Teaching And Learning Of E-commerce Courses Via Hybrid E-learning Model In Unitar

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ABSTRACT

The advent of the Internet in the early 1980s did not attract e-learning instantaneously. Circa 1990s only, universities started looking for the potential of the Internet to deliver teaching and learning to the masses. Universiti Tun Abdul Razak (UNITAR), being the first e-learning university in Malaysia, offers a hybrid model that combines three important components. The three components are the interactive, multimedia content on CDs and on the Web, the face-to-face meetings, and the Internet-based support systems that provide continuous interaction between the students and faculty. This paper describes our experience at UNITAR in designing and teaching Electronic-Commerce (EC) courses using the mentioned hybrid e-learning concept. EC courses in UNITAR were offered for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. The curriculum of these courses was developed and modeled after the EC Framework introduced by Ravi Kalakota and Andrew B. Whinston. Our hybrid e-learning model combines the face-to-face meetings of lecturers and students, and also the use of a Web-based Learning Management System (LMS) that enables continuous interactions via an Virtual Online Instructional Support System (VOISS), Centra as the Online Tutorial (OLT) media, and the multimedia-enabled Web-based courseware.

Keywords: hybrid e-learning model; EC framework; learning management system

INTRODUCTION

Distance learning in Malaysia has been in vogue for the last four decades or so. It started with the external degree programs offered by established universities in England, such as the University of London, as early as in the 1960s. Many professional bodies, such as the City and Guild in the United Kingdom, also offered various certificates and diplomas in different fields through correspondence programs. The first local university in Malaysia that started distance learning (also popularly known as off-campus programs) was the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in Penang. USM was established in 1967/1968 and started its operations in 1969, initiating the off-campus programs in the early 1970s. Off-campus or distance-learning programs have become...
very popular only in the 1990s, when almost all the established local public universities jumped onto the bandwagon.

Universiti Tun Abdul Razak (UNITAR) is the first virtual university in Malaysia adopting the hybrid e-learning model by offering online courses since September 1998. The university is also the region's first virtual university, where education is delivered through the pervasive use of e-learning technology like the Internet, Web-based or CD-based courseware, and facilitator-based tutorials or academic meetings.

The fact that e-learning is gaining popularity proved to be significant based on a study conducted by LearnFrame.com (2000). Their study found that the global education and training market is a US$2 trillion industry, with $740 billion in the United States alone. A study by Gartner Group, as reported by Peterson et al. (1999), showed that by 2003, 50% of all higher learning institutions globally will be offering e-learning programs to their students.

The growth rate for the different education and training markets is projected at 10–15% but, at least in the corporate sector, e-learning will far outstrip classroom training over the next few years, claiming almost half of the overall corporate training market. While it is true that most e-learning programs are now practiced to deliver corporate trainings, in UNITAR we offer full-fledged academic programs from certificate to doctorate level via the hybrid e-learning model.

The scope of discussion of this paper is directed to the teaching and learning of EC courses for the postgraduate program, CSM5033 Electronic Commerce, and the EC course for undergraduate students in CSB1014 Electronic Commerce and Law in IT. These two courses are among the subjects we offered at the Faculty of Information Technology under the Master in Information Technology Management program and Bachelor of Information Technology program, respectively. In the near future, UNITAR will be offering an academic program called Bachelor of E-Commerce, where all courses are to cater to the demand for skilled EC graduates from the industry. Toward the end of the paper, we will also discuss in brief the use of Instructional Design of our Web-based courseware using the ADDIE Model as well as the Kirkpatrick Model, which is used to make summative e-learning evaluation.

UNITAR E-LEARNING PHILOSOPHY

Philosophically, UNITAR is founded on a very sound idealistic base. It derives its strength from a combination of values of universality of education and training, strong commitment to excellence, customer focus, and trust and respect for individuals who continuously support each other in a cohesive team.

The learning system is directed toward pedagogical needs of learners as its principal customers. This is to ensure that the learning environment that UNITAR creates will fulfill the requirements of developing balanced and well-rounded individuals. The profiles of our graduates include being an independent individual, resourceful and competent in information technology skills as well as competent in communicating in English.

The virtues supported by e-learning, be it a pure e-learning (without human intervention) or hybrid e-learning model, such as practiced by UNITAR, is to support the following objectives of democratization and liberalization of education, development of knowledge workers, ease of facilitation of learning, reduction in operational cost, promotion of lifelong learning, and ability to create change agents in the information society.
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