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Shifting from traditional approaches of teaching to a blended learning approach; challenges and possible solutions

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ABSTRACT

The transfer from traditional methods of education to Blended Learning Approach has been essential and it has been adapted widely in universities around the world. The aim of this paper is to recommend a technique that can help to shift from traditional approaches to learning to the BLA approach. The recommendations are based on the analysis of previous studies that highlighted the challenges of BLA and recommended solutions. The key point in this research is that the recommendations do not require the whole education system to be changed. It focuses on aspects that need to be altered, and how. A documentary method of research was used to analyse data from the results of existing research. The recommendations provided are based on analysing major and common obstacles that face BLA. The studies that were analysed were selected from Saudi Arabia only as an Asian country.

Keywords: Traditional learning; Blended learning (BLA); Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge model of teaching (TPCK)

1. THE MOTIVATION FOR THIS PAPER

After three years of investigating the impact of student access to online resources on their relationship with their lecturer, we have come up with a clear fact. We found that the use of internet websites by students was beneficial to them in terms of increasing their academic self-confidence and academic self-reliance. However, internet websites increase the gap in the relationship between them and their lecturer in the classroom. Bridging the gap was the authors' main concern. The results found that lack of lecturers' use of internet technologies for sharing knowledge and communication was the main reason for creating this gap. From this point we started to think about which teaching technique could solve this issue. We found that BLA is the most suitable to be applied as this approach focuses on involving technology in traditional education. We found that Saudi Arabia is in the early stages of adapting BLA in higher education and there are major challenges facing the adaptation

process. From this point we started to think of simple ways to involve technology in the traditional education system without the need to change the whole education approach.

2. METHODOLOGY

This is a documentary research where the relevant information has been gathered from very useful studies. Documentary research is a type of qualitative research which is widely used to build a new idea or concept from findings of previous studies'. This researcher has selected common issues that have been highlighted in most relevant studies in Saudi Arabia.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional learning is defined as delivering learning material face-to-face with no use of the internet for teaching and learning (Lee and Tsai 2011). This approach has been used when the lecturer is the only source of information. Websites have become a rich source of information where students can access and benefit from for study purposes. Students are now able to get information from a wide range of online resources. For this reason, new approaches to teaching which rely on the use of online technologies have appeared in conjunction with the accelerated use of the internet. Blended Learning Approach (BLA) is one of the famous techniques that have been discussed as an alternative to the traditional approach. BLA is a combination of the traditional approach of teaching (face-to-face) and taking advantage of online resources (Jamian, Ab Jalil et al. 2013; Price and Kirkwood 2013). This approach has been adapted widely in universities around the world (Limited and Balcaen 2011)

The transfer in Asian countries has faced major challenges because of the gap between traditional and BLA approaches (Latchem and Jung 2009), and also as shown in the literature review section.

The adoption of BLA in Saudi Arabia has been investigated to a surprising extent. It seems this is because of the necessity to take advantage of modern technology, which has become popular in the country. This section reviews a range of studies that examined extensively the adaption of BLA in Saudi Arabia.

(Almalki 2011) found that BLA would help to improve the quality and efficiency of universities' outcomes. She found that BLA is useful in terms of increasing student teacher connectivity, which should impact positively on learning experiences. To shift to BLA she believes that "a radical shift in the educational system" should be made. She found that policy, curriculum, infrastructure, university culture, development of the instructors, students and administrators need to change for the purpose of a successful shift to BLA

(Alebaikan and Troudi 2010) referred to previous studies and categorized the challenges into three categories; culture, environment and finding the right design. They believe that faculties' ability to cope with new technologies is also part of the challenge. They have suggested three temporary solutions to the problem; new instructions to new students and teachers, establishing computer labs for student to practice using technology, and programmes to develop lecturers skills. Feedback from these three actions should be evaluated regularly to measure how they could speed up the transition.

(Alebaikan 2012)'s research focused on highlighting the benefits of BLA and exploring how it can be applied in Saudi Arabian higher education. He found a lot of enthusiasm from the students for the use of BLA. He believes that there are unlimited benefits to the use of BLA in Saudi Arabia. He also agrees with (Almalki 2011) that the culture could present resistance against BLA. He recommended that BLA could start from an early stage of education rather than waiting until the higher education stage; however, using BLA learning in early age could concern pupils' parents or could place risk on children. He suggested a pre-university stage as a preparation for using BLA successfully in higher education.

(Al-Sarrani 2010) investigated Taibah University as a case. He found that lack of lecturer skills development is a major problem in the smooth transaction to BLA. Lecturers think that availability of internet connection

and technology tools might not be an obstacle. He has provided a list of recommendations to achieve a successful shift to the BLA. His recommendations include enhancing teaching methods, professional development, Learning Management System (LMS) professional development and workshops, internet connections, technical support: BL support for cultural and religious practices, instructional design, Single LMS adoption and a strategic plan.

4. RESULTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Results

All examined studies stated that there is no doubt BLA is a necessary approach in Saudi Arabian higher education. None of the issues presented in these studies could outweigh the clear advantages. Obstacles facing the adoption of BLA are mainly about three issues: culture, limited skills of teachers to deal with the modern technologies, and absence of a clear plan or model to shift from current methods to BLA. Surprisingly, most the studies do not include students as an obstacle. Most of the researchers who have investigated this issue agreed that the shift is difficult and requires interaction from the higher education planner.

4.2. Recommendation

The main reason for previous studies' recommendation to move to BLA was the necessity to use technology in education. The main focus of this research is to provide major steps that would lead to taking advantage of technology without the necessity of the complete shift to BLA. As seen from the previous studies, students are not the main part of the shift problem. (Guidry and BrckaLorenz 2010) confirm that students are more able to use the technology than the lecturers. So the focus in this provided technique is on the lecturer and the techniques that make technology part of education system.

The recommendation in this paper is to focus on readjustment of the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge model of teaching (TPCK). According to this model, the role of the lecturer in the classroom is split

into three elements according to TPCK modellers Mishra & Koehler, as shown in figure (1). “Technology Knowledge (T): how to use the technology for teaching and learning; Content Knowledge (C): what students need to learn and what teachers need to teach; Pedagogical Knowledge (P): how to deliver those contents to students”(Chong, Go et al. 2011)

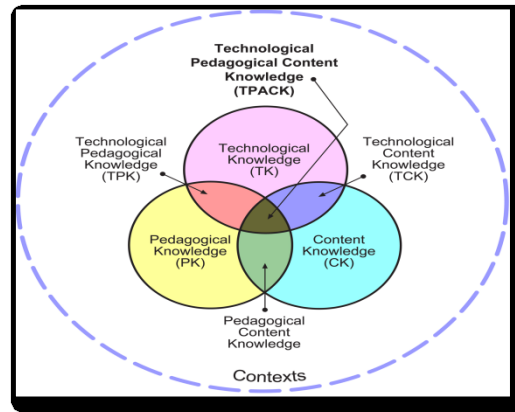


Figure 1: The original TPCK model by Mishra & Koehler (2006)

Step-1: change the focus of the lecturer role

Improving lecturer skills to achieve BLA requirements is not a miracle, but it seems complicated and needs a long process plan (Al-Sarrani, 2010). The need for the development is not for the purpose of delivering the skills to the students but to make them able to deal effectively with the technologies.

The ability to use technology is essential for both lecturer and students. The education system that the lecturers receive before they become lecturers should not focus on content knowledge only. Technological knowledge has become as important as other aspects of knowledge that the lecturer must have. Giving attention to technological knowledge is an important stage in the move from Teacher Centred Learning to BLA (Mather and Oliver 2007); however, it has been globally disregarded (Margerum-Leys and Marx 2002). Before the use of technology in education the TPCK was presented as the top row of table (1) because the technology did not exist.

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 80% | 20% | 0% |
| Content knowledge | Pedagogical knowledge | Technological knowledge |
| 20% | 40% | 40% |
| Content knowledge | Pedagogical knowledge | Technological knowledge |

Table 1: Weidth of TPCK technique

Nowadays the technology has become a rich source of information and a fundamental element in education. So to take advantage of the technology, the weighted balance should tend towards pedagogical knowledge and technological knowledge rather than content knowledge as shown in the third row in table (1).

Step-2: taking advantage of students’ enthusiasm for using technology in the classroom

Nowadays, the new generation of students are fetishists for using modern technology in general, not only in education. If the lecturer fails to meet their expectations, he/she will still have power and control in the classroom but the gap in the interpersonal relationship will surely expand. They want their lecturer to be their reference person in general, not just a knowledge provider. The lecturer should learn how to think as the new generation of students does.

Students’ rush to using web technology is uncontrollable. Their rush to use the web technology should be invested positively in the classroom. Using web technology should be part of daily activity in the classroom as a method of searching for information. The lecturer should not be an obstacle in any way. Learning technology has become reliant on personal effort and experiences. In this step the author strongly recommends the idea

suggested by (Al-Sarrani, 2010) to conduct workshops to exercise the use of technology in the classroom - but the workshop should not be restricted to lecturers only.

5. CONCLUSION

Previous studies have shown the importance of using BLA techniques in education. However, they have listed challenges faced in adopting this approach. Changing the balance of TPCK technique and the inclusion of technology in classroom activities are the suggested steps to move from traditional learning to BLA. These steps are recommended to resolve one of the major problems facing the shift to BLA, which is the limited skills teachers have to deal with modern technologies.

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