Sustenance of Values and Ethics in the Malaysian

Higher Education e-Learning Drive

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Abstract

The current scenario in the education sector of developing countries such as Malaysia is also experiencing the beginning of participation in the exploration and exploitation of e-learning initiatives. Like in many other trends, be it social, economic or political, put forth, particularly from the propagation of ideas of the western countries, developing countries take on to these like wild bush fire. This is also observed in the education sector.   With the advent of cyber technology, one aspect of teaching is starting to take root in the institution of higher education and that is e-learning. This paper attempts to address some of the challenges that have cropped up as far as learning with technology is concerned. The borderless realm of knowledge warrants behavior that may lead to academic dishonesty. To maintain the universal noble values, some actions on the part of the students may precariously endanger the credibility of their assignments, projects and evaluation. To sustain these values for the good of their future, we need to address these challenges and to make known to these students the implications that these behavior create on their study and their future.   The next part of the paper discusses considerations to help curb academic misbehavior in the university. The role taken by the institutions of higher education has to be comprehensive, if not total. It is particularly important that the management of student affairs, the faculty and several other parties be able to see these issues as very serious before the undesirable elements of technology usage sits deeply enrooted in the teaching-learning process. After all, the future of a nation depends on the stewardship of these students when they graduate one day and work in the government or private sectors of the country.

Keywords: Values, Ethics, e-learning, Trends, Academic, Dishonesty, Future of a nation

1. Introduction

The use of technology in the education sector in Malaysia began to take root in the 70's. This drive has been introduced from primary, secondary to tertiary levels in the teaching and learning system which aims to facilitate effective knowledge dissemination and acquisition. The usage saw the application of television, radio, language   laboratory , overhead projector, transparency and towards the 80's began the move to computer assisted learning and eventually, in the 90's the introduction of excellent software and hardware that can produce resources beyond the wildest imagination. In recent time, when learning management system is being introduced, this drive has taken into the education scenario like wild bush fire. This is evident with the inception of e-learning centre in almost every institution of higher learning

whether in the developed or developing countries. Universiti Teknologi MARA of Malaysia has initiated the e-learning drive with the establishment of what is called i-Learn Centre. Like any other e-learning centre, the university management has given complete and undivided support in its establishment.

In UiTM, adopting e-learning is a further step towards realizing the vision of technology serving lifelong learning and a knowledge based society through enculturation of new and effective pedagogies. By incorporating the online feature to the university's conventional mode, e-learning has created a potentially powerful learning environment that enriches and complements the effectiveness of traditional teaching and learning. Since 2004, faculties have begun to offer most of its courses and learning materials using online presentation. Learning activities and resources are no longer limited to resources physically available in libraries, confined to classrooms and lecturers who are physically present on campus. The way it is, e-learning has transformed the university teaching-learning approach and thus has increased its capability to offer online and distance education programmes to students, not only nationally but also internationally in our new digital world today. This effort has been taken as another internationalization effort of higher education as it is believed that e-learning is the catalyst and mover towards the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the university. Thus, this initiative intends to draw more students, foreign and local, to see the university as having a competitive edge. With this system, lecturers are able to include various instructional materials which students can access anytime and anywhere. This has also allowed the sharing of knowledge and has made communication among lecturers very feasible and simple.

In Malaysia, the pursuant of e-learning has been striving hard to ensure that it takes off very well with everyone in the educational institution. The target population, namely the lecturers who are responsible in uploading the content material of the course taught and the students responsible for the downloading and usage of content material for their very own purpose, has been continuously given training, demonstration and courses to help them get started and to move on. The approach in teaching and learning in institutions of higher education needs to accommodate to this drive for e-learning. Its main objective is to improve the flexibility of obtaining knowledge besides the traditional lecture concept. On the other hand, the implementation of e-learning does not at all intend to replace or disregard lecture rooms or lecturers, but it serves to strengthen the teaching and learning process via the utilisation of technology. Nevertheless, apart from strengthening the traditional learning system, e-learning ads values to the learning experience, it will also support dynamic and ever-changing approaches in teaching and learning.

2. What lies within e-learning?

In terms of adding value to the learning experience, lecturers or students enjoy the beneficial elements. These include time saving factor in the regular preparation of teaching material every beginning of the semester, at least this is what is happening in the local university in Malaysia. Content materials are usually uploaded for the teaching-learning purpose. With the learning management system, the process of acquiring and providing content materials is at the click of a button. Whilst time management challenge is systematically addressed, the lecturer can update course materials as and when he or she needs to. With the ever ready principle contents of the course taught, the materials will be able to undergo changes that are warranted in order to keep the materials relevant and up-to-date. Once again the role of implementation of e-learning is further enhanced in this respect.

Dynamic quality of courses can be manageably handled by lecturers as pressing times of other academic commitment seep in the career towards excellence. This includes enhancing teaching skills, apart from the normal tasks of writing and publication, research and consultation and professional contributions within and outside the institution. Given this advantage, lecturers would be able to continuously sustain up-to-date contents of these instructional materials. e-Learning when designed and implemented well are inherently motivating. Modern technologies in general and e-learning technologies specifically have transformed not only the how and what students learn, but also the learning process from teacher focused to student-focused. The new technologies are interactive and made it easier to create learning environments empowering students to become active learners and to self- paced their learning on a 24/7 basis throughout the year.

However, with all these wonders and benefits of technology utilizations in the teaching and learning process, challenges coming ahead and beneath this initiative when students' practice and behaviour comes into question with this borderless control of electronic exposure. Computers and internet are powerful instruments that allow students to reach around the world and it is educator's responsibility to teach them how to use it responsibly and inculcate a culture of ethics. Schools and universities have been so absorbed in their efforts to bring technology into classrooms that the issue of values and ethics as far as the general guide in e-learning usage has been neglected.

3. Language use versus language abuse

The limitless liberty of one's expressions of words may undermine the sovereignty of people's various background, age, race, religion, citizenship, gender and belief. What is the demarcation line of the desirable and undesirable? Language expressions that tend towards incitation, provocation, humiliation and maliciousness or pure ignorance may ignite the harmony of teaching-learning experience in the institution if situations of this nature were to take place. The general

guide is that these negativities have to be avoided, but where does the condoning come in when freedom of computer usage exists rampantly.

Efforts on the part of i-Learn Centre of Universiti Teknologi MARA have been unceasing to address the issue of abuse of language use in the teaching-learning experience at the tertiary institution. The policy that understates the control of this academic undesirable intends to sustain or condone the language abuse. Users of the technology drive are subject to the i_learn Centre User Policy. It is imperative to note that the above as indicated below provides premises that help to condone the issue:

< Table 1: Sets of rules against abuse in utilizing services provided>

4. Academic transparency versus academic dishonesty

There is obviously great anticipation when students are given the liberty to use the computer, in a class where a lesson is taking place. In a simple case of using word processor at the computer laboratory, with writing assignment to be accomplished, there is a tendency which has been observed that, some students take the freedom of 'surfing 'other sites instead of following instruction. Temptations to be unethical in online learning tends to be greater than in traditional classrooms and a number of researchers have suggested various approaches to minimised academic dishonesty i.e cheating and plagiarism. Hinman (2000) suggested three approaches: first, virtues approach which seeks to develop students who do not want to cheat. Second the prevention approach, which seeks to eliminate or reduce opportunities for students to cheat and to reduce the pressure to cheat. Finally, the police approach which seeks to catch and punish those who do cheat. According to Hinman (2000), policing, when employed consistently, can also serve as a preventive measure.

Olt (2002) in her paper entitled "Ethics and Distance Education: Strategies for minimizing academic dishonesty in online assessment," recommends that effective strategies to minimise academic dishonesty is first to recognize the instructor's inabilities in online assessment and find ways to overcome them. The first strategy is to acknowledge the instructor's inability to ascertain who is actually taking an online assessment. Instructors should utilize a log-in system for online assessment which should be disseminated just prior to the assessment being made available, and change for each online assessment. Secondly, to acknowledge instructor's inability to control a student's unauthorized use of resources in completing an assessment. The simplest way to combat this difficulty is to make all assessments open-book and the development of other assessments suitable for online. A third disadvantage is the possibility of students collaborating with each other in taking an assessment. Instructor's should be able to set time limits and the number of permissible accesses and randomized question pools are excellent tool since they ensure that no two students will take exactly the same assessment. Finally, to recognize the technical difficulties that instructors and students will face, students can sometimes try to use such difficulties to his/her advantage. One possible remedy to this problem is to use courseware that tracks the time, duration, and number of attempts that a student accesses an assessment. If students are made aware that such data is available to the instructors, then they may be less likely to exploit the situation. A final strategy to minimize academic dishonesty is to provide students with an academic integrity/dishonesty policy.

Universiti Teknologi MARA being the largest public university in Malaysia with a main campus and 12 other regional campuses around the country has a distance learning centre and 38 affiliated colleges under its wing. The university's students' population currently is 100,000 and was recently mandated in 2005 by the government to increase its student's population to 200,000 by the year 2010. The university's top management acted on the conviction that technology and e-learning as one of its main strategies. This will improve learner's support but also reduces demands on buildings. However, since then the university has experienced several issues bearing on student's ethics and honesty which are unique to the online method of course delivery. There is much discussion in the literature on student's dishonesty which is an issue of great concern throughout academia and students cheating are on the rise especially in online classes *(*Kennedy, 2000*)*. It is reported that online instructors at Purdue University Calumet have experienced a variety of actual, as well suspected, cases of students cheating. It appears that a significant number of students will generally attempt to do whatever is necessary to cut down on their workload or improve their grade in online classes regardless of ethics violation   (Colwell and Jenks, 2005*: students ethics in online courses, paper presented at 35th ASEE/IEEE Conference, October 19-22, 2005).*   Some frequently cited studies have reported that between 40-70 percent of all college students have reported cheating sometime during their academic career *(*Aiken, 1991; Davis, Grover, Becker and McGregor, 1992*)*. Researchers identified factors that influence academic dishonesty includes competition and pressures for good grades, instructional situations that are perceived as unfair or excessively demanding, lax attitude on the part of the faculty towards academic dishonesty, peer pressure to support a friend, and a diminishing sense of academic integrity and ethical values among students (Aiken, 1991; Barnett and Dalton, 1981; Davis, Grover, Becker, and McGregor, 1992; Roberts and Rabinowitz, 1992*)*.

In facing the challenge regarding academic dishonesty and cheating in exams, UiTM   implemented online assessment only for the coursework marks for its distance learning programmes. At the end of every semester all students come to campus to sit for examinations as the best solution to maintain the credibility of its online courses in particular.

However, a sound plan to address academic dishonesty and online assessment designs needs to be developed by the university in the very near future in anticipation of the 200,000 students population. Perhaps the following table can assist all parties to be well-informed of the sets of rules under e-learning policy that helps to condone the undesirables.

<Table 2: Rules on illegal use of services provided>

5. Graphic versus pornographic

In the course content management, graphics are valuable elements that enhance reception of knowledge and information. More and more people are using computer to create graphics for all kinds of assignments, projects and other academic construct. Graphics provide explicit physical and dimensional presentation of information that is necessary for courses taught in the institution of higher learning. This important element in the design of contents is soundly educational in relations to tables, charts, diagrams, photographs and all the rest.

In contrast, the concern will be the explicit content of pornographic elements that the graphic may attempt to represent. Very clearly, the internet has boundless inputs at the click of the key. However, what does the custodian, be it lecturer or student, of values and ethics, need to do to strain what is sufficient and insufficient, adequate and limitless or appropriate and inappropriate. In a developing country like Malaysia even, to avoid either staff or students from freely accessing pornographic materials which are highly accessible through the use of computer. For the users of learning management system, another line of demarcation needs to be drawn between these desirables and undesirable.

6. Conclusions

Since the establishment of its e-learning centre, officially known as i-Learn Centre, Universiti Teknologi MARA has developed its e-learning online ethic policy as "UiTM i-Learn User Policy", as have already been mentioned above, for students and academics as the first step in the right direction towards educating students and academics to behave responsibly online. The statements of the policy aim to teach students to understand that an electronic community requires people to behave responsibly and use the resources beneficially. For the academics, the policy is to make them aware of their responsibilities and expectations as online instructors and to exhibit legal and ethical behaviors. Much have been done, however, the question posed will be: have these been useful, if not effective? This concept paper has been written to address issues that have been observed since the inception of e-learning drive in the university. Effectiveness and success of such efforts may require further works of research, which are currently taking place by groups of academic custodians to investigate the direction of this technological drive in the university.

Let us return to the basics of history that has been moving like the cart wheel. With such a reminder, it is pertinent to look at   his famous book *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* in which the author, Gibbon (1788), quoted by Procnow (2000) outlined five basic reasons that resulted in the withering and death of this civilization and they are:

(1) The undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home, which is the basis for human society.
(2)Higher and higher taxes: the spending of public money for free bread and circuses for the populace.
(3)The mad craze for pleasure, with sports and plays becoming more exciting, more brutal and more immoral.
(4)The building of great armaments when the real enemy was within – decay of individual responsibility.
(5)The decay of religion, whose leaders lost touch with life and their power to guide.

Information and communication technology is the ''plaything' of the present day. Its multipurpose existence juxtaposes the livelihood of modern people in every facet of life. Taken for the purpose of education, it spells goodness for human kind. Nevertheless, with reference to the third statement of Edward Gibbon, when maddening craze for pleasure, entertainment, and abuse take over the sanity of a nation, death of civilization can be inevitable.

In addition, at operational level, the university and the platform provided by i-Learn Centre, continuous efforts to help control and sustain values and ethics in education. In many conferences on e-learning, the issue focused on ethics and values on the part of the students, in particular, as far as technology use is concerned; has not been readily and openly addressed. These are very much noticed in many topics found in conference proceedings, journals and other writings other than materials focused on the issue per se. With the discussion on the issue above, how then do these undergraduate be reminded of their responsibility of observing the good from the bad, the desirable from the undesirable, the right from the wrong, as in whatever realm of knowledge acquisition, the current trend in life needs to be paused and pondered by what lies ahead with e-learning or any other learning system that exists. Learning by our young people does not end with their graduation and the receipt of the graduate scroll for every convocation. Their turn in the world of career and work will be enhanced by the values and ethics, if not motivation and positive thinking, all of which if have been instilled determine the quality of work life undertaken by these young people. A careful analysis of Ibn Khaldun's view shows that although science and technology plays an important role in a civilization, they cannot exist by themselves. For science and technology to be really useful, they have to be established upon a firm foundation of a general education, the most important component of which are literacy, innumeracy, thinking skills, and, most importantly, religion and character development. Civilizations get corrupted and decline not because people do not have skills, but when their character becomes corrupted.

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Table 1. Sets of rules against abuse in utilizing services provided

The following is an excerpt of the e-learning drive policy of Universiti Teknologi MARA on issue pertaining to illegal or wrong usage of the services provided. Abuse means any conduct that is inconsistent with the generally accepted norms and expectations of the Internet community, and i-learn reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to make a determination whether any particular conduct violates such norms and expectations. The following are abusive activities that are prohibited. The lists are not mean to be exhaustive, but are rather to convey the idea of what constitutes 'abusive' activities, and should apply to other Internet activities such as Internet Relay Chat (IRC), bulletin boards, etc.

Prohibition on Network Abuse

The following are strictly prohibited:

causing denial of service (DoS) attacks against i-learn or UiTM network hosts or i-learn users or otherwise degrading or impairing the operation of i-learn or UiTM servers and facilities, whether intentionally or though neglect;

injecting, intentionally or negligently, false or unauthorised network control data into i-learn or UiTM network, for instant in the form of incorrect routing or domain name system (DNS) information;

subverting or attempting to subvert, or assisting others in such actions, the security or integrity of any i-learn or UiTM system, facilities or equipment;

gaining or attempting to gain unauthorised access to the computer network, systems or devices of i-Learn or UiTM;

conducting an unauthorised port scans or other invasive procedures against any system;

distributing or posting any virus, worm, Trojan horse, or computer code intended to disrupt services, destroy data, destroy or damage equipment, or disrupt the operation of i-Learn or UiTM;

distributing, advertising or promoting software, products or other services that have the primary purpose of encouraging or facilitating unsolicited commercial e-mail or "spam" [this includes any kind of hosting (web, DNS, FTP, etc) for spammers];

soliciting or collecting, or distributing, advertising or promoting, email address lists for the purpose of encouraging or facilitating commercial e-mail or "spam"; and

providing passwords or access codes to persons not authorised to receive such information by i-learn or UiTM or operator of any system requiring the password or access code.

Prohibition of E-Mail Abuse

i-Learn and UiTM adopt a zero tolerance policy for "Spam", whether originating from Users, User's customers, or from Users that provide services and products which are used to support "Spam". Users and their customers and downstream providers, are prohibited from:

sending and/or allowing their connection to i-learn or UiTM to be used for sending "Spam";

operating "Support services" (intentionally or not) for Spammers. This includes, but is not limited to hosting websites, DNS records, FTP services, e-mail, electronic mailboxes, telephony gateways, IRC servers, sale of spamming software or other such services;

promoting products or services through "Spam" or Spammers;

having third parties send out commercial emails on any User's behalf;

using i-learn or UiTM facilities to receive replies from unsolicited emails (commonly referred to as 'drop-box' account); and configuring any email server in such a way that it will accept third party emails for forwarding (commonly known as an "open mail relay").

Table 2. Rules on illegal use of services provided

The following rules pertain to i-learn services which may only be used for lawful purposes. The transmission, distribution, or storage of any data or materials in violation of any applicable laws or regulations is prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to materials or data which:

Are copied from third parties (including text, graphic, music, videos or other copyrightable material) without proper authorization.

Misappropriate or infringe the patents, copyrights, trademarks, trade secrets, or other intellectual property rights of any third party. User shall be responsible to get the necessary permission from the author or owner of any protected intellectual property materials for the transmission, distribution, storage, reproduction or use of any of such materials on i-learn.

Are used for trafficking illegal drugs, illegal gambling, raising racial or political sentiments, or are obscene materials or any other products or services that are prohibited under the applicable laws;

Constitute use or dissemination of pornography;

Violate any party's confidential rights;

Violate any applicable laws;

Subject i-learn or UiTM to legal proceedings, subject i-learn or UiTM to any liabilities for any reason, or adversely affect i-learn or UiTM's public image, reputation or goodwill, including, without limitation, sending or distributing sexually explicit, hateful, vulgar, racially, ethnically or otherwise objectionable materials as determined by i-learn in its sole discretion.