

ONLINE FORUM IN BIOTECHNOLOGY EDUCATION: A STUDY FROM THE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Interaction and communication through online forum is a widespread practice for the university students. To date, many reports indicate positive feedback on the implementation of online forum into the traditional face-to-face teaching and learning process, however the students' responses on this pedagogical tool in biotechnology education in Malaysia is yet to be reported. The main objective of this study is to learn about the students' perspective towards the integration of online forum into formal educational process. The feedback from the students were obtained through the questionnaires. The feedback shows only about 5% of the students has experienced taking online forum as formal educational event prior to this study. A total of 56% of the respondents agreed that online discussion had motivated them in their learning process, 61% of them found that the discussion had inspired their creativity, and about 53% of them found that the discussion had increased the interaction between their course mates. On the list of the factors that had motivated them to join the online forum, the students were most concern about the marks carried by joining the forum, closely followed by while the topics which could draw their interest. This study found that online forum is a good tool in teaching biotechnology courses.

Keywords: Biotechnology education, online forum, blended learning students' feedback

INTRODUCTION

Many educational bodies and teachers is leveraging on the widespread of internet technology by blending the usage of internet into their traditional face-to-face teaching approaches, which many of them are in the field of biology and biotechnology (Hejmadi, 2007; Morris, 2010; Ranganathan et al., 2007). The integration changed the demography in teaching and learning with more and more teachers had moved towards the blended learning. Some teachers even suggested the design of an ideal full online course (Carr-Chellman&Duchastel, 2000). As the web can be a medium of delivery and interaction, the constraint of time and space of online study have been minimized.

Online forum has become a popular way of communication and interaction between the university students, aided by many free online forum host, such as Facebook.com and Twitter.com. The forum, which can be accessed through internet connection has become an important source of knowledge and a supplement to teaching and learning process (Markel, 2001).

Online forum was reported could bring benefits to the participated students, including the upscale of student community (Dawson, 2006), participation and collaboration (Ruberg et al., 1996), promote critical thinking, and constructive learning (Warschauer, 1997; Dehler&Parras-Hernandez, 1998). Although it can be a good pedagogical tool, the forum raised some controversial as well, such as the lack of academic discussion and the control of the instructors (Markel, 2001; Thomas, 2002).

The objective of this study is to learn about the students perspective on the integration of online forum into their formal teaching and learning process. This study is important as it is a pioneer study on the online forum in biotechnology education in Malaysia. The result of this study is served as the indication of students' acceptance towards online forum as a formal educational event.

BACKGROUND OF THIS STUDY

INTI International University, Malaysia initiates student centred learning and starts encouraging the academics to change the teaching style from teacher centred to student centred since May 2010. The