PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF ONLINE EDUCATION IN MAKASSAR CITY, PROVINCE OF SOUTH SULAWESI, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Assessing the Higher Education Institutions' readiness to implement e-learning in Indonesia is a critical factor to its eventual successful full-swing implementation. HEIs compliance to the standards or requirements set by the Ministry of Education indeed will better prepare them as tertiary academic institutions to offer their faculty and the students the tremendous benefits of online education or e-learning in the teaching-learning process. The schools covered in this study are partially ready or prepared to implement e-learning or online education in their respective schools. The faculty members' high level of expertise in online education as assessed by the faculty and school heads as well as e-learning readiness of the participant schools means that the HEIs are indeed ready along these lines. The HEIs strong challenge lies primarily on their ability to address the minimum requirements set forth by the Ministry of Education with respect to software, learning management system infrastructure and internet speed requisites for them to enhance their readiness to implement the e-learning approach to teaching and learning.

Keywords: *Makassar City, e-learning readiness, online education*

INTRODUCTION

The academic world is experiencing great changes and tremendous innovations along its domains of teaching and learning. Many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) around the world now are compelled to adapt to a myriad of new teaching pedagogies and learning modalities that are attuned to the demands of the 21st century education. Many school administrators and teachers from Basic Education to Graduate School have set their focus of attention to proactively address the pressing issues, particularly, those that have to do with the use of ICT-based platforms for teaching and learning. Many academic institutions nowadays, specifically, colleges and universities have started to provide web-based courses aimed at complementing the traditional classroom-based forms of instruction. With the emergence of online education, a lot of people desiring to finish their tertiary education have found it convenient to earn their college degrees and diplomas. Students who are beset with the problem of distance, i.e., their place of residence is situated far from established schools, can now possibly learn and earn their degrees within the comfort of their homes and even in their most convenient time. Other than this, people who have not finished their tertiary education but who are currently gainfully employed can not possibly leave their work to attend formal schooling are certainly benefited with the flexibility attribute of online learning. With online education, learning has become almost accessible to everyone. With the onset of computer and information technology, time and distance no longer are significant barriers for people who want to learn and increase their knowledge, skills and competencies. In the workplace, most organizations require their employees to finish at least a college degree and submit a certificate of graduation as proof that they have gone through the rigors of formal education. With online education, earning at least a college degree for many no longer is a far-fetched reality.

Having noted the above phenomenon, the implementation of distance or online education using computer technology is needed by almost every people in the world and more especially of the people in Makassar city, South Sulawesi Indonesia who are in dire need of an innovative educational learning platform for them to be able to gain

access and benefits of online education.

Makassar is the largest city in eastern Indonesia and the second largest metropolitan areas outside Java. The city was also once the capital of the State of East Indonesia and Sulawesi. Makassar is the provincial capital of South Sulawesi with an area of 199,260 km2 and a population of nearly 1.4 million people. Actually, the city of Makassar has a big territory that the number of Higher Education Institutions in the city totals to 97 HEIs. This number does not include the HEIs in other districts close to Makassar like MAROS, PANGKEP, GOA and TAKALAR. Makassar City is also often called the city of education for all regions in eastern Indonesia as every Indonesian wants to finish and feel proud of having pursued his/her higher education in the city of Makassar. One form of education is through e-learning. Nowadays, e-learning has attracted the attention of people from various sectors, especially, those in the field of education utilizing distance learning.

At present, there are universities in Indonesia that implement Online Education like UI (Universitas Indonesia), BINUS University, UT (Universitas Terbuka) and PERBANAS Institute Jakarta. These are all universities found in the city capital of Indonesia. To date, no Higher Education Institution in Makassar City has ever implemented online education. This is the reason why the researcher has thought of conducting this research to assess the readiness of HEIs in Makassar City to implement online education and come up with a proposed framework to enhance the readiness of the HEIs to implement online education or e-learning educational learning platform.

Statement of the Problem

This study sought to assess the readiness and capability of some selected HEIs in Makassar City to adopt, embrace and implement Online Teaching and Learning. Specifically, it sought answers to the following:

1. What is the profile of the participating schools in terms of school category?
2. What is the profile of the participants in terms of work designation,

educational attainment, and Training on online education or e-learning?

3. What is the extent of readiness of the participating schools in terms of the teachers' level of expertise in online education as perceived by the faculty and school heads with respect to redesigning/ rethinking faculty roles, communication processes, technology issues, faculty role issues, time issues, research and partnerships?
4. Is there a significant difference in the extent of readiness of the participant schools in terms of the teachers' level of expertise in online education as perceived by the faculty and school heads with respect to the redesigning/rethinking faculty roles, communication processes, technology issues, faculty role issues, time issues, research and partnerships?
5. What is the e-learning readiness of the participant schools in terms of the following:
   5.1 The Changing Nature of Learning and e-learning;
   5.2 The Value of Instruction and Information;
   5.3 The Role of Change Management in Building a Durable e-learning Strategy;
   5.4 How Training Organizations Must Reinvent Themselves to Support e-learning;
   5.5 The e-learning Industry; and
   5.6 Organizational Commitment?
6. What is the extent of readiness of the participant schools in terms of the Ministry of Education's requirements in Online Education in terms of the following:
   6.1 Hardware requirements;
   6.2 Software requirements;
   6.3 ICT Infrastructure requirements (Learning Management System Framework);
   6.4 Internet Connectivity;
   6.5 Faculty e-Learning Training requirements; and
   6.6 Learning or Course Materials Package?
7. What are the problems and issues that need to be addressed by the participant schools to enhance their readiness for online teaching?
8. What proposed framework and action plan can be implemented to enhance the readiness of the participant schools for online teaching?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The descriptive research design was used since the study attempted to describe the multifaceted form of readiness of the HEIs in South Sulawesi, Makkasar City, Indonesia to adopt and embrace online education in their respective institutions.

Participants of the Study

The research participants of the study consisted of 2 groups, namely: faculty and school heads. Their views and assessments were used to present the extent of readiness of the participant schools to adopt, embrace and implement online learning or online education.

Instrumentation

Two standardized questionnaires were utilized to assess the readiness of the participant schools in this study to adopt, embrace and implement online teaching and learning in their respective institutions.

The 1st survey questionnaire titled Level of Expertise of Faculty in Online Education is composed of 20-item statements that seek to measure the teachers' expertise to engage in online education. This instrument measures seven (7) facets of expertise: Redesigning/ Rethinking Faculty Roles, Communication Processes, Technology Issues, Faculty, Role Issues, Time Issues, Research and Partnerships.

The 2nd survey questionnaire titled The e-Learning Readiness Survey version 1.0 by Rosembeng (2000) is composed of 20-item statements that seek to measure the extent of e-learning readiness of an organization or an academic institution The questions are grouped into seven areas of understanding: (1) the organization's business readiness; (2) the changing nature of learning and e-learning; (3) value of instructional and information design; (4) changes management; (5) reinventing the training organization; (6) the e-learning industry; and (7) organizational commitment. The questions provided in this

survey represent some of the most important strategic issues that organizations face when transitioning to e-learning.

Data Gathering Procedure

A Letter of Permission to conduct the study addressed to the Presidents or heads of the Higher Education Institutions identified as participant schools for this study was given and endorsed by the Dean of the Graduate School of St. Paul University Philippines. A brief description of the study was included in the letter given to the school heads together with copies of the research instruments that were used to gather the needed data. After getting the approval of the heads of the participant schools, the researcher personally administered the questionnaires in order that in the event there are questions arising from the use of the research instruments, the researcher will personally be able to address their questions or queries to ensure the smooth flow of data gathering from the participants. An interview with the heads of the 11 HEIs was also done to further enrich the data that were obtained from the use of the survey questionnaires. After gathering the needed data, they were collated electronically using MS Excel and were later treated using SPSS Version 17 to ensure accuracy of the computation of the statistical values and to facilitate the process of quantitative data analysis.

Data Analysis

The following statistical tools were used to analyze the data gathered in this study.

Frequency and Percentage. These were used to describe the profile of the participants.

Weighted Mean. This was used to present the weighted mean response of the participants on the items of the two sets of questionnaires that were administered.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Extent of Readiness of the participant *Schools in terms of the Teachers' Level of Expertise in Online Education as Assessed by the Faculty and School Heads*

Redesigning/Rethinking Faculty Roles

With regard to redesigning/rethinking faculty roles, both the administrator and teacher participants assessed the teachers' level of expertise in Online Education as "Proficient."

Communication Processes

In terms of communication processes, both the administrator and teacher participants assessed the teachers' level of expertise in Online Education as "Proficient."

Technology Issues

In terms of technology issues, the administrator participants assessed the teachers' level of expertise in Online Education as "Proficient" while the faculty participants assessed them as "Competent."

Faculty Role Issues

In terms of faculty role issues, the administrator participants assessed the teachers' level of expertise in Online Education as "Proficient" while the faculty participants assessed them as "Competent."

Time Issues

In terms of time issues, both the administrator and teacher participants assessed the teachers' level of expertise in Online Education as "Proficient."

Research

In terms of research, both the administrator and teacher participants assessed the teachers' level of expertise in Online Education as "Proficient."

Partnerships

In terms of partnerships, the administrator participants assessed the teachers' level of expertise in Online Education as "Proficient" while the faculty participants assessed them as "Competent."

Test for Significant Difference in the Assessment of the Faculty and School Heads in the Extent of Readiness of the Participant Schools in terms of the Teachers' Level of Expertise in Online Education

There is no significant difference in the assessment of the administrator and faculty participants on the extent of readiness of the participant schools in terms of the teachers' level of expertise in online education with respect to Redesigning/Rethinking Faculty Roles, Communication Processes, Technology Issues, Faculty Role Issues, Time Issues, Research and Partnerships.

E-learning Readiness of the Participant Schools as Assessed by the Faculty and School Heads

On the Changing Nature of Learning and e-Learning, both the administrator and teacher participants assessed the participant schools' e-learning readiness as having "Achieved Reasonable Success."

For Value of Instruction and Information, both the administrator and teacher participants assessed the participant schools' e-learning readiness as having "Achieved Reasonable Success."

Both the administrator and teacher participants assessed the participant schools' e-learning readiness as having "Achieved Reasonable Success" in terms of The Role of Change Management in Building a Durable E-Learning Strategy.

Both the administrator and teacher participants assessed the participant schools' e-learning readiness as having "Achieved Reasonable Success" in terms of How Training Organizations Must Reinvent Themselves to Support E-Learning.

In terms of the e-Learning Industry, both the administrator and teacher participants assessed the participant schools' e-learning readiness as having "Achieved Reasonable Success."

In terms of Organizational Commitment, Both the administrator and teacher participants assessed the participant schools' e-learning readiness as having "Achieved Reasonable Success."

Extent of Readiness of the Participant Schools in terms of the Ministry of Education's Requirements in Online Education

All HEIs covered in the study are capable of implementing e-learning as far as the minimum requirements of Indonesia's Ministry of Education with respect to hardware and e-learning packages and materials are concerned. However, the HEIs are not yet compliant with respect to Learning Management System (LMS) software; internet speed and ICT infrastructure are concerned.

Problems and Issues that need to be addressed by the Participant Schools to enhance their Readiness for Online Teaching

The following are the most urgent problems and issues shared by the faculty and administrator participants during the casual interview conducted by the researcher on what they think must be addressed in order to enhance their school's readiness to implement online or e-learning:

The faculty members have trainings in e-learning and have knowledge about online education but they were humble enough to admit that their training and acquired skills is inadequate.

They suggested that their Faculty Development Program must intensify their skills training along e-learning module development and implementation.

The HEIs have internet connections but the speed is slow. For Moodle, the most common Learning Management System platform, to run smoothly, it requires at least 4mbps of internet speed connection. The participants felt the need for their schools to increase their bandwidth to enable their schools to effectively implement e-learning.

In relation to the internet speed issue, the participants saw the problem of their existing hardware and software resources. They felt that their schools need to allot adequate funding and support to upgrade their existing infrastructure thus, the need to acquire for higher specifications of both hardware and software resources. This would redound to higher capital investments for the HEIs as the cost of computers with higher specifications and software requirements is expensive on the part of the school.

The participants saw the need too, to develop a curriculum and modules that highlight the use of e-learning among teachers and students. The modules ought to maximize the innate potentials of e-learning to enhance or improve both instruction and the learning process.

The eventual implementation of e-learning in their schools would initially result to higher costs of education on the part of the school and the students as recipients of e-learning instruction. Since the schools need to invest much on the e-learning infrastructure and platform, it is expected that student fees will increase as a result of the schools' capital investments on e-learning.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the foregoing findings, the following conclusions are reached: Assessing the Higher Education Institutions' readiness to implement e-learning in Indonesia is a critical factor to its eventual successful full-swing implementation. HEIs' compliance to the standards or requirements set by the Ministry of Education indeed will better prepare them as tertiary academic institutions to offer their faculty and students the tremendous benefits of online education or e-learning in the teaching-learning process.

The schools covered in this study are partially ready or prepared to implement e-learning or online education in their respective schools. The faculty members' high level of expertise in online education as assessed by the faculty and school heads as well as e-learning readiness of the participant schools means that the HEIs are indeed ready along these lines. The HEIs strong challenge lies primarily on their ability to address the minimum requirements set forth by the Ministry of Education with respect to software, learning management system infrastructure and internet speed requisites for them to enhance their readiness to implement the e-learning approach to teaching and learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following are the researcher's recommendations:

The results of this research must be disseminated in a Research Colloquium or Conference with the presence of heads of HEIs, faculty members as well as the officials of the Ministry of Education of Indonesia in order to make them aware of the challenges and prospects of implementing online education or e-learning in their respective schools.

For the heads of schools, to consider implementing the proposed action plan of this study to enhance their school's readiness to implement online or e-learning.

The HEIs covered in this study may conduct a study to investigate the students' readiness to use online or e-learning modality or approach in their tertiary education.

A study may be conducted to assess the effectiveness of the proposed framework and action plan in enhancing the school's readiness to implement online or e-learning once the concerned schools implement it.

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