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Acceptance towards Digital Learning Module based Blended Learning Strategy in Higher Learning Institutions: A case study from Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Background: Changes in pedagogical approach at higher learning institutions are in line with technological innovation and challenges in education. Teaching in the new millennium has been student-centred, material-based as well as inclusive of electronic, online and blended learning. This paper analyses learner acceptance towards digital learning module (e-CITAC) based on Blended Learning (BL) strategy in the Islamic and Asian Civilisation Course (TITAS) using a developmental research design Type 1. In the formative evaluation phase, a case study design was used to elicit responses towards the module. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed among 123 students and focused-group interviews among 4 groups. The findings indicated positive acceptance of the module with Performance Expectancy construct receiving the highest mean, followed by Facilitating Conditions (mean = 3.99), Effort Expectancy (mean = 3.96), Behavioral Intention (mean = 3.88), Social Influence (mean = 3.57) and the lowest mean was for Voluntary Usage (mean = 3.56). The changes brought by the digital learning module (e-CITAC) may be attributed to multimodality in content, delivery approach, instructional method and role. The module is also suitable for fact-based and history-related courses due to its varied learning content and attractive interesting visuals. The production of such module should be encouraged to support transformation at higher learning institutions focusing on blended learning integrated model.

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INTRODUCTION

Through technology, creative and interactive teaching content can be integrated as a module based on teaching objectives and skills outlined by an institution. The content can also be easily modified and accessible to lecturers and students anywhere. The Islamic and Asian Civilisation Course (TITAS) is a compulsory subject (MPW) for undergraduates in all higher learning institutions (Ahmad Zaki & Norhayati, 2007). The course comes under the General Studies Course coordinated by the ministry to be taught at all higher learning institutions and polytechnics beginning 1 September 2013, replacing the Compulsory Course' status to 'General Studies Course' (MPU) (Directives by Management of Private Learning Institutions No. 2, 2013). The objectives are to develop the undergraduates' understanding on the Islamic civilisations in the Asian region besides equipping the young generation with high morality and sense of tolerance (Yaacob & Che Bakar, 2004). The aims are also reflective of Malaysia's status as a nation with multitude of races, religions, ethnics and cultures (Siti Hajar & Ratna Roshida, 2012).

The Islamic and Asian Civilisation Course (TITAS) as a subject, contributes to racial harmony, leading to the preservation and prosperity of a society. Hence lecturer competence plays an important element to ensure effective delivery of the TITAS. The current situation is inundated with rapid advancement of technology in teaching (Abd Latif, 2006; Bonk, 2009; Umar and Samsuddin, 2011; Pombo and Moreira, 2013), contributing to the creation of students of the digital era (Prensky, 2001) who grow up with computers and the Internet (Mills,

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2011; Atif, 2013). In fact more than 86% of students are involved on online social networking (OSN) (Thoms and Eryilmaz, 2013).

Student who enter universities have long developed early exposure to technology and ready to absorb new ones. However the same condition may not apply to their lecturers who, bogged down by workloads, are inclined to focus solely on giving lectures, the most popular strategy used in teaching The Islamic and Asian Civilisation Course (TITAS) (Zulkifli, 2002; Norsiah *et al*., 2004; Zaid Ahmad *et al*., 2004; Mohd Arip, 2004; Nik Salida and Syahirah, 2004; Zarina, 2007; Wan Zulkifli and Mohd Arip, 2012; Wan Amizah *et al*., 2012; Mohamad Azhari *et al*., 2012; Norhapizah and Ab. Halim, 2013; Norhapizah *et al*., 2013). Through lecturing and power- point slide presentation, students become less motivated and bored (Muhamad Faisal *et al*., 2012; Mohamad Azhari and Siti Noralizah, 2012; Wan Zulkifli and Mohd Arip, 2012; Norhapizah *et al*., 2013). Hence this paper attempts to evaluate learner acceptance towards digital learning module (e-CITAC) based on blended learning strategy in the Islamic and Asian Civilisation Course (TITAS).

Digital Module Based on Blended Learning (BL) Strategy:

A module is a unit of teaching and learning for discussing a particular topic systematically and sequentially to facilitate individual learning so the topic can be mastered easily and accurately (Sidek and Jamaludin, 2005). Even if the module is carried out in a class or group of students, it still applies to individual learning. This is because as long as it brings about positive change in students, its implementation can take place individually or in academic or non-academic groups (Russel, 1974).

Online digital module for blended learning displays learning content and work plan or a combination of both on one page or more. It can be prepared for teaching and learning for a week or other specified duration (University of Central Florida and American Association of State College and Universities, 2015). Blended learning is made up of four models: (i) Rotation, (ii) Flex, (iii) Self-Blend, and (iv) Enriched-Virtual. Under Rotation Model, there are four types: Station-Rotation, Lab-Rotation, Flipped Classroom and Individual Classroom (Staker and Horn 2012; Moore, 2013).

Methodology:

Research Design:

The study used a developmental research design (van den Akker, 1999; Richey *et al*., 2004; Richey and Klein, 2007; Richey and Klein, 2014) integrating pragmatic and traditional designs such as case study, evaluation and interview by applying various methods normally qualitative in nature or a combination of both qualitative and quantitative (Noraziah and Sulaiman, 2012; Richey and Klien, 2014). The rationale for integrating both approaches is to enable the researcher to conduct the study with more accuracy and breadth through different methodological lens, diverse measurements and holistic description (Creswell, 2012).

A study on product creation and teaching materials is established through a developmental research design Type 1 as discussed by Richey and Klein (2014). In the formative evaluation, a case study design was used (Merriam, 1998) with a mixed triangulation approach (Creswell, 2012) in eliciting responses on user acceptance towards the content of digital learning module that has been developed.

Instrument:

The main instrument in the study was the prototype of the digital learning content (e-CITAC) besides a questionnaire and semi-structured verbal protocol verified by 7 experts on various fields: subject matter, instructional design, pedagogy, psychometrics and language. The questionnaire was modified from Venkatesh *et al*., (2012) on consumer acceptance towards information technology use based on Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). The instrument consisted of six criteria: (i) performance expectancy, (ii) effort expectancy, (iii) social influence, (iv) facilitating conditions, (v) voluntary usage (vi) behavioral intention. A scale range used was (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) not sure, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree using the scale for score mean interpretation based on Nunally (1978):

Table 1: Scales for score mean interpretation.

Mean Scale Range	Interpretation
1.00-2.00	Low
2.01-3.00	Moderately low
3.01-4.00	Moderately high
4.01-5.00	High

Qualitative data were obtained from semi-structured focused-group interviews involving four groups. To ensure reliability, (i) cross checking techniques were conducted systematically, followed by (ii) member check, (iii) expert review and (iv) informant check. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that informant check is of utmost importance to ensure the reliability of a study.

Sampling:

The study involved 123 undergraduates from four campuses of the University of Technology

Malaysia (UiTM) only and different higher learning institutions offered different courses despite some similarity in content (Faridah and Fakhruladabi, 2012). The selection was done through purposive sampling involving only campuses which had suitability in terms of teaching and learning context and consent from lecturers and students who agreed to implement the module. The digital learning module content was evaluated through questionnaires based on retrospective technique in which feedback from lecturers and students were collected after its implementation. The findings were verified through a triangulation of qualitative data to ensure high reliability hence focused-group interviews were conducted to elicit detailed implementation of the module.

Pilot Test:

A pilot test was conducted in one of the campuses of UiTM involving 40 Semester 1 undergraduates from two classes. Data collected from the pilot test were evaluated for consistency using SPSS. The alpha value was set at 0.916 following the norm that Cronbach's Alpha value of more than 0.6 to be used for determining the reliability index in a study (Gay *et al*., 2011). On the other hand, the pilot test for interviews involved four Semester 1 undergraduates. According to Merriam (2009), a pilot test helps a researcher to practise interviewing in a real setting to check for suitability, accuracy and feasibility of interview questions given to informants.

Findings:

The researcher obtained learner responses using questionnaires and focused-group semi-structured interviews. There are six constructs evaluated which are performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, voluntary usage and behavioral intention.

a. Performance expectancy:

Generally there is a strong preference among the respondents in this construct based on the overall mean score 4.12. Learners viewing 'module as very beneficial' (mean = 4.24, SD = 0.59) receives the highest mean followed by item 'making it easy for me to master learning' (mean = 4, SD = 0.69), 'module attracts interest' (mean = 4.10 SD= 0.69) and finally the item 'skill competence upgraded by e-CITAC' scores the lowest mean. In sum, in the performance expectancy construct, the e-CITAC module is well accepted by the respondents at both high and moderately high level.

b. Effort expectancy:

Learner acceptance towards effort expectancy in e-CITAC module at moderately high level based on the overall mean score of 3.96. The highest mean is obtained for item 'try to understand TITAS when I use e-CITAC' (mean = 4.00, SD= 0.67), item 'studying using e-CITAC is easy' (mean = 3.97, SD = 0.71), item 'get various skills through using e-CITAC' (mean = 3.93, SD = 0.78) and item 'using e-CITAC is easy' (mean= 3.93, SD = 0.78).

c. Social Influence:

Meanwhile, learner acceptance towards social influence of e-CITAC module at a moderately high level based on the overall mean of 3.57. The item 'My classmates help me' (mean = 3.84, SD 0.85) scores the highest mean, followed by item 'My friends support me' (mean= 3.57, SD= 0.94), item 'Lecturer encourages me using e-CITAC' (mean= 3.49, SD=0.84) and the lowest mean is 'My family members encourage me' (mean= 3.38, SD= 0.74).

d. Facilitating conditions:

Furthermore, learner acceptance towards facilitating conditions in e-CITAC module at a moderately high level based on the overall mean of 3.99. There are items like 'lecturer is ready to help me' (mean= 4.25, SD = 0.70) and 'e-CITAC is different from other learning strategies' (mean = 4.11, SD=0.81) which obtained high scores from respondents. On the other hand, item 'guidelines needed for learning in e-CITAC ' (mean = 3.83, SD = 0.73) and 'sufficient source of learning (mean = 3.78, SD =0.78) are at a moderately high level.

e. Voluntary usage:

In addition, learner acceptance towards voluntary usage of e-CITAC module at a moderately high level with overall mean of 3.56. All items score relatively the same mean score except for item 'choose to use e-CITAC even if it is not compulsory in my learning' (mean= 3.66, SD=0.83). Other three items with the same mean scores are item 'choose to use e-CITAC even if it is not directed by university university' (mean= 3.52, SD=0.78), item 'choose to use e-CITAC even if it is not supported by my friends' (mean= 3.52, SD=0.78) and item 'choose to use e-CITAC even if it is not requested by my lecturer' (mean= 3.52, SD= 0.79).

f. Behavioral Aspect:

Moreover, learner acceptance towards e-CITAC module based on behavioral intention at a moderately high level with overall mean of 3.88 and all items obtain the same sores; item 'plan to use a module similar to e-CITAC for other courses' (mean= 3.90, SD= 0.67), followed by 'intend to use e-CITAC' (mean= 3.87, SD= 0.72) and item 'plan to introduce e-CITAC to my friends' (mean= 3.87, SD= 0.72).

Qualitative analysis:

Data from the questionnaires were triangulated with the data collected from interviews interviews and using Atlas.Ti 7, four themes were identified in response to learner acceptance towards performance

expectancy, effort expectancy, behavioral intention and facilitating conditions.

i. Performance expectancy:

From the focused-group interviews, positive feedback is obtained in relation to the e-CITAC module based on Blended Learning (BL) strategy. Based on the performance expectancy, learners believed the module could benefit their learning of TITAS (K2R3 K.T.P1,105:105; K2R2 K.T.P1,138:138). Respondent K2R3 stated "For me, e-CITAC brings benefits. A lot of information can be gathered". (K2R3 K.T.P1,105:105). The e-CITAC module also allowed learners to gain new knowledge aside from their own field of study hence bringing elevating TITAS to a higher pedestal as claimed by K3R2 "One thing that I like is, if I don't understand something, so just Google. look for blogs, not just for information based on text books. so this brings TITAS to the next level. Now, for me TITAS is not for the sake of passing the course but as a means for us to get out from the medical field and learn new things. learn new ways..." (K3R2 K.T.P.I,90:90).

ii. Effort expectancy:

The main reason for learner acceptance in the effort expectancy is the accessibility and easy usage of the e-CITAC module even to students who are not equipped with online learning skills and experience. For example, according to K3R1 "I'm not familiar with the Internet but with time, I think everybody can be successful in using the e-CITAC module" (K3R1: K.T.P2, 93:93). Besides, another reason cited for learner acceptance in this aspect is the group work project such as video making and blog construction which add to the skills acquired by the students. For instance, K3R5 explained that "Because that's one skill to be upgraded, to be used so it can be used for presentation or forum..." (K3R5: K.T.P2, 130:130).

iii. Behavioral intention:

Focused-group interviews reveal learner acceptance in the aspects of behavioral intention with one respondent K2R5 stating "I can accept the module and this can be extended from one generation to another" (K2R5: K.T.P3, 117:117). Besides, K2R4 shared the same view, "Hopefully the e-CITAC module can be continued to facilitate students" (K2R4: K.T.P2, 141:141).

iv. Facilitating conditions:

An excerpt from learner transcripts based on the interviews reflect learner acceptance towards the e-CITAC module. For example, K3R2 stated that, "Even on holiday, I can check on what my lecturer posts on whatsApps group and then I wrote on paper how to do the TITAS step by step before I downloaded it on the Facebook" (K3R2: K.T.P3, 81:81). In fact, K3R4 claimed "I think everyone is using the guidelines" (K3R4: K.T.P3, 106:106). Another respondent, K3R1 added that all students successfully used the e-CITAC module because the dateline set by the lecturer allowed them to complete the learning tasks. According to K3R1, "It's the same acceptance by all students but with datelines, all of them succeeded in using the e-CITAC" (K3R1: K.T.P3, 93:93). Overall, qualitative data reveal the themes related to the four constructs in regards to learner acceptance, performance expectancy, effort expectancy, facilitating conditions and behavioral intention.

Discussions:

The six constructs based on UTAUT model (Venkatesh *et al*. 2012) were used to evaluate learner acceptance towards digital learning content module based on Blended Learning (BL). The performance expectancy is highly rated to be accepted by the students with reasons that e-CITAC module can (i) help them gain knowledge and skill outlined in the TITAS course, (ii) facilitate learning, (iii) increase interest and (iv) upgrade skill competency. The most important reason cited is that through the e-CITAC module, the students no longer perceive the TITAS Course as another elective subject irrelevant to their field of study at university. In the effort expectancy aspect, the e-CITAC module is found suitable and easy to understand by the Gen Y in the course of studying TITAS hence encouraging them to use it further.

According to Davis' (1989)Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the behavioral intention of users to use a system may be due to perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. This is further supported by Venkatesh *et al*.'s (2012) Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology that highlights users' belief about the performance of a particular system. Relating this to this study, the students are more likely to use the module when they discover it can facilitate them in acquiring various skills.

In regard to facilitating conditions, students highly regard the e-CITAC module as a sufficient source of learning with guidelines necessary for learning. It is different from other learning strategies as it offers help and feedback from lecturers on TITAS even outside the lecture hours if students encounter difficulty while using the module.

The performance and effort expectancy constructs also influence student behavior towards the e-CITAC module. The students do intend to use the module, introduce it to their friends and even use similar module like e-CITAC for other courses. A study by Malek (2012) among five universities in Jordan on acceptance towards mobile learning revealed that technological service quality significantly influences usability and ease expectancy which then affects behavior. On the other hand, ease expectancy and attitude significantly determines behavioral intention of a user.

In this study, there is a moderately high learner acceptance towards social influence of the e-CITAC module. In this aspect, there is support offered mostly offered by their peers but from lecturers and family, it is relatively minimal. Learner acceptance towards this construct is also due to availability of lecturers and friends anytime and anywhere for discussion on TITAS course. It has been discovered that the absence of instructors online is a major factor for students' inability to complete their task well in Blended Learning (Joel, S.M & Christina, R. 2013). Johnson *et al*. (2007) also state that the effectiveness of electronic learning is dependent on performance, satisfaction, course expertise and presence of peers during online learning for user satisfaction. Hence it is important to ensure the presence of all these people while online learning takes place as indicated by Venkatesh *et al*. (2012) who discover that social influence can affect users' decision to use a new system. Similarly, a study by Roslina and Azizah (2011) also reveals that social influence is a significant factor in behavioral intention for educational games. Through virtual learning, social support is much needed so feedback is easily obtained throughout the duration of the learning.

In addition, a good acceptance of the e-CITAC module is also attributed to the opportunity it allows for the students to communicate with lecturers and friends outside lecture hours in order to get feedback and also for discussion on TITAS course. It has been known that in Blended Learning (BL), an absence of instructor during online learning may affect students' results (Joel, S.M & Christina, R. 2013). Referring back to Johnson *et al*. (2007), an effective electronic learning relies on the performance, satisfaction and course instruments and the presence of these important people can bring about satisfaction to the users.

The e-CITAC module is also equipped with online field work requiring students to produce videos and blogs which give them new experiences and satisfaction. Based on the activities provided in the TITAS digital module, students are to work in group and communicate online hence teaching them to practise good moral values and embark on life-long learning. According to Al-Ghazali (cited in Mohd Zaidi 2002), spiritual development is fundamental to the development of knowledgeable individuals who can shape a society's civilisation in the future. Therefore good values and educational elements afforded by teaching and learning based on digital learning module are hoped to fulfill the objectives outlined in the TITAS course.

Conclusions:

To conclude, e-CITAC module based on Blended Learning (BL) is well accepted by the undergraduates in the Islamic and Asian Civilisation Studies (TITAS) with performance expectancy receiving the highest mean score. Even findings from the interviews indicate themes related to performance expectancy the main benefit cited is a change of student perception towards TITAS which no longer be regarded as irrelevant or secondary to their own courses offered by their faculties. The content variety in the module also facilitates the learners' acquisition of knowledge, interest and skill competence. The e-CITAC module is also well accepted in regards to accessibility to lecturers and peers outside lecture hours for discussion and feedback related to TITAS. Through online fieldwork consisting of video making and blogging, students learn new skills and share ideas hence enjoying a meaningful and satisfying learning experience. The findings from the study support the importance of group work, online communication, good moral values and life-long learning which are afforded by the e-CITAC module.

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