READINESS FOR SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING AMONG DISTANCE LEARNERS IN KUCHING

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KESEDIAAN UNTUK PEMBELAJARAN KENDIRI DI KALANGAN
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Tesis yang dikemukakan
Untuk memenuhi keperluan bagi Ijazah Sarjana Sains

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate distance learners’ acceptance of e-learning and readiness for self-directed learning in two major Malaysian distance learning higher education institutions. This cross-sectional survey research used a questionnaire to obtain the research data. The questionnaire used to measure distance learners’ acceptance of e-learning and readiness for self-directed learning was adapted from the research instruments used by Poon, Low and Yong (2004) and Guglielmino (1977). A total of 229 students from the Open University of Malaysia and the Universiti Tun Abdul Razak campuses in Kuching responded to the questionnaires, representing a return rate of 82.4%. The majority of the students reported a moderate level of acceptance of e-learning and perceived themselves to be at the moderate level of self-directed learning readiness. Acceptance of e-learning and readiness for self-directed learning was found to have a moderate but significant positive relationship. Students with higher readiness of self-directed learning were found to accept e-learning more readily. Generally, the students experienced moderate satisfaction with their e-learning studies and also had moderate achievement in their e-learning course. However, students’ satisfactions with e-learning and achievements in their e-learning course were not significantly related to AEL and readiness for SDL. Single and younger students were found to have lower levels of both acceptance of e-learning and self-directed learning readiness. Students with more working experiences and with only Form 5 or Form 6 education background tended to have higher level of acceptance of e-learning. However, computer use experience and gender did not have significant influence
on the levels of acceptance of e-learning and readiness for self-directed learning. The findings of this study indicated that institutions offering e-learning should provide some non-credit courses to improve students' acceptance of e-learning and their readiness for self-directed learning. These courses should also be targeted at certain types of students such as those that are single and younger in ages. Further research could be carried out to extend the findings of this study to include more e-learners in Malaysia, investigating rural and urban students, issues of digital divide and including the use of more qualitative data to further illuminate understanding on self-directed learning readiness for e-learning.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEL  Acceptance of E-Learning
LMS  Learning Management System (Open University Malaysia)
ODCLI Oddi Continuing Learning Inventory
OUM  Open University Malaysia
SDL  Self-Directed Learning
SDLPS Self-Directed Learning Perception Scale
SDLRS Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scales
UNIMAS Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
UNITAR Universiti Tunku Abdul Razak
VIOSS Virtual Online Instructional Support System (Universiti Tunku Abdul Razak)
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

Distance learning is fast becoming an important educational medium in Malaysia and e-learning is one of the most important modes of learning for distance learning (Jefferies & Hussain, 1998).

Distance learning first started in the 1980s with the two-way interactive video-conferencing as the initial interaction methods. It had since evolved from satellite-based video-conferencing in the 1980s to ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network, compressed video) in the 1990s and to Internet Protocol (IP) based video-conferencing in the current decade (Tiedemann, 2002).

The appearance of the Internet in the 1980s did not lead to the development of Internet-based learning right away (DeLacey & Leonard, 2002). However, by the 1990s, in tandem with the rapidly expanded use of the Internet, there was an increase in the use of the Internet-based online learning to support distance learning (Jefferies & Hussain, 1998). The Internet is dramatically affecting the way people teach and learn (DeLacey & Leonard, 2002).

Distance-learning programmes were not popular until the 1990s, when an increasing number of established universities began embracing distance learning because of its benefits, especially of borderless, anytime and anywhere
learning using e-learning (DeLacey & Leonard, 2002). Since then, electronic learning (e-learning) as a form of distance learning has become an increasingly important medium of instruction (Jefferies & Hussain, 1998; Poon, Low, & Yong, 2004; Volery & Lord, 2000). Nowadays, most institutions of higher learning offer campus-based learning with some components of e-learning to supplement face-to-face interaction.

E-learning includes web-based courses and multimedia enhanced delivery medium and it has the potential to make the learning process an active one. E-learning also consists of online and knowledge management (Rosenberg, 2001).

E-learning as a form of distance learning is being promoted as the educational medium of the future (O'Malley, 1999). However, technology itself does not improve learning (Alexander & McKenzie, 1998) but its use makes possible some kinds of activity and limits others (Stephenson, 2001). The new learning environments should reflect the change in the culture of education from teacher-centred to learner-centred (O'Malley, 1999).

It is also important for distance learning students to be ready for this technology in learning as past experience had shown that new technologies, do not necessarily lead to major improvement in education (Stephenson, 2001).
1.1 **Self-directed distance learning**

In the 1980s, many researchers described distance learning as a learning environment with a physical separation of instructors and students during delivery of education (Holmberg, 1980). Hence, this kind of learning environment required the students’ learning to be independent and self-directed as the students had to learn with minimal interaction with their instructors.

As technology improved, distance learning began to move away from merely paying attention to technology and emphasizing the needs for the learners' self-determination, self-direction and self-control in the learning process (Peters, 1983). Nowadays, it is generally accepted that students enrolled in distance learning programmes using the e-learning mode should, in the first phase, already have a certain level of self-motivation and possess a certain degree of self-directed learning readiness (Jain & Lee, 2003).

Thus, distance learning students using e-learning as a mode of distance learning should possess certain attributes such as self-independence, self-motivation and seriousness about learning and achieving higher education. However, theses attributes may differ among individuals depending on their different characteristics and e-learning background (Jain & Lee, 2003).

Distance learning students are usually mature students with prior working experiences. These characteristics meant that distance learning students usually have confidence and additional skills to work independently based on
their work experiences (Gunasekaran, McNeil, & Shaul, 2002). Thus, an important aspect to look at among distance learning student characteristics is “self-directed learning”.

1.1.1 Definition of Self-Directed Learning (SDL)

There are many definitions of self-directed learning (SDL). In this study, SDL was defined as a blend of the learners’ capabilities, learner’s motivation and learner’s satisfactions with their own learning goals and the availability of resources (LeJeune, 2001). LeJeune (2001) viewed SDL as the process in which learners take control of their own learning, in particular regarding the decision on the learning approaches based on their capabilities, locating appropriate resources, setting learning goals, and evaluating progress based on their performance.

1.1.2 The importance of SDL to distance learning

SDL is valuable to students because this learning approach enhances creativity, prevents blind acceptance of existing knowledge, encourages the use of brainstorming to determine what is personally important and consistent with personal values, and helps students to adapt to rapidly changing social and physical environments (Ramsey & Couch, 1994).

From the e-learning point of view, SDL approaches provide students with flexibility in acquiring knowledge but its effectiveness however may depend on
certain students' demographics. For example, most students enrolled in distance learning programmes receive their previous education in conventional or traditional institutions where teachers play the lead role in the teaching-learning process (Jain & Lee, 2003). Therefore, although it is generally assumed that distance learning students can fall back on their work experiences, it does not necessarily mean that they can foster SDL for e-learning given their prior educational experiences which are teacher-centred.

Hence, it is important to conduct research on e-learning looking into SDL to examine the distance learning students' ability to learn analytically within this learning environment (Gan, 1998; Jain & Lee, 2003; Ndubisi, 2004).

1.2 Distance learning in Malaysia

The Malaysian higher education system traditionally involved tertiary students taught didactically in a lecture mode (Alhabshi & Hakim, 2003). This education system put emphasis on rote learning, examinations and rigid curriculum. However, Malaysia has embarked on e-learning as part of a series of measures to achieve the applications of Multimedia Super Corridor (Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid (1993), Ministry of Education (1997), and Corridor of Power (1997) cited by Hong & Koh, 2002). In line with Malaysia's mission of providing excellence in education, there are approximately 14 private colleges or universities in Malaysia providing distance learning to their students (Alhabshi & Hakim, 2003). Two well established distance learning universities in Malaysia are the Open University Malaysia (OUM) and Universiti Tun Abdul Razak (UNITAR).
1.2.1 Background of Open University Malaysia (OUM)

OUM was established on August 10, 2000 as the seventh private university in Malaysia with more than 24,000 students enrolled in e-learning programmes (Open University Malaysia, 2005) at the year 2004. The OUM e-learning system is called the Learning Management System (LMS). It is user-friendly, with a pleasant interface and is integrated with a single-login procedure. The LMS serves as the contact between the university and the students (Latifah & Ramli, 2003). At OUM, students are expected and required to become self-directed learners as they only meet and interact with their assigned tutors five times in a semester. Therefore, OUM’s students have to rely on self-instructional materials such as printed modules, digital libraries and online discussion as the main sources of learning (Latifah & Ramli, 2003). Figure 1.1 and Figure 1.2 are snapshots of myLMS from OUM.

![Figure 1.1: A snapshot of myLMS (OUM) homepage](image-url)
1.2.2 Background of Universiti Tun Abdul Razak (UNITAR)

UNITAR first established its operation in 1998, with an initial batch of 162 students (Alhabshi & Hakim, 2003). By the year 2003, UNITAR had more than 8,000 students in several campuses all around Malaysia.

UNITAR developed VOISS (Virtual Online Instructional Support System) as its learning management system to provide a supportive e-learning environment for its students. VOISS includes online discussion, online tutorials and lectures, electronic bulletin-boards and other online material (Alhabshi & Hakim, 2003; Jain & Lee, 2003). UNITAR students were exposed to the use of computer and the Internet for their studies in all their courses. UNITAR uses a combination of