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WEEK WITHOUT WALLS: A 21ST CENTURY CLASSROOM IMPLEMENTATION AT TERTIARY LEVEL

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Abstract: *This paper uses a descriptive approach to investigate the implementation of 21st-century classroom learning at the tertiary level. The action research observed the use of digital technology in a university's "Week Without Walls" initiative. The purpose was to find out what activities were carried out in the "Week Without Walls" and how they were implemented in relation to 21st-century education learning. A total number of 17 lecturers' teaching and learning activities were observed during a one-week university initiative of out-of-classroom "Week Without Walls" implementation. Lecturers were given directions to prepare their activities outside the classroom walls in any form or manner of their choice. The results showed that the majority of lecturers used digital technologies to carry out their activities during the week with the highest application being online learning and WhatsApp mobile sharing. This provided a strong indication that the possibilities of the use of digital technologies for teaching and learning are tremendous and highly recommended for the implementation of 21st century classroom learning.*

Keywords: *Week Without Walls, 21st Century Classroom, Digital Technologies, Online Learning*

Introduction

Virtual learning environments are becoming more popular among students and teachers alike. They allow opportunities for students and teachers to meet without being confined to a specific location, restricted by walls of a physical building. This provides an alternative to traditional learning environments. The flexibility of learning includes gaining learning experience at any time and any place of the learner's choice, access to a massive resource-bank on the internet for gaining more knowledge on a particular subject matter and a variety of interesting and interactive resources such as videos, animations, audios, emails, internet, mobile apps and websites. Advanced technologies such as these are becoming more important in directing the process of learning in 21st century education (Anekwe, 2017).

In effect, the emergence of technology in education is not new in our education system. The practice of technology in teaching and learning has been implemented in schools and universities since the 1990s where the use of computer, internet and CD, and other ICT technologies had thoughtful impact on the direction of the education environment in Malaysia (Yusup Hashim & Abd Latif Gapor, 2017). Nevertheless, findings from the Microsoft Asia EduTech Survey 2016 revealed that from a poll of 200 educators in the Asia Pacific region, 96 percent were already making technology decisions in their work and 97 percent wished they could do more. They all agreed that technology plays a big part in transforming and improving the education system of the future (Zulita Mustafa, 2016).

Thus, it is undeniable that the utilization of technology to enhance learning has become a necessity for educators. For this reason, educators have been forced by the wired environment to adapt and improve their teaching delivery towards e-learning methods. With the advent of computer as a teaching tool, computers have gone through rapid development. Mobile versions have emerged to adapt the technology for a more conducive use. Computers and the internet have been both used extensively as teaching tools to help educators present their teaching contents in the most creative way. In addition to the continuous development of computers and telecommunication technology where teachers can manage these inventions easily, learners have also become accustomed to them. Instead of waiting for teachers to present knowledge using computers in class, learners can now acquire knowledge independently by using the internet to receive more exposure to any topics learnt at school (Brown, 2016). Bearing this in mind, it would therefore be interesting to see if the efforts to utilize technology has been applied at the tertiary level. This paper will thus attempt to provide insight to the implementation of the "Week Without Walls" initiative at a local university by focusing on the following research questions: (1) What type of activities are conducted in Week Without Walls? (2) How are the activities implemented in relation to 21st century education learning?

Objectives

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the implementation of the "Week Without Walls" initiative at a local university in line with the government's agenda towards 21st century education. As such, the objectives of the study are as follows:

1. to identify the type of activities conducted in Week Without Walls to support 21st century education;
2. to investigate the implementation of the activities in relation to 21st century education.

Scope of The Study

In general, this study looks at the different approaches to the implementation of 21st century education. One of the initiatives of the university to this implementation is the "Week without walls" programme. Specifically, the study will look at this initiative to determine the activities in relation to the implementation of 21st century learning. Thus, the scope of the study is limited to the approach by means of the "Week without walls" initiative in the implementation of 21st century education.

Literature Review

This section of the paper will discuss past literatures to provide an in-depth view of the paper in terms of 21st century education, e-learning environments and the concept of Week Without Walls (WWW).

Brief Overview of 21st Century Education

The introduction of 21st century education into the education system has seen a transformation of conventional classrooms as portrayed in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013 to 2025. The education scene has undergone remarkable change in terms of retrieving information. This has encouraged learners to become thinkers due to the availability of mobile technology and internet in their hands. Learners can easily use both inventions to acquire more knowledge or solve problems. The change in the role of learners has led to a crucial change in education where educators have been called to redesign their teaching methods at par with the level of knowledge that students have acquired by themselves. Lessons in classrooms have turned into student-centered lessons where students are able to manage their own learning with the help of technology. For example, a study on e-reading materials found that students are resourceful and able to work independently to find materials for their assignments (Soo, 2018). Students are able to collaborate with others to complete assessments through emails. Learning has become an act of independence and freedom for learners due to their ability to manage their learning process on their own (Hennes, 2017).

E-learning Environment

Since students have become well versed in the use of computers and the internet, there is less need for students to be available in class. E-learning or electronic learning has replaced traditional classrooms where students use their computers to access educational websites which have been set by their lecturers/teachers as their source of learning. These technologies have enabled learners to access a wide array of websites and to communicate with other students for information sharing (Farahiza Zaihan Azizan, 2010).

In the context of higher education institutions in Malaysia, e-learning was first practiced for the purpose of delivering lectures where students can access the university's official website to download lecture notes, exercises or to complete online quiz. In Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) for example, the I-Learn Portal was developed for such purposes in the year 2007 where teaching and learning materials can be accessed by both the lecturers and students besides online interactions. The learning portal can also be accessed with a mobile phone. Students in the institution have used the website mainly for retrieving lecture notes and completing assessments. Since the development of the portal, the usage has increased remarkably 3,714 to 77,027 in the span of 3 years (Adora Endut et al, 2011). The number of

users is expected to increase yearly due to the support from the university in implementing the portal as part of the teaching and learning process.

Access to the internet can be done by use of varied electronic devices and this includes the use of mobile smartphones. Mobile learning has become the new and popular teaching and learning tool. It has been considered as a practical communicative device and a hub for study aids. It is a technology which can easily be learnt regardless of age (Cheon et al, 2012). Educators can easily share website links for students to access while students can simply click on the given link, communicate with other students through a mobile app and access the contents anytime. Smartphones and I-Pods have been used by educators to deliver teaching contents. Educators in the present time have been reported to share teaching episodes using smartphones and recorded audio files which contain commentaries and explanation related to the episodes (Herrington et al, 2009).

Week Without Walls

Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) first started the "Week Without Walls" initiative in the year 2018 (UiTM Academic Affairs Division, 2018). "Week Without Walls" is an allocated week of lessons without the barriers of physical walls where lessons can be conducted outside the physical classroom. Activities such as excursions and field trips, blended learning, workshops, learning camps and online lessons are encouraged to be conducted as part of the learning process for that particular week. This programme was executed in support of the initiative of Education 5.0 by the university. Educators and learners were invited to use technologies as their tool to manage the teaching and learning process (Prof Dr Nor Aziah Alias, 2019). Lecturers have been encouraged to use the I-Learn portal or other learning aids such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Edmodo, Quizziz, and Padlet, open learning portal such as UiTM MOOC and other educational webpages that were applicable to their lessons. Besides using ICT and mobile technology as teaching and learning sources, lecturers were also allowed to hold educational events which were managed by students to create a different way of learning and managing assessments independently. "Week Without Wall" is an initiative in encouraging educators and learners in the 21st century to utilize third platform technology as tools for teaching and learning. This initiative was executed to ensure learners are prepared in ICT literacy and to meet the demands of the workplace where employees are expected to be trained with ICT and digital technology.

Methodology

This study is based on a descriptive approach to investigate the implementation of 21st century classroom at the tertiary level. The action research observed the use of digital technology in a university's "Week Without Walls" innitiative. Seventeen participants were selected using purposive non-random sampling methods. They were all Academy of Language Studies (ALS) lecturers affiliated to the Universiti Teknologi MARA Rembau Campus. Out of the 17 participants, 5 are permanent lecturers, 2 are contract lecturers and 10 are part-time (PT) and part-time full-time (PTFT) lecturers. There were 6 English language diploma and degree codes, 5 Mandarin and Arabic language diploma and degree codes and 2 Bahasa Melayu diploma and degree codes taught by the lecturers. The participants consisted of 2 male lecturers and 15 female lecturers. There were 2 Indian lecturers, 2 Chinese lecturers and 13 Malay lecturers. The "Week Without Walls" initiative was held on 15 to 19 April 2019. The lecturers were

informed earlier to prepare their lessons for the week-long programme. They were given flexibility to choose how they intend to carry out their lessons during that week. Each lecturer was required to produce a report of the activities he/she carried out during the week-long programme. The report was to be handed in to the administration. A study of the report with the relevant evidence provided data for the research. The data were tabulated and analyzed using descriptive analysis of percentages and frequency counts in order to draw conclusions from the results and findings.

Results and Findings

After reviewing of the past literature and the consideration of the method applied for the present study, the data collected from the reports by the ALS lecturers for the WWW initiative are tabulated and analyzed using descriptive statistics. This section of the paper will provide the results and findings from the data run with regards to the demographics of the participants, activities conducted during the WWW week and how WWW supports 21st century education.

Demographics

Table 1 below describes the demographics of the participants for the study. As indicated in the table, out of 17 lecturers from the Academy of Language Studies only 5 are permanent lecturers while the rest are either contract, part time full time or part time lecturers. The lecturers teach four different languages offered at the university which are English Language, Mandarin Language, Arabic Language and Bahasa Melayu. There are 15 female lecturers and 2 male lecturers. There are 2 Indian lecturers, 2 Chinese lecturers and 13 Malay lecturers who participated in the study.

		n	Total
Job status	Permanent	5	
	Contract	2	
	Part Time Full Time	7	
	Part Time	3	17
Number of course code taught	English diploma	3	
	English degree	3	6
	Mandarin diploma	2	
	Mandarin degree	3	5
	Arabic diploma	2	
	Arabic degree	3	5
	Bahasa Melayu diploma	1	
	Bahasa Melayu degree	1	2
Gender	Male	2	
	Female	15	17
Race	Indian	2	
	Chinese	2	
	Malay	13	17

Table 1. Demographics of the Participants

Activities Conducted During the "Week Without Walls"

One of the objectives of this paper is to find out the activities conducted during the "Week Without Walls" initiative. As stipulated in the university's agenda, the activities can vary according to the needs of the course such as going for field trips, doing workshops, having seminars, self-access learning and so forth. Figure 1 below shows the activities carried out during the "Week Without Walls" from 15 to 19 April 2019 by the lecturers at ALS Rembau Campus.

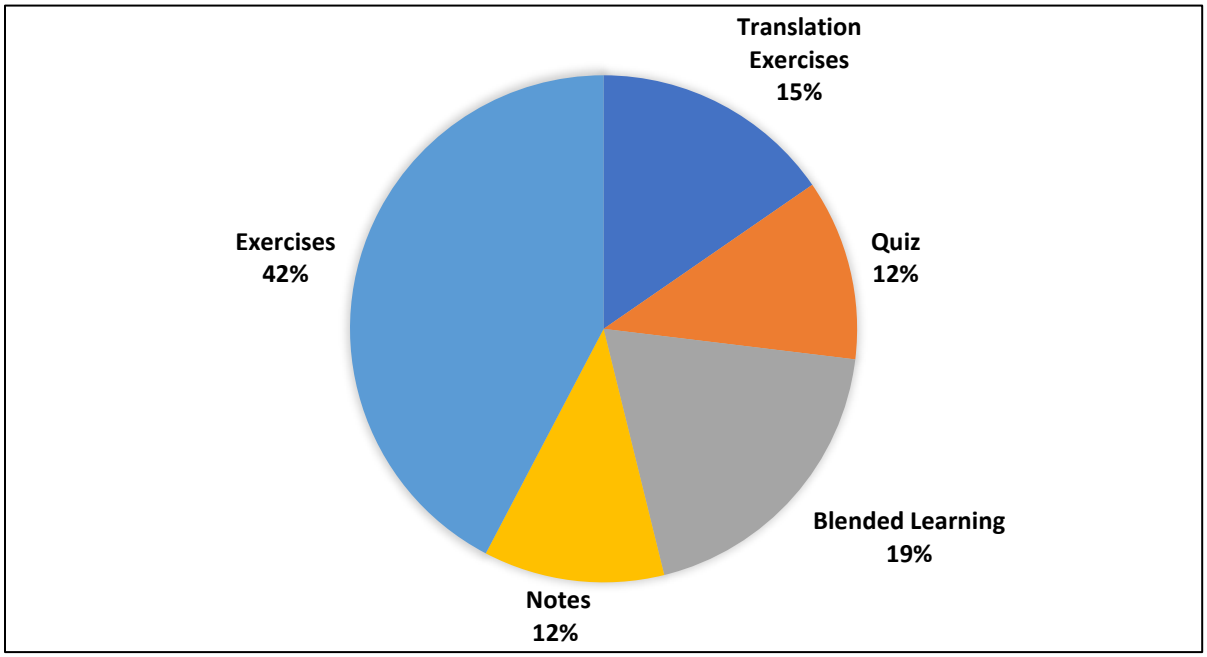

Figure 1. Activities Carried Out During the "Week Without Walls" by ALS Lecturers

Figure 1 shows the activities carried out during the "Week Without Walls" by ALS lecturers. The findings show that the activity that was most carried out by the lecturers are exercises 42%, followed by blended learning 19%, translation exercises 15%, quiz 12% and notes 12%. Rather than carrying out field excursions or workshops, the lecturers preferred giving exercises, quizzes, notes, translation exercises and blended learning.

WWW in Relation To 21st Century Education

Without a doubt, 21st century education advocates online independent learning where students have become digital natives of the wired environment. In relation to this, the practice of an out-of-classroom learning environment through virtual applications and techno-savvy devices can be seen as part and parcel of the agenda of 21st century education. The findings of the present action research show that for the WWW initiative the use of such application in line with 21st century education models are prevalent as indicated in Figure 2 below.

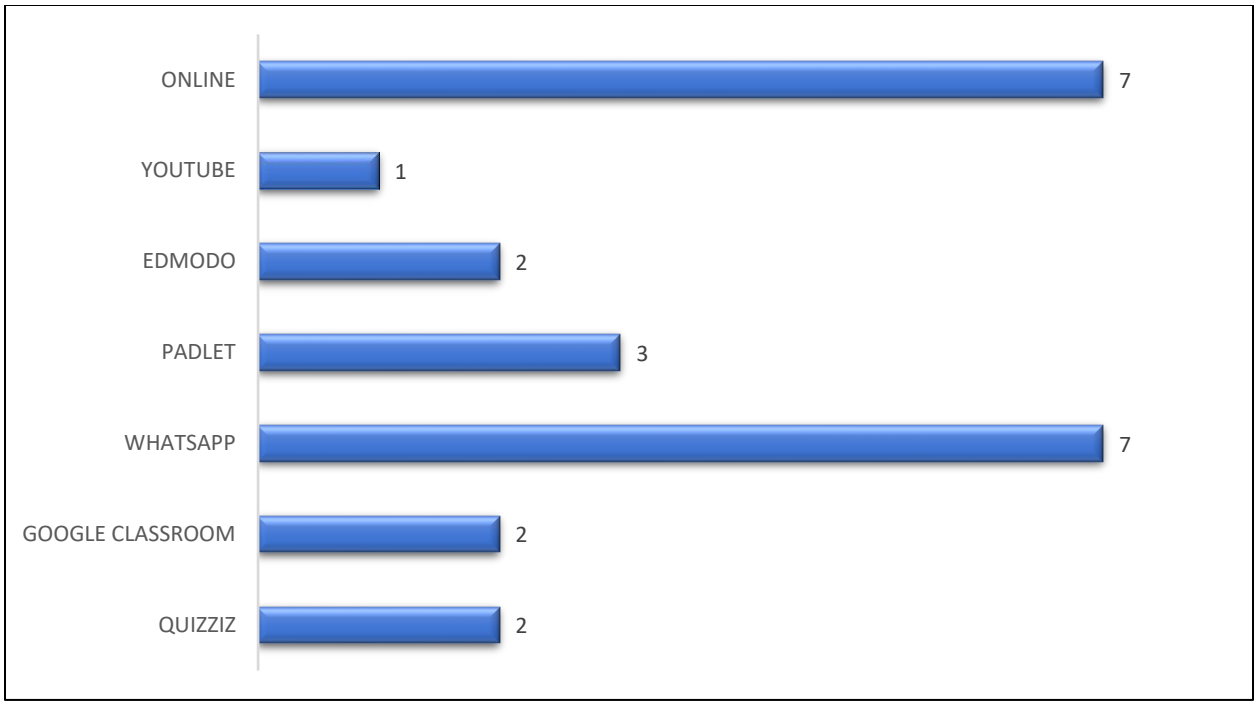

Figure 2. Digital Applications with Relations To 21st Century Education in The WWW Initiative

Figure 2 shows the use of various digital applications by the ALS lecturers in disseminating activities for the week-long WWW initiative. Overall, the data indicates that the ALS lecturers used digital applications throughout the WWW initiative for all the activities for that week. Of all the online digital applications used, the WhatsApp mobile sharing and the i-learn online website had the highest usage and was the most popular among the ALS lecturers (n=7). This was followed by the use of padlet (n=3), google classroom (n=2), quizziz (n=2), Edmodo (n=2) and youtube (n=1). The usage of such applications show that the ALS lecturers are able to use digital technologies to disseminate teaching and learning activities in a virtual platform. This also shows that the university agenda for WWW in relations to 21st century education is doable among the ALS lecturers at the tertiary level.

Conclusion

This study has investigated the implementation of 21st century classroom at the tertiary level in a university campus with regards to the university's WWW initiative. The purpose was to find out what type of activities are conducted in Week Without Walls and how the activities are implemented in relation to 21st century education learning. The results and findings from the study showed that for the ALS lecturers, activities related directly to the lesson for the week were carried out. Majority of the lecturers chose to have exercises. Exercises are important as they provide good practice to improve language skills. Further, language courses at the university do not have final exams. As such, students are given continuous on-going assessments throughout the 14 weeks of study. Exercises to practice the skill is therefore important to familiarize the students with the assessment format. For example, students need some exercises on how to write reports using the language for report in the EWC661 course in order to successfully be able to write the final report by the end of the semester. It was also

found that the ALS lecturers conducted the activities by using digital online applications. Thus, interaction was done via email, mobile chat rooms and online applications such as google classroom, Edmodo and i-learn. Majority of the activities were either through the WhatsApp Mobile phone sharing or the internet i-learn online.

From the results and findings, it can thus be concluded that there is a strong indication for 21st century education application in the WWW initiative among the ALS lecturers. 21st century education asserts that learning can be done virtually anywhere at any time where learners can resourcefully find info independently in a virtual learning environment. The WWW initiative provided an avenue for the lecturers to apply such techniques in 21st century education to their classroom. Thus, the WWW provided an opportunity for the use of 21st century education elements in the teaching and learning at the university.

The study was an action research in a university campus that focused on the WWW initiative at the university. The gap of the study was to look at whether WWW provided for the implementation of 21st century education by means of the type of activities carried out and how it was carried out during the WWW initiative. However, the study had limitations as it was mainly based on a faculty's report at the university and therefore cannot be used to apply to all faculties at the university. For future research henceforth, it is recommended that a more comprehensive research on 21st century education at tertiary level be conducted across universities in Malaysia. Also, it is recommended that the study look at the implementation from the view point of learners and administrators besides educators.

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