

TRANSFORMING TEACHING AND LEARNING PARADIGM TO EMPOWER 21ST CENTURY LEARNERS: PARTICIPATORY ONLINE COURSE (POC) FOR HUBUNGAN ETNIK MODULE AT TAYLOR'S UNIVERSITY, MALAYSIA

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Abstract: *The emergence of digital technologies in Education 4.0 has created a need in transforming face-to-face (F2F) learning into a fully virtual learning environment (VLE). As Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) booms up in Malaysian Education System in 2015, Hubungan Etnik (HE) course at Taylor's University has been revolutionizing from traditional classroom learning to fully online course. This project, which was launched in 2016 was developed through an online social learning platform (Openlearning). Users experienced empowering interactive learning through targeted video contents and interactive assessments. The gamification elements such as progress tracking and online digital badges hold the students' active participation throughout the course. However, the interactive content and motivation, not enough to promote the students' self-regulation in VLE. The gaps that occur between F2F learning and VLE makes the students' feel disconnected from a learning environment, contents and instructor. Therefore, the learning structure in this module has been shifted towards participatory assessments together integrating emotive factors which brings the students into deep learning via critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The purpose of this research is to investigate the level of students' participation and achievement in the learning process. Through reflective writing on students' learning experiences, qualitative data collected to analyze students' active participation, acceptance, and achievement in HE module as a Participatory Online Course. The findings showed the emotive factors plays a huge role in promoting students' deeper participation that leads to high motivation and engagement in learning as well close the gaps between F2F learning and VLE.*

Keywords: *Keywords MOOC, Transforming Education, Virtual Learning Environment, Participatory Online Course, Humanizing Online Learning, Hubungan Etnik, Emotive*

Introduction

E-Learning or online learning is not a new phenomenon in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Most online learnings occur through Learning Management System (LMS) and online materials such as lecture notes, videos, infographics, etc., are used as supportive tools for teaching and learning processes while the assessments are also done online. Since the introduction of Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) in 2008 which later became popular in 2012 (Longstaff, 2014), online learning has been constantly transformed and enhanced in many HEIs around the world.

The first Malaysian MOOC was launched in 2013 by Taylor's University and since then, MOOC has become a resonance in Malaysian higher institutions such as in UPM, UKM, UiTM, and UNIMAS and all of these institutions offered their MOOCs through Openlearning, a for-profit educational technology based in Sydney, Australia (Fadzil, Abdol Latif, & Munira, 2015). The first MOOC launched by Taylor's University in 2013 was a MOOC on Entrepreneurship pioneered by Professor Mushtak Al-Atabi and it has attracted 3,500 students from 145 different countries up to the year 2015 (Rahman, 2015). Along the way, the role of MOOCs in TU mostly as an additional, supportive, or hybrid learning platform for selected courses. In 2016 when Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) launched guidelines on credit transfer for MOOC (CTM), Taylor's University has released 2 CTMs which are *Tamadun Islam* dan *Tamadun Asia* (TITAS) and *Hubungan Etnik* (HE). Both of these modules are university compulsory subjects for Malaysian students under component U1, which indicates 'Appreciating philosophy, values, and history'.

This credit-bearing MOOC has become one of the initial projects of Taylor's University to reimagine and redesign learning from the traditional face-to-face classroom concept to online learning environment to suit the 21st-century learners. The first batch of TU's credit-bearing MOOCs released on March 2016 was developed as a one-click learning platform for student-instructors engagement that focuses on concise, interactive video contents for students as well as the opportunity to explore other forms of learning resources and assessment in effective and interactive manner.

Regarding *Hubungan Etnik* (HE), this course attempts to increase students' understanding of the concepts of social cohesion as well as basic concepts of ethnic relations, plurality, and pluralistic society. Students are also exposed to the concepts of political, economic and constitutional development in the context of ethnic relations in Malaysia. The first batch of HE MOOC launched as a pilot study for internal students. In this stage, the acceptance of learners became an important aspect in the process of transformative learning from traditional to online. Therefore, students' feedback collected from the survey is used as a mean for continuous improvement. The first batch of MOOC received positive feedback as this new way of learning provides them with the flexibility and preferred methods of learning which is learner-centered instead of teacher-centered learning. According to Smith and Hardaker (2000) and Alexander (2001), the flexibility and learner-centered learning environment assumed to promote self-directed learning which brings in a quality learning compare to traditional learning method (Kemp & Grieve, 2014). However, student's engagement is considered as a prerequisite for successful online learning (Guo, Kim, & Rubin, 2014) (as cited in Kemp & Grieve, 2014) and keep the learners committed to their own learning (Lee & Ferwerda, 2017).

However, with the continuous improvement based on the research study and students' feedback, HE MOOC was then introduced as Participatory Online Course (POC) in order to emphasize on just TU's students in the experimental stage of enhancing the online course. The focus of the pedagogy is on students participation. Besides implementing the flexible learning mode with interactive contents, the virtual learning environment (VLE) in HE has also been humanized in order to close the gap that usually occurs in between face-to-face and face-to-the-screen methods. As found by Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer in the year 2001 and followed by Gorsky and Blau in the year 2009, the high level of instructor's presence in an online learning environment has contributed to successful online learning (as cited in Baran & Correia, 2014). Besides, the high level of social presence in an online learning has also been identified as an attribute for successful learning (Richardson & Swan, 2003; Thurmond, Wambach, Connors, & Frey, 2002) (as cited in Baran & Correia, 2014). Both instructor and social presence play a key role in humanizing online education as students feel more connected to their peers and instructors with the implementation of these criteria (Czerkawski, 2017).

Apart from the teacher and social presence, online scaffolding gives the student a pleasing online learning experience (Phillip & Cain, 2015) that promote self-regulation (Stosny, 2011). The HE POC has been carefully designed to reach student's positive emotional state to lead successful learning throughout the semester. With this implementation, it is hoped that the HE module can be transformed from a traditional face-to-face learning to successful Participatory Online Course for the 21st Century learners and brings them the best learning experience. At the end of the chapter, the effects on student's performance in terms of their active participation, acceptance, and achievement will be discussed.

Literature Review

The Types of Learners have Radically Changed

According to Prensky, the characteristics of students who are entering the universities today are no longer the same (2001). In his own words "***Our students have changed radically. Today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach***" (Prensky, p.1, 2001). This radical change is due to the rapid dissemination of digital technology, which has totally changed the way people live, conduct business, socialize and even the preference to learn. This is rightfully so due to the 'digital technology' enabling delivery of knowledge through mobile devices which allows learning to be conducted fully online, anytime and anywhere where there is an internet connection. The person growing up in this digital technology is what Prensky termed as *Digital Natives* (2001). Connecting to the digital universe is the norm for these students and these digital native learners have different kinds of needs than what the education system designed the learning for. Although recent study in 2017 by Kirshner and Pedro De Bruyckere informed that the term Digital Natives is a myth and that today's generation uses technology the same ways as older people, we can't deny that today's student's needs have changed together with the innovative technology applicable in education. These new groups of students who are now beginning to enroll in private higher education institutions (HEI) prefer easy access to education. Taking today's learners preference towards personalized, anytime and anywhere learning, TU realizes the urgent necessity for educational reform, so they can continue to be relevant and be the number one university choice for a student.

The New Curriculum Framework

Taylor's University had undergone an educational reformation in early 2018 to redesign their curriculum structure in order to deliver a learning experience that meets the expectation of

today's learners. Together with the transformative drive at the ministry level, TU redesigned its curriculum framework from a rigid traditional classroom centered curriculum to an immersive, flexible yet personalized curriculum utilizing digital technology as one of its enablers in order to prepare its learners for Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR4.0) (Star Online, 11 Mar 2018). With the new Taylor's Curriculum Framework (TCF), Taylor's University hopes to position itself as an innovative University leading the way to redesign curriculum for the digital natives (Ayub, Goh, Luaran, Lim; in press). The redesigning of TU's curriculum is timely, in line with meeting the demand for a change in how teaching and learning are conducted in HEI. An orchestrated effort by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) nationwide preceded by end of 2017, awarding the prestigious *Reimagining and Redesigning Malaysian Higher Education Award 2017* (KPT, 2017) to encourage Malaysian educators and HEI to redesign their method of teaching and by early 2018 the nation-wide transformational change through MyHE4.0 was launched. TU however, has anticipated the change to University 4.0, and has begun the transformation process much earlier in 2016 to become the 'University of the Future'.

Transforming the Classroom for Massive Target Learners

In 2016, two modules which are *Hubungan Etnik* or Ethnic Relations (HE) and *Tamadun Islam dan Tamadun Asia* (TITAS) or Islamic and Asian Civilization under the *Mata Pelajaran Umum* (MPU) or General subjects were identified to go through this transformational change for the massive open online course (MOOC). Future plans at that time were to offer the two courses as Credit Transfer MOOC (CTM) since the MPU courses are compulsory subjects for all students graduating from a Malaysian University. In its experimental stage, to cater to the request of the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences to design the course to be collaborative and participative for its students, instead of a MOOC, the two courses were designed as a participatory open online course (POOC) in OpenLearning, an Australian based MOOC provider. However, due to considering that the courses are still in its experimental stage to be 'participatory', in its implementation, the courses were launched only to TU students as a participatory fully online course.

HE as Participatory Online Course

The number of MOOCs has grown rapidly in higher learning institutions nationally and internationally and the courses attract learners of various generations and backgrounds (*Onah & Sinclair, 2015*). Thus, the need to tailor the course design to meet the target learners' individual needs is important in order to sustain their motivation to participate and complete the two courses. However, even though MOOCs are developed to provide 21st century learning skills (*Gamage, Perera, & Fernando, 2016*), most of the existing MOOCs have been observed to offer very traditional learning approaches which has led to issues with learner participation and retention (*Onah, Sinclair, Boyatt, & Foss, 2014*). Thus, Participatory Online Course (POC) has been implemented instead of MOOC in this course in order to promote learner participation while at the same time increasing the level of learner motivation. As summarized by the process (*Barab, Hay, Barnett, & Keating, 2000*), participatory learning is where learners can negotiate and collaborate with their peers while sharing their understanding towards the learning design of a course. According to (*Barab, et al., 2000*), the goal of the development of participatory learning design is more towards constructing a course with task-based or challenge-based content full of contexts that stimulate critical thinking and findings. In HE POOC, the implementation of project-based learning has been taken as one of the most necessary components of the participatory approach. Project-based learning is proven to be one of the examples of participatory approach which focuses on the learning activities throughout the

course, includes real-world relevance, and provides a space for learners to engage in the learning process (Barab, et al., 2000).

Factors in Participatory Learning

There are two main factors that trigger the participation and collaboration in an online learning environment and they are social and technological (Literat, 2017). As summarized by (Literat, 2017) based on the findings by (Elliott 2016; Henderson 2012; Rheingold 2013), among social characteristics that involve in an online learning are the relationship between members in the group, learners' main common objectives or collective identity, as well as the standard communication and collaboration that shape the way they participate in the course. By designing these two courses in OpenLearning, students are able to participate, communicate, engage and contribute their personal insight in the classroom discussion and instructors are encouraged to fully utilize the features provided in the platform. Among the tools used in HE POC are, forums, chat, interactive videos, lecture slides which are paired with self-assessments, interactive quizzes, as well as digital badging. In these two courses, instructors are observed to have highly utilized the live chat, live lecture videos in Youtube Live (that allow live chat), as well as the forum features in the platform in order to communicate directly with learners. The live chat feature has been proven to increase learner participation in an online course as it is able to solve the lack of interactivity issues among learners, as most students prefer to get an immediate response from their instructors and peers in an online learning environment (Knowles & Kerkman, 2007). According to (Onah et al., 2014), forums, on the other hand, has been observed to help motivate learners to sustain their participation towards completing an online course. According to (Penny, 2011), in explaining the works of (Hrastinski, 2008; Davies & Graff, 2005; Vonderwell & Zachariah, 2005), participatory online learning is a process of learning through the relationship with peers, which involves a process of doing, thinking, interacting with each other, as well as the feeling of belonging towards the learning environment.

Types of Learners' Learning Behaviour

Human interaction in a face-to-face classroom and in an online course are not the same and the characteristics are depending on how human interacts with the technology provided (Literat, 2017). Thus, in order to sustain learner motivation and interaction in a virtual learning environment, the receivers of the course should not be treated as a simple student who would just "listen" or "receive" the lessons taught (Haddidoui & Khaldi, 2011). In HE POC, learners are encouraged to actively participate in the online discussions and most of the activities provided may lead the learners to become a social person as well as an actor in his or her own learning (Haddidoui & Khaldi, 2011). According to Liu, Yuan, Liao, & Peng (2005) findings based on Csikszentmihalyi (1990) theory, students can reach the flow in the online presentation when it's presented with a media-rich element such as a combination of text, audio, and video comparing to a single element such as either text or audio only. To reach the maximum concentration in learning materials, HE POC used videos with highlighting text and keywords as well as narrated audio as main lecture materials in their course. Additionally, with the technology advancement, video in HE POC was designed to be interactive by embedding the question in the video to awaken their flow while watching it. The following screenshot shows the interactive video in HE POC. The text-based lecture notes are only used as supplementary materials and not track under compulsory learning materials.



Figure 1: Screenshot of Interactive Video in HE POC

Emotive Factors in Online Learning Environment

One of the huge challenges confronted by instructors in MOOC teaching is to manage a huge number of students in an uncontrolled environment. The motivation factors and level for each student may differ from one another. This is why many researchers have endorsed self-regulation as one of the key factors for successful online learning. Since the purpose and nature of online learning are to create a learner-centered environment, self-regulation has become an important aspect to maintain high-level motivation and engagement throughout the course. As explained by Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons (1988), in the learning context, self-regulation refers to the degree of which students engage in the learning process using metacognition and proper motivation (as cited in You & Kang, 2014). As described by Yukselturk Bulut (2007), self-regulated learning brings in student's responsibilities in their own learning by completing the given online task within the timeframe (as cited in You & Kang, 2014). You & Kang (2014) proved that positive emotion such as enjoyment encourages self-regulated learning, while negative emotions such as stress, also facilitate learning and memory depending on the intensity and the duration (Vogel & Schwabe, 2016) (as cited in Tyng et al., 2017). This method is applied in HE POC by rewarding online digital badges for student's accomplishment to stimulate positive feeling. Negative emotion can occur in a VLE if not managed properly. Students can get stressed if there are no indicators to inform them that they have completed a certain learning milestones within a given timeframe. Hence, the application of time released activity with its due date assist students in knowing they have completed what is needed of them during the timeframe given by their course instructors. The progress bar indicator, on the other hand, is another tool in Open Learning that moves them to complete their online tasks at the required timeframe.

On another note, the implementation of targeted short videos, structured learning notes, additional readings, forum discussion, and assessment in an online learning environment is still not a promise for the learning acceptance to happen among the students. Even if all information is only one click away in the platform and even if students' questions are immediately responded by the instructors, the natural learning which needs to happen is without having to force the students and it is all depending on one person's emotion. In any environment, information which is delivered with rigid and formal manner will retain less in the long-term memory compared to the same information which delivered in the way that affects a person's

emotion such as relating the messages with a scary story or with funny jokes. Oglensky (2016) have mentioned that, including humor in a classroom learning or online environment will influence students' learning. This is because emotion can influence the cognitive process which includes perception, attention, learning, memory, reasoning, and problem solving (Tyng et al., 2017).

As stated by Baran & Correia (2014), the increasing number of teacher presence and social presence is important for successful online courses. However, the way how teacher and social presence in an online environment also need to be taken into consideration. The language of communication (Phillip & Cain, 2015) such as polite and friendly tone (Clark & Mayer, 2011) (as cited in Betul C. & Schmidt, 2017) will give positive emotion that leads to better learning gains. In HE POC, it is proven that students tend to be more comfortable to participate in discussion when the instructor uses polite and friendly tone when communicating with students to encourage them to voice out their opinions. Emotions used to humanize VLE are interrelated, which can bring meaningful learning experience to the students. Following screenshots show the discussion trail between instructor and students in HE POC.

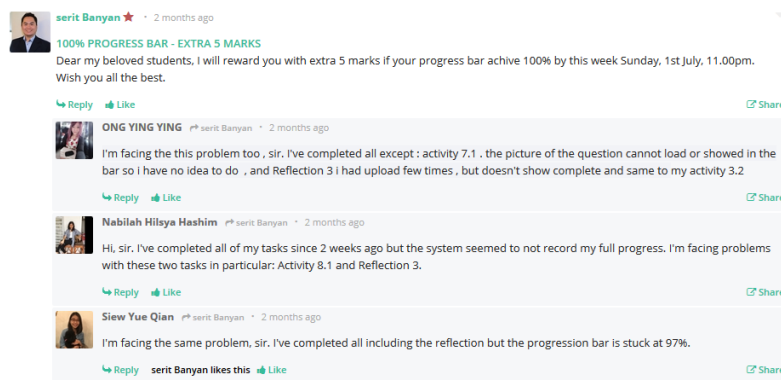


Figure 2: Screenshots of Instructor-Students in HE POC

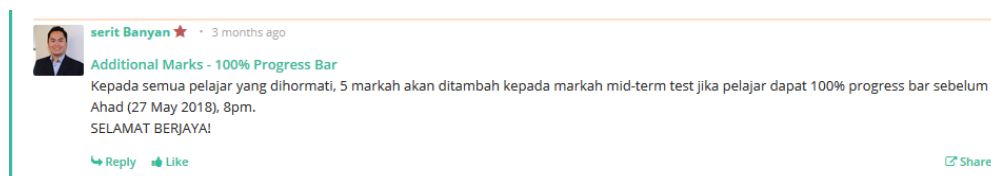


Figure 2.1: Screenshots of Instructor-Students in HE POC

Humanizing Online Learning Retained Student's Motivation Level

Instructor-students interaction is an important element in a learning process and in humanizing the course. As stated by Lee and Choi (2011), the lack of interaction or communication has been found as one of the factors that cause student's dropout from the online course (Delmas, 2017). Although the disengagement in learning happened in a traditional classroom environment, problematic students can be identified and motivated immediately by peers or instructor, but this is less applicable in an online environment (Lee & Ferwerda, 2017). Researcher Yen and Lee on 2011 followed by Callaway in 2012 also claimed that the lack of interaction and the feel of isolation is the result of the dissatisfaction among students in an online environment (as cited in Krishnan, 2016). However, the researchers have found out the sense of belonging to the learning community was one of the factor that ensures students to persist in online learning course (Hart 2012; Herbert 2006; Ivankova and Stick 2007; Park and Choi 2009) (as cited in Delmas, 2017).

Regarding the qualitative research on the instructor's perspective in online learning, Philip and Cain (2015) identified that the language of communication is important in humanizing the course. The early research by Clark and Mayer (2011) has identified that by implementing the polite and friendly voice tone in course materials will bring meaningful experience that brings better learning gains (as cited in Betul C. & Schmidt, 2017). Similarly, the multimedia videos with instructor's friendly and polite tone together with appropriate personal examples also brings towards humanizing online learning (Betul C. & Schmidt, 2017). Apart from the videos and course learning materials, instructions and feedbacks via voice messages will add a human element in digital data. The findings from Phillip and Cain (2015) and Delmas (2017) showed the voices increased the feeling of connectedness between peers and instructor, thus will help to create a sense of community in online learning (Delmas, 2017). With the use of voice tone which is structurally planned in course materials and as voice messages, the connectedness between instructors and students can be built without having a constant teacher presence in an online environment (Betul C. & Schmidt, 2017). Humanizing the VLE using emotive factors is the pillar to build an online learning environment that can affect online learner's engagement and learning. In HE POC, the learning design is set in a way that frequent lecturer-student-students engagement is always present through the learning resource and activities presented to the learners. Apart from that, each learning section is equipped with an introductory video. This method is being used to create a connection between instructor-students-learning content at the start of each learning episode.

Methodologies

The participants for this research were the students that enrolled to HE POC on March 2018 cohort. Convenience sampling was chosen for this research where the sample being drawn from the Bachelor of Architecture, Bachelor of Mass Communication, and Bachelor of Business students. There were 100 students participated in this, where 64% are females and 36% are males.

The data for this research was collected using mixed methods, which includes a qualitative and descriptive quantitative data analysis. The quantitative data analysis looking into first-hand observation of cohort March 2018 which consists of 269 students; their involvement in the forum and other online learning activities in the MOOC. The learning analytics of MOOC's educational dataset was collected to find the number of comments posted by students according to their programmes. The instrument that used to collect the qualitative data was a reflective set of questions which consists of seven open-ended questions. The reflective set of questions was designed using Schon Model to measure the students' learning experiences throughout the semester. It's was posted in OpenLearning platform under the HE POC as one of their online learning activities in Week 14 under March 2018 cohort. The reflective writing activity will automatically turn on to access once students reached to Week 14 according to their academic calendar. Students were given the flexibility to answer from anywhere and anytime within the seven days' timeline that has been set to complete this activity. They need to write their answers inside the Microsoft Word and posted either in word document format or portable document format (PDF). In the questions, students were required to reflect their learning experiences from week 1 until week 14 based on their insights, acceptance of online learning methods, and the knowledge learned.

Following are the questions given to the students to evaluate their acceptance, participation, and achievement in identifying whether the learning design of HE POC empowers the life-long learning of these students.

Student Acceptance of Hubungan Etnik as a Fully Online Course

The following questions were given to analyse their acceptance of shifting the learning paradigm from face-to-face learning to fully virtual learning environment.

Questions:

1. How do you compare the ways to acquire knowledge through online learning with the traditional classroom?
2. Are you satisfied with your learning experience? Why?

Student Achievement in the Learning Process

In HE POC, remembering theories and achieving an 'A' grade for final examination is not the only focus in order to indicate student achievement. Student achievement in this course is depending on their skills of critical thinking as well as how deep they understand the topics and how good they immerse in the course materials based on their participatory skills and their ability to reflect on their learning and community. Some activities in this module require students to reflect the theories taught into their real-life application. The reflective question below was given to the students in order to analyse their individual learning achievement in the course: -

Question:

Write a summary of what have you learned throughout the semester.

Student Participation of Hubungan Etnik as a Fully Online Course.

The observation data is focusing on the student's live participation and their experience in the real course. Students' participation are tracked based on their response or reply frequency in the forums provided as well as the additional questions that they posted to the instructor and peers. Their participation rate was analysed through the learning analytics of the total numbers of comments. The student participation's data shows how the students engage in this online learning module. This data was collected through an observation of the discussion made in the forum sections as well as in other communication features in the POC, while the learning analytic report summarized the total number of comments posted by the students in this course which also indicates the level of student participation in HE POC.

Results and Discussion

The research study shows the impacts on student's learning experience upon the learning paradigm shift from face-to-face learning to online learning. As Taylor's University Learning Revolution is focusing on the 21st Century learners, the University Compulsory Module (UCM) HE POC has been designed in the way to cater students' learning needs and their learning characteristics. Based on the data collected, the total number of 35 students from Bachelor of Architecture, 25 students from Bachelor of Mass Communication, and 40 students from Bachelor of Business have answered the reflective questions given to them as part of their learning activity. From the data gathered, students' acceptance and achievement in HE POC has been analysed and discussed. Meanwhile, the learning analytics report was also collected to analyse student participation rate in HE POC.

Participants

The total number of students who involved in this research study was 100 students and all of them answered the reflective learning questions, which gives the total response rate 100%. The

following chart shows the percentage of students who enrolled in three different programmes at Taylor's University.

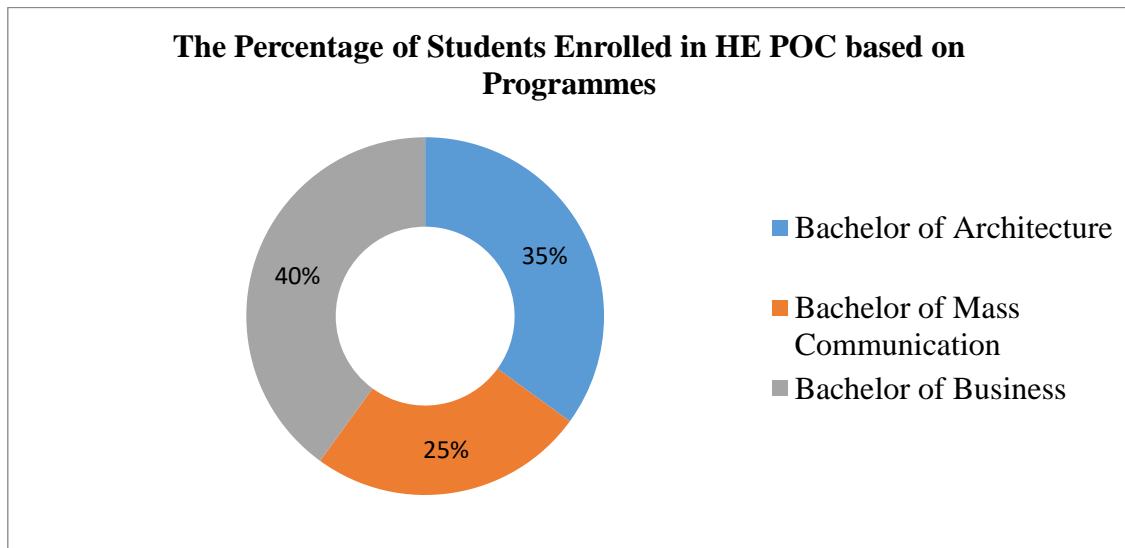


Figure 3: Percentage of the Student's Enrolled to HE POC From Bachelor of Architecture, Bachelor of Mass Communication, and Bachelor of Business.

Based on the data collected, some of them have claimed that HE POC is not the first online module that they have enrolled in Taylors University. As Taylor's University has revolutionized two compulsory modules as credit-transfer for MOOCs, some students have already enrolled in '*Tamadun Islam dan Tamadun Asia*' MOOC as their first online module in the university. Next, the following chart shows the student's prior experience in online learning when they were first enrolled in the HE POC.

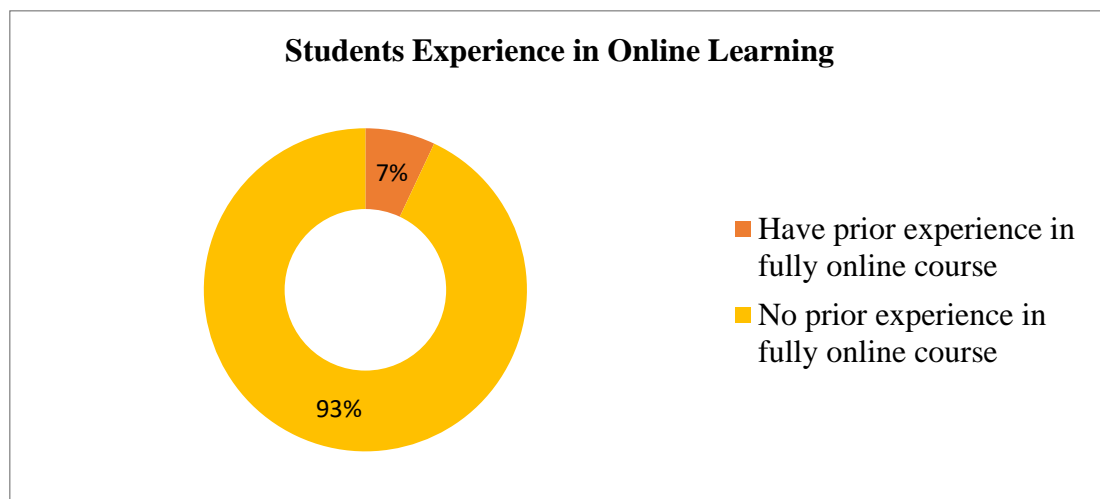


Figure 4: Percentage of Students Based on Their Experience in Enrolling to the Fully Online Module at Taylor's University.

Based on the chart above, only 7% of students have prior experience in participating a fully online course at Taylors University, while another 93% of students were having their first experience when joining HE POC.

Student Acceptance of the Implementation of Fully Online Learning for Hubungan Etnik Module

The major concern of the lecturers and the course designers is on student's acceptance of the course due to the shift of the learning method from face-to-face to the virtual learning environment (VLE). As mentioned above, 93% of the students did not have prior experience learning in VLE. The following shows some of the responses from students on their early acceptance of the online learning concept.

"I am still confused at times as I am still learning on how to adapt to online classes."

"Whenever students find any confusion about their studies in traditional classroom approach, students can just approach their tutor directly to clear up the confusion, as for online platform it may take a while for students to get responses from the tutor regarding on their study confusion."

"The part that I particularly value about an online learning environment is the time consumed."

The real acceptance of online learning for HE POC, however, has been evaluated from the data collected after they have completed the entire module. Surprisingly, all students surveyed mentioned that they are satisfied with their overall learning experience in HE POC. One common factor that gives high satisfaction to all students was 'time' because as 21st Century learners, one of their preferred learning needs is the flexibility in time management.

Below are some of the highlighted students' responses that show the increased level of satisfaction because of the flexibility in time management: -

"The experiences I gained is that I feel that this online module provides flexibility to me as I can finish the task assigned whenever I feel like doing it."

"I am satisfied with my learning experience. This is because I can learn this module and course conveniently in my own time."

"I am satisfied with my learning experience because this is my first time taking the module, so I have learned to plan my time well to watch the videos and do the activities given at home or café."

"I prefer to complete the tasks at my own pace and I do not need to spend much time on the highway going to Taylors."

Referring to the students' responses above, students are highly satisfied when flexibility in completing the tasks are given to them. In that way, the students are able to manage their own time in acquiring knowledge and doing the assessment. Moreover, they can choose their preferred convenient private environment, to complete their online tasks.

The students' level of acceptance of online learning in this HE POC is again clearly proven compared to their level of acceptance in the traditional face-to-face learning environment. Again, the majority of student's responses focusing on the flexibility in time and learning environment. The flexibility provided in this module promotes self-directed learning and allows them more focus on their own learning activities. All students' responses in comparing traditional learning and online learning have been divided into two main categories as below:

- i. Flexibility learning anytime anywhere
- ii. Self-directed learning using task-based and challenge-based activities

Flexibility Learning Anytime Anywhere

When responding to the questions of comparing their experience in traditional learning and online learning, all students highlighted the flexibility that they obtained from online learning which is not possible in traditional learning. The following responses show some of the students' responses related to the flexibility factor in learning experience:-

“Through online learning, time is more flexible compared to a traditional classroom. Online learning can be arranged freely so that I can pick a free time to focus on reading the slide, do activities and videos.”

“Online learning is more flexible and easier to acquire knowledge as it is just a click away for gathering information.”

“The time is very flexible so that we do not need to attend all the classes on time and can connect to the internet to finish the online activities.”

“Online learning is convenient as it can be accessed anytime and anywhere while traditional classroom requires our presence in class and we have to drive to the university to attend the two hours lecture.”

Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed is one of the general criteria in online learning. This criterion can become either a positive or negative experience for individual student depending on the self-regulation in their own learning. As mentioned by researchers Artino & Stephens and Dabbagh & Kitsantas in different publication in the year 2009, self-regulation is more important in an online learning environment compared to the traditional classroom learning (as cited in You & Kang, 2014). Based on the students' responses, they seem to enjoy the technology advancement which facilitates them in their self-directed learning and the positive return that they gain depending on their own responsibility. The following list shows some of the students' responses that mentioned about self-directed learning.

“Online learning can be arranged freely so that I can pick a free time to focus on reading the slide, do activities and videos.”

“Moreover, online learning is easily measured with progress bar and allows me to complete my tasks without missing out any activities within the week.”

“For online learning, I need to be self-disciplined enough whenever I was doing this module. For example, I need to search the extra information myself or watch other videos in order to understand the topics covered well enough.”

“I can acquire knowledge through online learning by watching interesting videos and completing activities.”

By referring to the above students' responses, we understand that online learning gives a more positive impact on students' learning because they can spend more time to learn and do the activities. Their curiosity allows them to learn independently by exploring and researching

immediately on their own time as it is not affecting anyone's time. In a traditional setting, the student may need to pause their eagerness towards their preferred topic and explore later after the class hour. In a traditional classroom setting, students may ask the instructor during class in session or approach them after class if they need more information and this could create a spoon-fed level of interaction while in an online setting, they will need to post the questions and wait for the reply. This drawback of online learning at the end has turned into a positive self-directed culture of learning as the students will browse themselves on the internet or in the textbooks to get more information rather than waiting. This promotes a deeper learning experience for the students.

Students Participation in HE POC as a Fully Online Course

The learning analytics gathered from OpenLearning are used to evaluate student's participation in HE POC. As proved by Siemens (2010), the learning analytics are able to measure students' behavior and attitude in an online learning platform (as cited in Khalil & Ebner, 2016). The following table shows the numeric data on the total number of students' comments that they have posted in the forum activities as well as in the comment sections. The data has been summed up and divided based on the number of programmes before the average value is calculated.

Table 1: Total Number of Students' Comments That They Have Posted in the Forum Activities and Comment Sections

Programme	Number of Students	Total Comments
Bachelor of Architecture	35	413
Bachelor of Mass Communication	25	257
Bachelor of Business	40	551

These numbers of comments are taken from the forum activities, general communication and questions. By referring to learning analytics, the highest number of a comment posted by an individual student was 48 comments and lowest number of the comment was 3. The average value of total comments of all surveyed students were 12 comments. This shows that the average text-based communication such as answering, questioning, and clarifying for each student has reached up to 12 times in an online class. Compared to traditional classrooms, not all students get the opportunities to share their thoughts, moreover when it is conducted in a huge lecture theatre due to a high number of students.

The pattern of the comments that have been posted shows a more in-depth view on student participation level. The comment trails between instructor-students and peers as well as the language used have shown that the level of student participation occurs more deeply in an online platform.

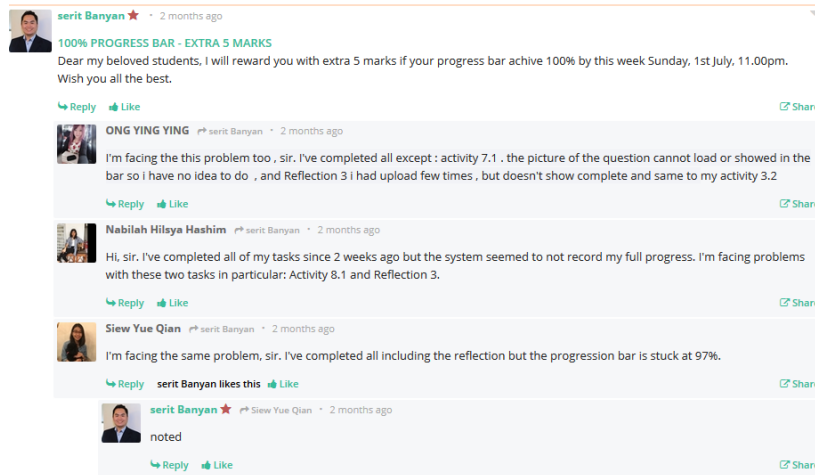


Figure 5: Screenshots of HE POC Online Communication Trail

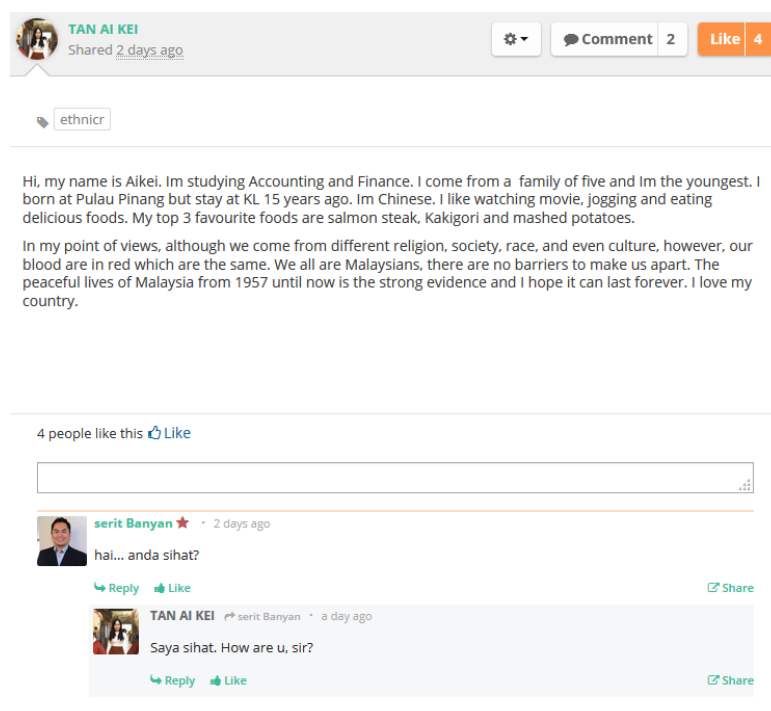


Figure 6: Screenshots of HE POC Online Communication Trail

The above collection of screenshots showed the students' trails of interaction and the two-way of communications, which are similar to the face-to-face environment and this also proved students' high level of participation in an online learning. Apart from that, the language of communication used an online platform also played an important role to form a connection between instructors-students-peers that leads to an increasing feeling of security and comfortability for each individual to freely voice-out the feedback. The following screenshots show the students level of participation in response to the lecturer when using a friendly-tone to communicate: -

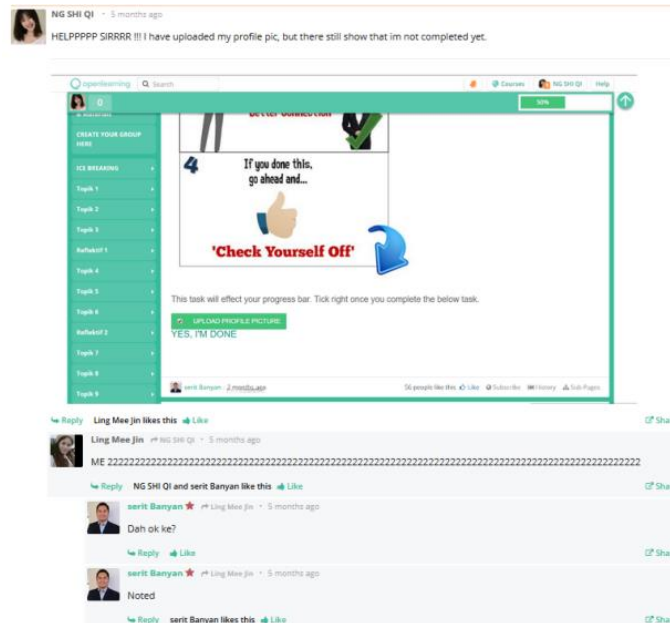


Figure 7: Student’s Involvement in Interaction with Friendly Communication Language in HE POC

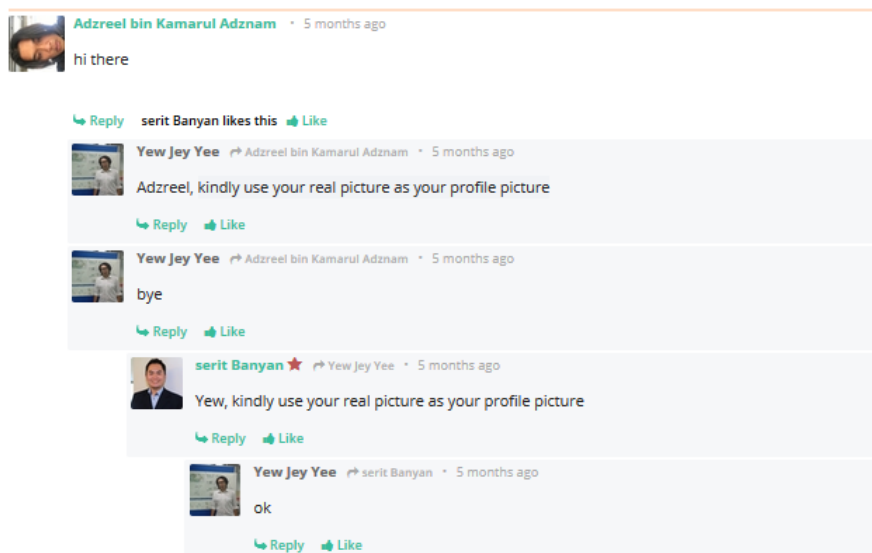


Figure 8: Student’s Involvement in Interaction with Friendly Communication Language in HE POC

Similar to the traditional classroom, students tend to voice-out their thoughts when completing any given tasks. Here, we can value the imaginative factors where students imagined this virtual platform as their own classroom as they seem to treat and participate in online activities the same as when they learn in the classroom. In the traditional classroom, students may raise-up hand and say ‘complete’ or ‘done’. Hence, they seem to have brought alike attitude to online learning as well where they type-in the text ‘done’ in the comment box.

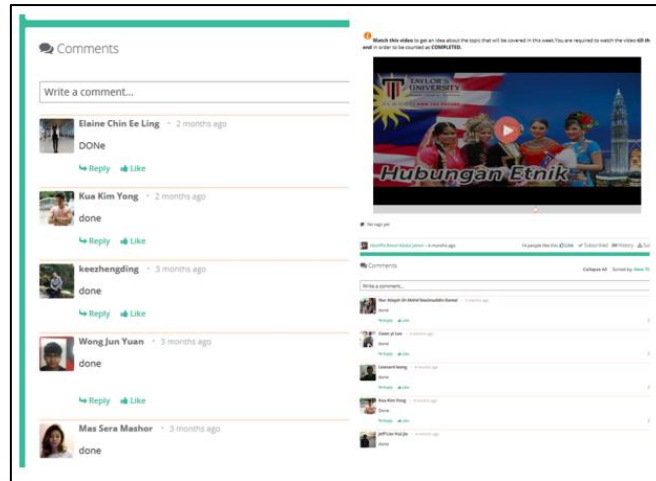


Figure 7.0: Screenshots of Students Responses Once They Have Completed the Given Task

The above screenshots are the strong evidence that students have participated in online learning not to just complete the tasks, but they have also fully immersed in the course. Additionally, the following comment shows the students' responses that mentioned about their emotion when comparing both traditional learning and HE POC.

"This module is being taught 100% online but still have the same happy emotion to attending the online session and attending class would not be necessary."

Finally, based on the student participation, it is proven that the online course structure in HE POC and the humanized digital tools provided increased students participation and involvement, which lead to life-long learning.

Student's Achievement in The Learning Process

Achieving high score and an 'A' in final examination have been the main focus for the majority of Malaysian students. However, in HE POC, student achievement is monitored based on the natural learning that empowers learners towards life-long learning. In HE POC, students' are experiencing the learning context through site visits which acquire deeper understanding, and this can naturally instil patriotism among the students. The following student responses show their experiential learning in HE POC.

"We went to Melaka and visited The Historical Musuem of Peranakan and also enjoyed mouth watering tradisional Nyonya food. In a nutshell, I realized that we all should appreciate all cultures in Malaysia."

"Building a strong relationship with other races individuals is a good thing as it help us to be more united."

Based on the responses above, students seemed to have more understanding on the learning context when they experience it themselves. Furthermore, the site visits also empowered life-long learning of patriotism through the experiences that they have gathered. Apart from the experiential learning, students will achieve high-order thinking skills when they are able to relate the theories into real-life application and reflect them to the community. This type of learning will store in their long-term memory compared to traditional learning methods, such

memorizing the content just for the sake of examination. Students' achievements into high-order thinking skills in online learning platform are shown in the following responses.

"I like the most about this is the sharing of our opinions and reflection on ideas and concept. It allows me to see how and what others think and as such I can gain multiple different perception and views on things thus broadening my knowledge and understanding of the topics."

"I also learned that we must always respect every religious around the world even though we are not close to them."

"I get to know more about the formation and history of Malaysia which makes me proud to be a Malaysian. I am grateful and appreciate all the sacrifices made by our countries' leaders and I will strive to contribute to the society."

"This module also deepens my knowledge about the history and formation of Malaysia. It also makes me proud to be a Malaysian and I will strive to provide a contribution to the society."

The students' responses above clearly shown their achievement in online learning and the positive impact of shifting the learning paradigm from traditional classroom to online learning.

Conclusion

Transforming the entire learning paradigm from face-to-face to VLE has created a huge challenge in transforming a person's mind-set to accept the new learning methods, to immerse in the learning environment, and to truly learn the juice of the contents. Participatory Online Course (POC) for *Hubungan Etnik* (HE) module are designed in the way the digital data is humanized in order to close the gap in between face-to-face and digital learning. The nature of online learning, the structure of learning design and assessment, as well as the teacher and social presence in HE POC has brought towards the successfulness of these course. In conclusion, HE POC has meet the 21st Century Learner's needs by empowering them with life-long learning through the design of the course and the content structure, learning flexibility, experiential learning, problem-solving, and reflective writing. Apart from the content, the emotive factor have also played a major role in HE POC in creating the feel of community and the sense of belonging in the virtual learning environment. This has given the students and instructors the freedom and the feel of security to share their thoughts and answers in public, which differs from the traditional classroom where the questions and answers are shared face-to-face, which can be a drawback especially in a classroom with a limited session and a huge number of students. Based on the research findings, since HE POC has eliminated the fear of sharing in public, it has also formed a strong sense of community among instructor-students-peers.

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