THE CHALLENGES OF E-LEARNING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION OF TWO UNIVERSITIES IN MALAYSIA AND VIETNAM

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material in this thesis is my own except for quotations, equations, summaries and references, which have been duly acknowledged.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a comparative study aimed at investigating the implementation of the National E-learning policy in a Malaysian and a Vietnamese higher learning institution. The study centered around how the National E-learning policy of both nations were implemented at a higher learning institution. The study was conducted to address the issue of many lecturers preferring the use of traditional teaching methods over the use of blended learning. This has contributed to students lack of acceptance towards the E-learning aspect of blended learning lessons. This has affected policy implementation. There are many factors associated to this, one of them is associated with training, culture and infrastructure. Thus, a comparative study between two institutions from different nations would be beneficial as this would help gain insights between the challenges faced by both nations. In addition, the institution in Vietnam was chosen because the country has seen much improvement with regards to blended learning in the classroom. Since both Malaysia and Vietnam are from the same region, the challenges faced are similar. Hence, the insights on steps taken to overcome certain challenges should be relevant to both contexts. The investigation was conducted with the use of Trowler's (2003) implementation staircase framework, Vedung's (1998) taxonomy on policy instruments and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). An interview and survey which was based on TAM, was used to investigate the students' acceptance towards technology in the classroom. The implementors, which consists of the policymaker, the administrator and lecturers were interviewed based on Vedung's (1998) taxonomy on policy instruments. Vedung's (1998) taxonomy on policy instruments was used to frame the reasons which contributed to how the objectives and pillars of the policy was implemented. The findings of the study indicated the need for regulatory measures and enforcement to help ensure that the lecturers implement blended learning and this increased the students' level of acceptance in blended learning activities. In addition, the need for adequate infrastructure and assessment were also found to be important factors that contributed to the successful implementation of the policy in each institution. The findings also indicated similarities and differences between the thoughts of both the implementors and students within each institution. One such finding include the need to avoid stereotyping the students as digital natives as such stereotyping decreases the acceptance towards blended learning activities.

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ABSTRAK

CABARAN-CABARAN PELAKSANAAN DASAR E-PEMBELAJARAN DI ANTARA DUA UNIVERSITI DI MALAYSIA DAN VIETNAM

Tesis ini adalah kajian komparatif yang bertujuan untuk menyiasat pelaksanaan dasar E-pembelajaran di dua buah institusi pengajian tinggi di Malaysia dan di Vietnam. Kajian ini bertumpu kepada cara dasar E-pembelajaran kedua-dua negara dilaksanakan di institusi pengajian tinggi untuk menangani isu pensyarah yang memilih untuk menggunakan kaedah pengajaran tradisional berbanding dengan kaedah E-pembelajaran. Ramai pelajar menolak kaedah E-pembelajaran dalam kelas disebabkan oleh faktor latihan, budaya dan infrastruktur. Oleh itu, kajian komparatif antara dua institusi dari negara-negara yang berbeza dapat membantu memberi pemahaman yang lebih mendalam. Ini kerana ia akan membantu mendapatkan pandangan antara cabaran yang dihadapi oleh kedua-dua negara. Di samping itu, institusi di Vietnam dipilih kerana penggunaan E-pembelajaran di dalam bilik darjah negara tersebut telah meningkat. Oleh kerana kedua-dua negara Malaysia dan Vietnam merupakan negara ASEAN, cabaran yang dialami mempunyai banyak persamaan. Oleh itu, dapatan kajian daripada kajian ini boleh diaplikasikan kepada kedua-dua negara ini. Penyiasatan dilakukan dengan menggunakan "implementation staircase" yang diasaskan oleh Trowler (2003), taksonomi Vedung (1998) (Vedung's taxonomy on policy instruments) dan Model Technology acceptance model (TAM). Satu temu bual dan tinjauan yang berdasarkan TAM, digunakan untuk menyiasat penerimaan para pelajar di kedua-dua institutsi pengajian tinggi terhadap teknologi dalam pengajaran. Para pelaksana yang terdiri daripada penulis polisi (policymaker), pentadbir dan kakitangan pengajar telah ditemuramah melalui Taksonomi Vedung (1998). Taksonomi Vedung (1998) digunakan untuk menyiasat sebab-sebab yang menyumbang kepada cara dasar dilaksanakan di kedua-dua negara tersebut. Penemuan kajian menunjukkan keperluan bagi langkah pengawalseliaan dan penguatkuasaan untuk memastikan para pensyarah dan pelajar melaksanakan dan menyertai kelas-kelas E-pembelajaran. Di samping itu, keperluan untuk infrastruktur dan penilaian yang mencukupi juga didapati sebagai faktor penting yang menyumbang kepada kejayaan pelaksanaan dasar di setiap institusi. Penemuan ini juga menunjukkan persamaan dan perbezaan di antara pelaksana dan pelajar dalam setiap institusi. Ini termasuk keperluan untuk mengelakkan stereotaip umur pelajar sebagai satu indikasi kemampuan dan kemahiran para pelajar dalam menggunakan program E-pembelajaran.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

The integration of blended learning in education is common in any education system of any nation seeking to address the challenges of the 21st Century. Latchem and Jung (2010) pointed out that countries have been implementing blended learning in the classroom to better prepare the students for the 21st century as well as the future workforce. The use of blended learning, which is a combination of E-learning and face to face interaction, has improved the teaching and learning process. This is seen in Dinh (2015), who pointed out the use of blended learning in the classroom can improve the teaching and learning process. Some studies have even used the term blended and E-learning interchangeably, such as the one by Ali & Bhasin (2020).

Several nations have created policies to facilitate the implementation of E-learning and blended learning in the classroom. Zhang and Duan (2017) described that the implementation of the E-learning policy in Hong Kong incorporated the use of blended learning strategies to improve the effectiveness of the overall policy. In Malaysia, E-learning and blended learning has been a focus of the Malaysian Education blueprint (Ministry of Education, 2013). However, the blueprint is also focused on other aspects of education for this nation. Hence, this study focused more on the DePAN policy for the Malaysian context to focus on the aspect of E-learning implementation. DePAN stands for *Dasar E-Pembelajaran Negara* or the National E-learning policy for higher learning institutions. The policy was formulated on the 16th of April 2011, with an overall objective of developing the students' ability with ICT (DePAN, 2011). In addition, other purposes of DePAN consists of preparing the students to be more engaged in their learning (Mohd Syahrizad & Ahmad Zamzuri,

2014). Furthermore, Malaysia's National E-learning policy for higher institutions (DePAN) was attributed to the improvement of some E-learning implementation (Tharmabalan, 2016).

According to the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (2015), the goal of DePAN is to enhance the teaching and learning experience of students in higher education institutions through blended learning. Other countries such as Vietnam too have implemented similar initiatives such as Directive 55, policy which points to the implementation of E-learning in education (Peeraer et al., 2009). This also includes blended learning as noted by Peeraer & Tran (2015). Directive 55 is the main policy that led to several sub-policies that are in-line with E-learning implementation in the classroom. This is seen in the article by Dinh (2015). Dinh (2015) also claimed that Directive 55 provided the right conditions which supported further policies and implementation with regards to E-learning implementation in the classroom.

Comparatively, Directive 55 is the national E-learning policy of Vietnam that was conducted from 2008-2012. Despite this, directive 55 has spawned many sub-policies that are derived from the main policy of Directive 55, which was focused on in this study (Dinh, 2015). Dinh (2015) pointed out that Directive 55's main purpose was to put in place conditions that are favorable for E-learning to be integrated and implemented in education. This includes blended learning which was cited as one of the examples and the by Dinh (2015) cooperation with other institutions to ensure that equipment can be cheaply supplied to the classroom. This also consists of the necessary training required to implement E-learning in the classroom.

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1.2 Background of the Study

The investigation of national E-learning policies is an area of interest because of how similar national such policies are, yet, the results yielded may differ. Pasley (2013) researched the E-learning policies in South East Asia. Pasley (2013) pointed out that despite how several policies are starting to converge and become similar. Some may focus on E-learning while others blended learning. However, similar goals do not mean similar results. This is seen in the difference in the ability to implement said

policies. Pasley (2013) pointed out, for example, that some wealthier nations would have more success in implementation due to its resources. However, these implementation methods are not without fault. This indicates that E-learning policies is dependent on its manner of implementation and not just a nation's resources.

1.2.1 E-learning Policy Implementation

E-learning policy implementation was used as way to identify how the policy was implemented. Reasons behind the implementation or lack of implementation has been seen in studies such as Yahya Ibrahim (2016). Yahya Ibrahim (2016) found resistance stemmed from the lack of support, perception, training, and a resistance towards change. Yahya Ibrahim's (2016) study was conducted to ascertain the implementation of E-learning policy in Saudi Arabian secondary schools. Yahya Ibrahim's (2016) study is in line with Kozma's (2008) findings that the study of E-learning policy implementation can identify gaps in policy implementation. Such gaps can be in the form of supervising the purchase of infrastructure and the training required for the policy to be implemented as pointed out by Yahya Ibrahim's (2016).

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In addition, policies can be poorly implemented due to issues such as the resistance of the lecturers towards the implementation of E-learning in the classroom. Resistance is a lack of acceptance and is a reason for poor policy implementation as noted Lochmiller and Hedges (2017). This resistance may have stemmed from the lack of understanding or a challenge of tried and true methods which has led to teachers resisting such policies. This can be seen in E-learning policy implementation and technology acceptance. Dang (2014) concluded that training, infrastructure should be the focus in ensuring E-learning policy implementation. Dang (2014) noted that with training and infrastructure, acceptance can be achieved. A similar sentiment is concurred by Bartlett et al. (2017). Bartlett et al. (2017) pointed to the need for considering the expert views of those who are implementing the policy. In the study conducted by Bartlett et al. (2017), it was pointed out that the lack of participation from the teachers. These teachers were the experts and implementors who would carry out the policy. Due to a lack of participation, this has caused the policy to be implemented in a less than satisfactory manner. Schweisfurth (2013) adds that implementors such as teachers must be supported and trained to ensure that policy

can be implemented well. Schweisfurth (2013) also called for the need of a good workplace culture either in the form of the policy implementation or the teaching practices of the lecturers. As such, technology acceptance is dependent on the adequacy of policy implementation. As such, implementation should be done in a way to avoid resistance (Bartlett et al., 2017; Dang, 2014; Lochmiller and Hedges, 2017; Schweisfurth, 2013)

One aspect of acceptance is the acceptance of blended learning, specifically from the lens of the lecturer. This is because the lecturers are at the forefront of implementing an E-learning policy created for higher learning institutions. It is through the implementation of E-learning by the lecturers in the classroom that it improves teaching and learning at the higher learning institutions (Dinh, 2015). The acceptance of the lecturers also leads to the acceptance of the students. However, if the lecturers do not accept the use of E-learning or blended learning, this may cause blended learning to be poorly implemented. This is seen in the study by Kintu, Zhu & Kagambe (2017) where poor implementation of blended learning by the lecturers leads to students not accepting it. However, it is important to ensure that these lecturers are equipped with the right skills and training to do so. If the lecturers are well equipped, this will lead to less resistance and, eventually, the successful implementation of the E-learning policy due to the lecturer accepting the requirements set forth by the policy, even in the form of blended learning. These points are echoed by Abuya et al. (2015), who posits that teaching staff such as lecturers are the ones who will determine if an E-learning policy in education is implemented at all. Abuya et al. (2015) was referring to how the teaching staff who were ill-trained to teach well in class. This was in part, attributed to the lack of training. Thus, this has led to the poor implementation of the national education policy. The case of Abuya et al. (2015) was based on E-learning policy and is applicable to blended learning due to its similarities.

This is seen in the study by Bowyer & Chambers (2017) where the blended learning consists of two aspects, the face to face and the E-learning. As such, it can be assumed that the implementation of adequate training would suffice in ensuring that E-learning aspect of blended learning can be implemented well. There is an importance placed on the professional development of lecturers. In a study by Yuen

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and Hew (2018), the investigation found that each country has a different purpose in each of its ICT policies. Despite the differences in their purposes, one common factor seemed to be the importance placed on the professional development of the teaching staff such as lecturers. Thus, this showcases the importance of developing the lecturers' ability to implement ICT adequately in the classroom. Developing the lecturers' ability in implementation could lead to ensuring the success of how an E-learning policy can be implemented. This is further exemplified in the report by Park and Bodrogini (2016) who mentioned that due to inadequate E-learning policy implementation, the use of ICT was not being utilized to the fullest. The project implemented in the study consisted of a few objectives. Such objectives consist of supporting the lecturers with the necessary tools to integrate ICT in the classroom, to equip the teaching staff in higher learning institutions with the professional development necessary to align the classes at the institutions with the set national policy and standard. While the project aimed to localize this information to the different contexts in the Asia Pacific region. Park and Bodrogini's (2016) findings also pointed to the importance of professional development in ensuring that ICT policies are well implemented.

However, even with the availability of professional development activities, some implementors are still unwilling to implement E-learning in the classroom despite going through the required training. This is seen in a study by Sakala and Chigona (2019), who pointed out that some teachers were fearful of implementing ICT in the classroom. As such, there are hindrances faced even during the teaching of courses in universities. These hindrances are seen in both the Malaysian and Vietnamese contexts. In the case of Malaysia, Prasanna et al. (2012) found out that the students and lecturers are resistant towards the implementation of technology even in the case of blended learning in the classroom. The lecturers pointed out that there were constraints such as the workload in integrating technology into the lesson and the familiarity with more traditional methods of teaching and learning. The same applies to the Vietnamese context, whereby Hoang (2015) pointed out that many lecturers were resistant towards using ICT. These were trained lecturers who attributed their resistance towards using ICT to the extra workload and unfamiliarity with some technologies.

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For the Malaysian and Vietnamese contexts, the E-learning policy is implemented at the higher learning institutions. This is achieved by encouraging the use of blended learning. In both contexts, the lecturers are required to use ICT to enhance the teaching and learning practices in the classroom. This is concurred by both Dinh (2013) and Norazah et al. (2019). The creation of E-learning policy in Malaysia and Vietnam centers around blended learning. This is seen in the Ministry of higher education (n.d.) and MOET (2008). While researching a policy on its own can be an area of research, researching the implementation of the policy has been noted by Keshav (2012) as a more important area of research. Keshav (2012) noted that policy implementation is interpretive, noting that policy will ultimately be up to how its implementors interpret and implement it. Keshav (2012) further noted that the administrators determine the adoption of any policy at the higher learning institutions. Depending on how the administrator convinces the teaching staff, such as lecturers, to implement blended learning, it will determine if the lecturers will adopt or resist the policy.

Thus, studying how the policy is implemented is important because the study of the lecturers' implementation can be tied to and associated with other issues such as infrastructure and training, as presented above. In addition, investigating the implementation of E-learning policy by the implementors and acceptance by the students could identify the gaps that should be addressed by policymakers, administrators, and lecturers in the future.

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1.2.2 The Malaysian and Vietnamese Context

A comparison between Malaysia and Vietnam is important because this could avoid what Silova (2009) points out as the resistance and distortion of policies borrowed from other nations. Silova (2009) points out that certain policies are met with resistance or poor implementation as policies that are borrowed through comparative education policy may not be suitable. This is because the borrowed policy may not be suitable due to economic, cultural, or historical factors. Hence, it is prudent for some research to be conducted beforehand to mitigate such issues. As such, an interview would be beneficial to investigate the cultural and other aspects that are not stipulated in the policy.