Application of Knowledge among Distance Learning Students in Real Life School Classrooms: Challenges and Perspectives

Abrar Yahya N. Khawaji

Faculty of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Kaha354849@gmail.com

Abstract: *This study was carried a program of distance learning. The main purpose of this study was to highlight the challenges and perspectives of students facing distance learning when they apply what they have learnt from the program in their classrooms, and also to focus on the challenges of the program itself and how can students deal with it and handle it. The study is qualitative in nature, seeking deeper information about the challenges and perspectives faced by the students. The study intreview four distance students during their course program, three of them were interviewed face to face and the fourth one was interviewed by phone. The data was translated on three sections namely follows; program challenges, personal challenges, and pupils (school student) challenges. Research findings show that there are many challenges that distance students face according to the program such as; mode of delivery, Lectures' language usage, communication, and group work. Moreover, according to their personal challenges they provide two; travel problems and time management. In terms of pupils challenges, they mention that they have some problems when apply the knowldge to pupils such as: adapte to something new and the fact that what they learn in the program is some how different from what is provided in their school environment. The final challenge is their difficulties in dealing with student's different abilites and skills insuch as; ICT skills and some other learning difficulties. The study recommends constructing a small education bulding in different places with a good internet connection and also an easy accessbility to the library with having the advantage of using chat rooms for discussions, thus, to,support distance students with time management courses to train them and also help them solve their problems.*

Keywords: *knowledge, distance learning, school classrooms.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Distance education is one of the solutions for gaining knowledge and developing skills without the need of moving from one place to another. Knowledge and skills are important needs for everyone and everywhere. Therefore, according to Mishra (2002), many countries intend to improve the basic skills of their workers by including distance education in their educational system and by allowing a big number of them to benefit from it. By having these skills and that kind of knowledge, they can improve their work and apply what they learnt to the working environment. For example, the teachers in school teach for many years, but they still need a great deal of knowledge and skills to learn, and to apply to their students in the classroom, so that students can reapply it in their real lives according to, (Hammond & Austin) "Applying knowledge in real-life contexts can support deeper initial learning" (p: 192)...

However, there are many challenges facing distance education. "The main problem faced by the distance universities all over the world relates to the maintenance of standards" (Nadia & Muhammad Rashid, 2012: 19). They found that the standard should be clear and strong for the distance education. However, Kim and Shih (2003: 40) say that "The motivation of students is one of the key factors that will determine the success of a distance learning program".

Therefore, this study has resorted to identifying the most important challenges (from the students' point of view) faced by the students of distance education including travel problems, mode of delivery, lecturers' language usage, time management, communication and group working. In addition, the study also discusses students' ways in dealing and overcoming all these challenges and their specific difficulties in applying this method of learning. The study also looks at the field of distance education student's ability to deal with individual differences during the class time. The main

purpose of the study is to highlight the challenges faced by the students involved and to investigate their ways to handle them.

The study also intends to provide some possible suggestions for the effectiveness and development, as well as improvement of the distance education. There are three research questions, formulated:

1. What are the challenges that distance learning students face in the program, and how they deal with them?

2. What are the difficulties that distance learning students face when they apply what they have learnt in their schools?

3. How the distance learning students (who are also teachers) cope with the different abilities of their pupils in the classroom?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The problems and challenges that face distance learning students has long been a key issue in distance learning. Galusha (1998) who arranged the problems in categories; costs and motivators, feedback and teacher contact, student support and services, alienation and isolation, lack of experience, and finally training. Apart from that, he mentioned that "Understanding and mitigating technology problems are important, especially with the rapid expansion of technology" (Galusha, 1998: 19). Some researchers found out that the major problem facing distance student is the difficulty in managing their time and this is reflected in Ghana by Samuel (2010).

Mariki (2013) represents the challenges that HYCU distance students faced in using the Information and Communicative Technology (ICT) and they collected data by using both structured and unstructured interviews. However, the findings show that distance students faced some difficulties in terms of meeting or contacting their teachers online, the learning requirements, and the lack of materials and human resources. Moreover, they found that distance students cannot use DE courses effectively by using the ICT in the HYCU. Nevertheless, it can be seen that Kim & Shih (2003) give some solutions for the difficulty of meeting teachers online by having chat room discussions to communicate with the teachers and fellow classmates.

In addition, Rashid (2012) organized the issues and problems which are facing distance education according to faculty members, academics, technology, and the economy. These issues have been specific overall of current literature review in the field. The findings show that, based on several researches done and discussed all over the world, the quality of education becomes less in the distance education programs because of the poor maintenance of standards and the absence of formal teachings and education sessions. Moreover, the postal service sometimes could be slow and unreliable. Hence, it makes communication more difficult. Besides, the communication skills should be taught instead of communicating, by giving information to the students and making them repeat what they have learnt. There must be a reaction and an interaction with constant reciprocal feedback. Therefore, they should develop the communication skills where it is the foundation of the distance education institution.

However, it can be seen that Diane Hockridge (2012), used interviews to figure out the understanding formation according to the theological education and how the students enhance to use the formation through the education practice. Nevertheless, unlike Rashid (2012) who highlighted the challenges which are facing the lectures to prepare distance student for relational professions, Diane Hockridge (2012) focuses on the challenges which face the distance students.

On the other hand, there are some researches who argue about the factors that influence the success of distance education programs such as Essary (2014) who uses qualitative methods and identifies two positive external factors that contribute to it, which are competitive issues and meeting the needs of the students.

3. METHODOLOGY

The researchers used a qualitative approach to gain in-depth information to address the questions that are essential to the study. A semi-structured interviews were conducted based on the four levels of Kirkpatrick-learning evaluation model (figure 1).This four level is: reaction that measure how the person feel about the thing you ask him, Learning is measure what the knowledge and skills they learn, behavior measuring the application of what they

learn in the classroom and result is to measure the outcome of the program (http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/kirkpatrick.htm). These four levels conducted by the researchers with four distance learners during their PGP courses in IIUM. The study involves interviews for the purpose of figuring out the challenges in their program and how they apply what they have learned in their school environment.
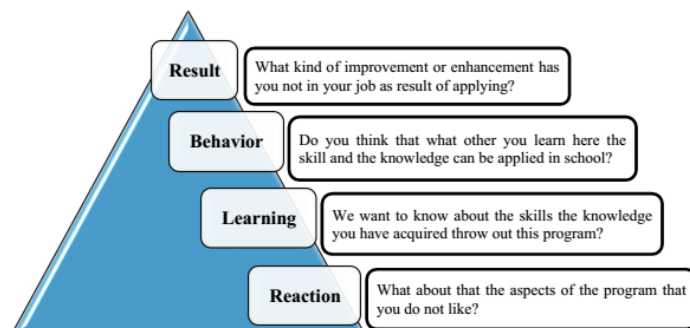
Kirkpatrick-learning evaluation model (figure 1)

The interview is conduct one time, face-to-face for about 45 minutes in IIUM with three participants where the fourth interview was conducted by phone, because the participant has busy schedule. The interview was audio recorded with the interviewee's consent. After transcribing the interviews, reading the text and listening to the tapes a few times, the data was coded and analyzed.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Many distance education systems in several universities have had some challenges such as the distance education system in Ghana, which had problems with its methods of learning, adjustment and management of time, Nyarko (2010). This is similar to what had happened in this study , where the data showed that there are many challenges that distance learning students face from the programs and from transferring what they learn to the school environment. Moreover, some of these challenges are dealt with yet they still influence their personal life and work.

 After coding the data, the researchers came up with three challenges themes:

➢ Program.

➢ Personal.

➢ Pupils (school students).

We can see that every theme have sub theme with a theoretical affiliate and researches which shows in concept map (figure2)

Program challenges

The university offers many courses to distance learning. From the interview, the study analyses four major challenges that we found significant and that need to be discussed here.

5. MODE OF DELIVERY

Distance learning needs to have computer facilities and strong network programs in order to transfer the knowledge to students. Therefore, LMS (Learning Management System) is used to manage promote e-learning for both full time and distant learning students**.** However, there are some problems that are related to (LMS) and internet connection. At the same time (Rusmanizah, Sharifah, 2013) highlight the difficulties that are encountering the students access the internet and how it is not effective for them.

One of the participants also mentioned problems regarding the usage of social media. These are the students' claims about LMS:

Student B1:

"the mode of delivery is something that aa quite I cannot cannot agree with LMS aaa, not much,, but some of it, because I'm staying in the rural area., so aaa internet connection quite some time low,

sometimes there is internet connection, so I face problem with internet connection when I want to go throw LMS to respond the forum aa to join the desiccation so, is very aaa hard for me in that way''

Student B2:

"Student B2: in that way waye iaaa hard explain for me ,because I need to aa dept. my laptop with LMS it is quit new when I use to use it aaaaa I think I love it very much ..but not two weeks before exam started, LMS will be congested", LMS you need you have to use laptop or desktop"

Student B3

"Very. Very problem I think (Referring to LMS)"

"For first time users, they might be…different, especially older generations…you know" (Referring to ICT skills)

Most of them do not like LMS and have some difficulties to log in to the system and use it. Two of them said that it is quite hard and problematic. One of them claimed it was hard as he had to use a laptop or a desktop in order to log in, unlike the easier way, such as using a smart phone or a tablet. Similarly to (Kim, Shih, 2003) they are facing the same problem and they claim that distance students should be able to access the network from anywhere and everywhere and with any kind of selector such as a laptop or a smart phone. Also, Sharifah (2013) found in their studies that distance students face some difficulties when they want to assist their studies.

Meanwhile, another participant might consider it as a problematic matter as she lacks the information and communications technology (ICT) skills. This issue is also faced by (Galusha, 1998: 6) the research found that" many adult students are not well versed in the use of technology such as computers and the Internet."

Moreover, one person said that he has difficulties logging in because he lives in the rural area that make them cannot get the internet connection or probably get low connection to the internet which make the Internet connection unavailable. This will impact the learning of distance learning, so we need to improve the technology system to help them ,this supported by Saba and Shearer (1994) they built on Moore's model they Integrated telecommunication systems may permit a greater variety of transactions to occur.

So far, there was only one student that did not have any problems with the LMS or the internet connection at all.

5.1. In Dealing with Accessing the LMS the Respondents (Interviewees) Said

Student B1:

"the LMS , but as we student , we need to to to overcome the problem , sometime I have to travel some some place that I can get internet connection ,so that I can do the aa for the aa join element".

Student B2:

"My laptop with LMS it is quit new when I use to use it aaaaa I think I love it very much"

It can be seen that one of the interviewees decided to travel to a closer place to be able to access the internet connection, while another participant admitted that LMS is something new for him. Nevertheless, after getting to know it, he started to love it and that he keeps practicing and using it.

However, the third student only provided a limited response by saying "For first time users, they might be…different, especially older generations…you know." In this case, I might say that the age factor may play its role as well as older generations normally appear to have more difficulties in dealing with ICT. Thus, as a prior to the program, I believe that sufficient training in ICT is needed before entering the program. Distance student can not only solve this problem, the University should be attention to follow what Jegeda (1994) listed to have attention about student support service and equity and access.

5.2. Lectures' Language Usage

It can be seen that the lecturers are from different nationalities and backgrounds. Some of them are locals while others are from foreign countries. Thus, some students might have difficulties in understanding the language used by them. Even though they all speak English, their different and

unique accents may become a source of hindrance for some students to understand their lectures well. Therefore, these participants claimed that:

Student B3:

"But, if foreign lecturers, a bit challenging because we must have a translator among us, who knows how to talk English."

Student B4:

"Yes, because they are talking with slangs."

It can be seen that half of the participants have had problems with the foreign lecturers' language as they cannot understand them where one of the students added that some lecturers speak with certain slangs. On the other hand, the other two students claimed that they do not have any problems in understanding the lecturers' language. One of the students did not give any response to this problem while another student said that he is fine to have both local and foreign lecturers.

5.3. In Dealing with Difficulties in Understanding, A Respondent (Interviewee) Said

Student B3:

"Sometimes we do not understand, we ask him anything problem, a respondent (interviewee asked of him"

This student claimed that she tried to deal with the problem by asking the lecturers whenever she does not understand things in class. However, they still cannot deal with the problem, whereby the lecturers themselves sometimes cannot understand the students' questions. Meanwhile, the other students did not mention anything on how they tried to deal with this problem.

5.4. Communication

Out of four students, two of them admitted that they have problems in communicating with both lecturers and classmates. They said:

Student B3:

"although you cannot see each other's, you can call, you can WhatsApp, you can Facebook, but it is not the same things when we face to face ""Sometimes they reply instantly , sometimes they post into italeem but sometimes there are lecturers who said differently in one class and the next class, making me confuse"

Student B4:

"This WhatsApp group but quite limited.. You know.. So..The real.. I mean.. Conversation is not happen.. So...Sometimes we ask something... you said... And get meaning. How to get something... so that the problem..."

The first student prefers to communicate face to face with her classmate than online. That is supported by Bischoff et al. (1993) –"the perceived interpersonal closeness between the teacher and student, among students, and between other students and the teacher, as perceived by the student respondents"(p5) . She also added that what they post in the LMS and what they say in class are different. Hence, she feels confused. Meanwhile, the second student mentioned that the number of groups in the social media was limited and that there wasn't any good conversation happening. Also, the questions posted are not always answered. However, the other two students claimed that they do not have any problems and that one of them enjoys communicating online with his classmates and share his experience. Another student does not mention anything about it.

5.5. In Dealing with Communication, The Respondents (Interviewees) Said

Student B3:

"Although you cannot see each other, you can call, you can WhatsApp, you can Facebook"

Student B4:

"So they should make one... One video... Streaming... So equal streaming... Or they might set time... So it might be equal for all student... This is...Some...Some... Sort of good communicative... I mean communication...between the students... And the lecturer"

Student B3 uses social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp to communicate with others. Meanwhile, another student suggested to have a video streaming session by setting the possible time slots for each individual, student, and the lecturer. This which support by Moore (2007) dialogue have a lot of advantages between the teachers and the learners. Moreover, Moore (1993) claim that transactional distance as "a psychological and communications space to be crossed, a space of potential misunderstanding between the inputs of instructor and those of the learner" (p. 23).

5.6. Group Work

Working in a group is one of the education strategies that every education system looks forward to encouraging amongst the students, so that they will learn how to be cooperative with each other. Badu-Nyarko (2010) claims that there has be a group of students working together, such as a group for assignments that encourages the members of the group to finish the assignment fast and share different kinds of expertise amongst the members, so that this leads to a high quality of learning.

However, based on the data, we can see that some students face problems in using this method. They said:

Student B3:

"Group work is very difficult, because the members are all over ... ha ... All over the place"

StudentB4:

"I did not have any partner from that area to talk to...to discussing between... I mean... Like face to face" "I mean. Collaboration between the colleagues is not quite happened"

Half of these students face problems with group work. One of them said that it is very difficult to meet up because the members of the group are from different places. This can influence negatively in the student learning that what Saba and Shearer (1994) says after they built on Moores model .if the dialogue between learner increase, the distance between the student will decrease. However,

 Another student said that he does not have any partner nearby him to meet and he also mentioned that there is no group work between the colleagues. On the contrary, the other students do not have any problem with it.

5.7. In Dealing with This Problem, The Respondents (Interviewees) Said

The students did not provide any response on how to deal with this problem. According to (Kim, Shih, 2003) they have the same problem, but they suggest having a chat room to discuss which can help students and their group members to have an effective discussion.

5.8. Personal Challenges

Many distance students are adult and works, so most of their time was so occupied thus they face some personal challenges such as: travelling problems and time management.

5.9. Travelling Problems

We managed to figure out that half of the participants have problems traveling from their place to the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), and some of them have problems with the living cost as they said:

Student B1:

"I have to travel, that one I really heat , every time I have class here ,I have travel for two and half hours.''

Student B2:" for the traveling and hotel we have to spend own money for.''" when I need to travel to Gombak I think evolve high cost"

Based on these responses, it can be said that these two students are living quite far from the university, as they are from Pahang. Hence, they consider travelling back and forth between their place and the university as costly and troublesome. This is against Badu-Nyarko (2010) research; he says that with distance education we can save money. But I think we can save money if there is good management for the programs and the place where the students can stay.

However, the other two students did not have any problems with travelling, where one of them is also from Pahang. It seemed that the other students are living in a nearby residential area in Kuala Lumpur. One of the participants mentioned that she is even from Lumut.

5.10. In Dealing with this Problem, The Respondents (Interviewees) Said

Student B1:

" So like today , I have classes like yesterday I have classes every day .so this two day I have to wake up early and I start to drive around 6:00 am in the morning "

Student B2:

"aaa there are five of us from Kuantan so, we travel aa I think at 4 in the morning that for Saturday and we need to stay there in Gombak for next day, we have soooo class on Sunday". "At first three semesters we manage to get in hostel, but after that aaa we need to stay in hotel"

Based on their responses, it can be seen that these two students tried to deal with this problem as much as they can.

5.11. Time Management

There are also some problems related to class time, but it seems insignificant as only one person mentioned them. Nevertheless, we can see that other students have problems in managing their time. Same as to what happened in Ghana, where the students faced problems when they wanted to manage their time to study Badu-Nyarko (2010). The students claim:

Student B2:

"aaaaa the challenges aaa I think aaaa as husband teacher a student I need tooooooo manage my time very well"

Student B3:

 "My time management sometimes I really do not know how to manage my time for different task"

The data showed that half of the students have problems with time management. One of them mentioned that he has to commit and play the roles of a teacher, a husband and a student at the same time. Hence, it seems challenging to him to manage everything. This is close to Badu-Nyarko (2010) where it showed that many people such as women, have difficulties to deal with family pressures. So, I can say that some people have some problem with managing their time. Another student has the same dilemma regarding her time management. Nevertheless, one of the participants does not find time management as something challenging for him.

5.12. In Dealing with this Problem, A Respondent (Interviewee) Said

Student B2:

"for time management aaaaa need to ask my wife and I got very strong sport from my friends''' the pose very supportive''

This particular student deals with this problem by having discussions with his family and he gets support from both his friends and his spouse. Another student does not know how to manage her time well, maybe because she is a wife, a mother, a student and a teacher at the same time. Therefore, she feels that it is difficult.

5.13. Pupils (School Students) Challenges

5.13.1. Application At School Classroom

Meanwhile, in relation to pupil's challenges, some of the distance students claimed that they do not have any problems in applying what they learnt in their school. However, the other students admitted to facing some obstacles when applying what they learnt, as they mentioned:

Student B1

"Sometime we learn is not the same thing we happen in the school, we learn different that in the school different thing happen"

Student B2:

"So, people the students difficult to adapt to something new"

Student B3:

"But sometimes the university, they are not aware of what is happening in schools, in reality, the real school syllabus. "Lecturers are not aware with latest curriculum, for example KSSR.not a reality. It's not like theory. What happens now"

StudentB4:

"The lecturer Said... Might be directly teaching...but ministry said it is not being directly... aa... Throughout the ... the activities... it's is not been directly teaching such as the grammar parts"

Based on the interview with these four students, we can see that all of them have unique problems when wanting to apply what they learnt in school. Most of them found that there were some differences between what they learnt and what happens in school. For example, they do not know about the new curriculum in school, and one of students encountered some troubles when he wanted to adapt to something new.

5.13.2.Ability of Pupils(School Students)

On the other hand, there are some challenges faced with distance learning, which has to cope with different abilities of the pupils whom they teach in school. Hence, they claimed that:

Student B1:

"ok there some people they are different each other every year, so here we learn a lot of skill a lot of method a lot of offered, so when we cannot use aaa serten apos certain method certain skill .so we change' 'my class already have 35 pupils so eleven of them leans candidate so, I use my what I learn here the skill the method the porch that I learn here,, so is ii from 11 of them .,,fife of them already apple to read apple to write"

Student B2:

"I try to apply ICT skills, because my school is outside of Kuantan"

Based on the interview conducted, it can be seen that two of the respondents (who are students and also teachers) have had difficulties in dealing with their pupils' different abilities at school. One of the distance learning students mentioned that every year they would have different pupils with different abilities, so that they needed to change their method in order to match it with their ability. In addition, he related it to his own experience with lenus (Learning difficulties) where there were pupils who needed more attention and different methods compared to others. He also stated that there were some difficulties in dealing with his 35 pupils in the classroom, were eleven of them needed more care and attention than others. Apart from that, another interviewee found some barriers when he wanted to apply ICT skills amongst his school pupils. Being able to use computers amongst his pupils was inappropriate and that he needed to pay more attention to them. This may be due to the fact that they come from the village.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings in this study helped in highlighting some of the challenges that distance learning students encountered in their program and also while applying what they learnt, to their school environment. Furthermore, this study comes out with some suggestions, such as:

Build an education center or opening a cafés with facilities and easy internet access location in rural areas that will help student to achieve a high quality of learning. Also, using Facebook or discussion rooms for chatting, organized by the University will encourage student to have group working and good discussion. Moreover, the university can conduct small programs for the students to teach them how to manage their time. They also need more practice with their ICT skills, and what's more is, to conduct courses related to their work as teachers to improve their skills and the easements that they provide should be related and applied in their work, so that this can help both, enhancing their skills and improving their school's environment.

This study recommends to have more researches about the challenges that face lectures in teaching distance learning and how they deal with this problem. Moreover, the researches should highlight the

relationship between what distance students learn in the program and what they do in their work environment. To develop distance learning program I think, they should concentrate in distance learning needs and the society needs. Also to have more studs in applying the knowledge effectively to the work environment and in the real life.

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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Abrar Yahya has gained the degree of Bachelor of education, King Abdulaziz University, and earned a master's degree in education (Curriculum and Instruction) at Sanaa University in 2010, she currently PhD candidate in education (Curriculum and Instruction), International Islamic University Malaysia.