The teaching materials found online are inappropriate in meeting students' needs.					
15.	There is lack of courses regarding instructional building through ICT.					
16.	Appropriate platform should be provided for lecturers to share instructional design and materials.					
17.	CIDOS should be more user friendly.					
	Part 4					
18.	There is lack of administrative support for adopting e-learning into teaching.					
19.	There is lack of access to essential hardware and software.					
20.	There is lack of adequate financial support to develop technology-based activities.					
21.	There is lack of technical supports in managing e-learning classroom.					
22.	My polytechnic administration should allow ample time for lecturers in preparing e-learning materials.					
23.	My polytechnic administration should provide adequate computers for students' usage.					
24.	My polytechnic administration should ensure uninterrupted internet connection all the time.					
25.	Greater incentives are needed to motivate lecturers in incorporating BL in their teaching.					

ISSN 2348-3156 (Print)
International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research ISSN 2348-3164 (online)
Vol. 6, Issue 4, pp: (194-209), Month: October - December 2018, Available at: www.researchpublish.com

APPENDIX B

Personal opinion on Blended Learning (BL)

As this is considered an interview, the use of "I" is strongly encouraged.

1.	Between BL and traditional teaching (chalk and talk), which one do you prefer more? Why?
2.	Based on your experience, what is your students' reaction toward BL? Do they like it or it is no different as compared to traditional teaching?
3.	What kind of incentive should be given by the ministry/polytechnic to ensure effective adoption of BL among polytechnic lecturers? State your reason(s)
4.	In term of pedagogy, what kind of problem(s) do you usually face in teaching BL classroom? Please provide example(s) where necessary.
5.	Which of the aspects below require serious attention by the ministry/polytechnic in ensuring effective adoption of BL? (You may choose more than one and please state your reason for each option chosen) Instructional design/teaching materials Facilities Supports from administration Time constraint