



MAKING STUDENTS' LEARNING FUN AND MEANINGFUL THROUGH E-EDUTOUR

Souba Rethinasamy^{1*}, Soo Ruey Shing², Nurul Huzaimah Hussien³, Keezrawati Mujan⁴,
Liyana Rosli⁵ & Joseph Ramanair⁶

¹⁻⁶Faculty of Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia

*Corresponding author's email: rsouba@unimas.my

HIGHLIGHT

This paper provides an illustration of a virtual international student mobility module called e-EduTour. The e-EduTour was created based on Fink's (2003) Significant Learning principles to enhance the learning experiences of undergraduate students taking the English for Global Communication and Strategic Communication degree programmes at the Faculty of Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). The e-EduTour module is co-created by the lecturers with their undergraduates, and it is offered virtually to international partner university participants. This unique module includes English lessons, introduction to UNIMAS faculties and facilities, visits to interesting places in Kuching, introduction to Malaysian culture, food, and drinks. Guided by the instructors, the UNIMAS undergraduates create contents for e-EduTour and serve as buddies throughout the virtual programme. The English classes are taught by experienced instructors while the undergraduates act as teaching assistants and provide peer support to participants during the breakout sessions. The undergraduates utilize knowledge learnt in their courses and work as a team to create contents introducing UNIMAS, tourist spots in Kuching, Malaysian culture, and cuisines. The contents are scripted, recorded, and edited collaboratively by the undergraduates and they take turns to host when they are showcased to the participants during the synchronous sessions. The feedback received from the international participants show that the undergraduate buddy support system acted as a catalyst in helping them develop a positive attitude towards English, enhancing their motivation to learn English, boosting their confidence to speak in English, and enriching their cultural experience. In addition, the UNIMAS undergraduates indicated that the e-EduTour was a fun and meaningful learning platform for them to collaborate with peers, learn through experience in a fun and exciting way, as well as foster personal growth. To conclude, the e-EduTour is a holistic international student mobility module that enables the UNIMAS undergraduates to have a significant learning experience by applying and integrating the knowledge learnt in their courses in a new context beyond the classroom while collaborating with local and international students.

Keywords: Significant Learning, e-EduTour, International student mobility, Buddy system, Experiential learning, Peer engagement

BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH / INNOVATION / INVENTION / DESIGN

“Knowledge without application is like a book that is never read”. Similarly, in teaching-learning enterprise, providing knowledge without getting students to utilize them would defeat the purpose of true education. Thus, educators’ ultimate goal is to provide opportunities for students to apply the knowledge learnt and make them deep learners. This aspiration, however, comes with the challenge of designing a connected curriculum that enables students to experience Significant Learning (Fink, 2003) while pursuing their study. It leads to the question of how educators can design a curriculum that enables them to apply and integrate the knowledge and skills learnt in a new context. One of the effective ways to address this is to get students participate in mobility programmes which require them to engage with international students (Roy et al., 2019; Salajan et al., 2012). However, students’ participation in mobility programmes was disrupted due to the travel restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This challenged us to rethink a new way of offering the face-to-face (F2F) mobility program in a virtual platform without compromising the quality.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH / INNOVATION / INVENTION / DESIGN

EduTour is an international student mobility program offered by UNIMAS to international partner university participants since 2018. It was offered successfully with increasing number of participants for three consecutive years from 2018 to 2020 on UNIMAS campus. However, due to the travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to rethink of a new way to offer this programme. As a result, the lecturers shared authority with their undergraduates, engaged them as partners and co-created a digital version named e-EduTour. The e-EduTour module includes five major components, namely, online English lessons, virtual introduction to UNIMAS, virtual visits to interesting places in Kuching, virtual introduction to Malaysian culture and cuisines. Guided by the instructors, the UNIMAS undergraduates utilized knowledge learnt in their courses and worked as a team in creating the contents and served as buddies throughout the virtual mobility programme. The English lessons were taught by experienced instructors while the undergraduates acted as teaching assistants and provided peer support to participants during the breakout sessions. They created videos introducing UNIMAS faculties and facilities, highlighting major tourist spots in Kuching such as the Darul Hana Bridge and Waterfront, introducing the Malaysian traditional costumes, showcasing Sarawak food such as ‘Kolo Mee’, and ‘Teh Tarik. The contents of the videos were recorded, scripted, and edited collaboratively by the undergraduates from various degree programmes and they took turns to host the contents when they were showcased to the participants during the synchronous sessions.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH / INNOVATION / INVENTION / DESIGN

The opportunity that e-EduTour offers for UNIMAS students to engage in meaningful learning while still undertaking their respective programmes has been of major significance of this international mobility programme. By participating in this programme, they were able to apply both declarative and procedural knowledge (Marzano & Pickering, 2012) they have learnt in the class and collaborate with peers within their degree programme, peers in other degree programmes as well as with international students. The multi-disciplinary learning experience gained by the students can be attributed to their active participation in planning, designing, producing, and showcasing interactive media contents, as well as playing the roles as teaching assistant in English lessons. Taken all together, this signifies that the students are stimulated to adopt creative and innovative thinking where they were compelled to learn how to convert problems into ideas, and subsequently turning the ideas into realistic plans.

Besides the aforementioned educational significance involving ‘learning beyond classroom’ or

'borderless learning', helping students to generate income is another highlight of e-EduTour. With the funding from the commercialization of this programme to Utsunomiya University in Japan, the students get a stipend for their initiatives and works produced. They are also awarded certificates for their participation and contribution. Additionally, for the instructors who are in charge of the English lessons, this is a great space for career advancement or professional training as they are able to practise mentorship with both the students and international participants while conducting the lessons.

The implementation of e-EduTour has also enhanced UNIMAS global visibility through strengthening relationships with both domestic and international partners. To highlight, this programme is no longer a stand-alone effort as it has led to various other opportunities such as student exchange programme, community engagement, university-industry collaboration, intellectual property, and commercialization, among others. Therefore, to make UNIMAS a 'community-driven university', e-EduTour is indeed a catalyst.

IMPACT OF THE INNOVATION/INVENTION/DESIGN TOWARDS EDUCATION OR COMMUNITY

The essence of innovation in the e-EduTour can be seen in its potentiality of promoting 'sustainable education' and 'significant learning', albeit in the absence of physical co-location. These future-oriented learning approaches, as embedded in this international mobility program, provide a long-lasting impact of collaboration and inclusion with a focus on enhancing authentic virtual communications among all parties involved.

In the formative stage of e-EduTour, the undergraduates across majors from UNIMAS are entrusted to create interactive contents, act as teaching assistants, and provide holistic peer support to international participants with the guidance from instructors. Through these innovation-focused tasks, their learning experience has been lifted to a more conscious and practical level, besides applying what they have learnt in their respective programmes. This is driven by the notion that learners learn better when they are given the chance to apply the knowledge and skills learnt in class. As this kind of learning involves a high degree of activity and involvement of learners in the learning process, any knowledge, skills and experience that they obtain will be more memorable and easier to apply in the future (Kucharčíková & Tokarčíková, 2016). On this basis, the undergraduate students involved in e-EduTour are not only empowered in the learning process, but also reinforced to expanding own potentials. In other sense, e-EduTour has fostered significant learning among the students in which they are poised to experience learning beyond normal.

By involving the community through the Malaysian schools, the e-EduTour programme has also opened up opportunities for local schools to collaborate with schools in Japan. Through this collaboration, they have established global classroom learning activities where the students engage in intellectual sharing of science and technology and environmental conservation projects as well as cultural exchanges. The values of such activities lie in the formation of network and friendship which has in turn tremendously encouraged them to participate in international programme. On these grounds, e-EduTour enables the school students to interact with the group and the environment in sharing personal experience (Obadiegwu, 2012). In short, the process of participation among the students in diverse teams and socio-cultural contexts fosters mutual learning, which is a desired educational outcome (Domínguez, 2012).

COMMERCIALIZATION POTENTIAL

The e-EduTour module has been copyrighted under Malaysian Intellectual Property Corporation (MyIPO) [Registration Number: LY2021W00321] and commercialized to Utsunomiya University Japan in 2021 and 2022. Universities in China and Middle-East have also requested for the module.

CONCLUSION

Significant Learning through the e-EduTour module offers a rich and rewarding learning experience for students. The undergraduates worked together with their lecturers and had the opportunity to apply disciplinary knowledge in solving a real educational problem while pursuing their undergraduate study. They established friendship and collaboration with peers within the university and forming network at the international level, while receiving financial gain and recognition.

Acknowledgement: The authors would like to express their appreciation for the support of the grant from Avid Education Project No GI/F09/ALPHA/01/2021.

REFERENCES

1. Domínguez, R.G. (2012). Participatory learning. In N. M. Seel (ed), *Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning* (pp. 2556-2560). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1428-6_1903
2. Fink, L. D. (2003). *A self-directed guide to designing courses for significant learning*. Jossey-Bass.
3. Kucharčíková, A., & Tokarčíková, E. (2016). Use of participatory methods in teaching at the university. *The Online Journal of Science and Technology*, 6(1), 82-90. <https://www.tojsat.net/?pid=showissue&issueid=116>
4. Marzano, R. J., & Pickering, D. J. (2012). *Dimension of learning*. ASCD
5. Obadiogwu, C. C. (2012). Participatory learning and student empowerment in the classroom. *African Research Review*, 6(1), 299-310. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrrrev.v6i1.25>
6. Roy, A., Newman, A., Ellenberger, T., & Pyman, A. (2019). Outcomes of international student mobility programs: A systematic review and agenda for future research. *Studies in Higher Education*, 44(9), 1630-1644.
7. Salajan, F. D., & Chiper, S. (2012). Value and benefits of European student mobility for Romanian students: experiences and perspectives of participants in the ERASMUS programme. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 2(4), 403-422.