

## **E-learning in Interpreting didactics: Students' attitudes and learning patterns, and instructor's challenges**

**Noraini Ibrahim-González, Universiti Sains, Malaysia**

### **ABSTRACT**

The use of digital and web-based technology in interpreting classrooms has been extensively adopted and researched in countries like Spain, Italy and Denmark since the beginning of the new millennium. Nonetheless, in Malaysia such a platform has only recently been introduced. Thus, along with Universiti Sains Malaysia's Accelerated Programme for Excellence (APEX) plan to transform nurturing and learning by raising student-centred learning, adopting alternative assessment, and promoting a technology-enhanced education system, e-learning was incorporated into interpreting courses taught in the Bachelor of Arts in Translation and Interpreting degree programme (BATI). It is the only Translation and Interpreting degree programme in Malaysia and was established in 1992. E-learning was first introduced in Semester 1, 2009/2010. This article discusses the building blocks of e-learning in the interpreting courses, the necessary improvisation that has been carried out in the teaching and learning methods due to the unavailability of a digital laboratory, the students' learning patterns with regards to e-learning, the students' attitudes towards e-learning, and the challenges faced by the instructor in deploying e-learning as part of teaching and learning in interpreting.

### **KEYWORDS**

Interpreting, interpreter education and training, e-learning, online learning, Universiti Sains Malaysia.

## **1. Introduction**

New technology has been extensively used in the didactics of interpreting courses in European countries since the beginning of the new millennium. Software applications such as *Interpr-IT*, *Interpretations*, and *Melissi Black Box*, have been developed to integrate technology into the interpreter training curriculum (Sandrelli and De Manuel Jerez 2007: 286-290). In addition to software there are other pedagogical tools such as the award-winning interactive multimedia CD-ROMs for self-learning in bilateral interpreting for German, Spanish, French and English developed by an interpreting research group at the Universidad de Granada (Ribas 2010: 52); state-of-the-art digital interpreting laboratories and virtual interpreting classrooms for example, at the Universitat Jaume I in Spain (Blasco Mayor and Jiménez Ivars 2007: 292-293) and Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Ribas 2010: 50); and an e-learning platform to support the didactics of interpreting for example, at the Copenhagen Business School (Gorm Hansen and Shlesinger 2007), Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań in Poland (Tymczyńska 2009), and Masaryk University, Brno in the Czech Republic (Fictumová 2005).

In 2008, Universiti Sains Malaysia was granted the Accelerated Programme for Excellence (APEX) status. Increasing learner autonomy among its students via a technology-enhanced education system is one of

the items on the university's transformation agenda (Abdul Razak and Mohamed 2008). Jumping on the bandwagon, the present writer (also the instructor) has deployed e-learning in the BATI's interpreting courses. This article aims to look into: (1) the e-learning building blocks, (2) the didactical improvisation that has been performed, (3) students' learning patterns and attitudes, and (4) the instructor's problems and constraints in implementing e-learning. Such a study is essential because

understanding users' attitudes toward learning technology, including instructors' and learners' attitudes, enables us to make learning more effective, efficient, and appealing. When applying a learning tool or system for learners, it is necessary to investigate both teachers' and learners' attitudes toward that tool or system. Essentially, understanding their perceptions toward learning environments is a crucial issue for enhancing teaching performance and learning effects (Liaw et al. 2007a: 1077).

## **2. Definitions of E-learning**

The term e-learning is derived from 'electronic learning'. E-learning can be defined as "the use of Internet technologies to deliver a broad array of solutions that enhance knowledge and performance" (Rosenberg 2001: 28), or simply, it's an online access to learning resources which can take place "anywhere and anytime" (Holmes and Gardner 2006: 14). However, there are other definitions that do not limit e-learning to online learning only but imply a complete learning solution that covers all educational activities performed by an individual or a group either online or offline, and synchronously or asynchronously using networked or standalone computers or telephonic electronic devices, in combination or in isolation (Chada and Nafay Kumail 2002: 31; Naidu 2006: 1). E-learning instruction is delivered using all kinds of electronic media such as the Internet, intranets, extranets, satellite broadcasts, audio/video tape, interactive TV, and CD-ROM (Govindasamy 2002: 288). Other common terms that are used for e-learning are online learning, virtual learning, distributed learning, networked or web-based learning, computer-assisted learning and tele-learning (Singh and Sharma, 2005: 2; Naidu 2006: 1).

## **3. E-learning considerations**

This section highlights several factors that need to be considered in implementing e-learning. E-learning is beneficial for learners, firstly, because its mode of delivery is via Internet technology, and it is available on-demand and flexible, since learners are able to access up-to-date information and use resources at a convenient time and place (Kruse 2004; Liaw et al. 2007b: 1909; Rosenberg 2001: 30; Naidu 2006: 4; Sun et al. 2008: 1196). Besides the "anywhere-and-anytime learning environment," e-learning is also self-pacing and interactive. Learners, fast and slow, can become active and self-regulatory learners because they are able to decide on the pace, time, and steps of their learning (Liaw et al. 2007b: 1909). This "learner autonomy environment" can minimise stress,

maximise satisfaction and promote confidence and learner autonomy among learners (Kruse 2004).

As for the instructors, they can use e-learning to make instant updates which enables them to deliver more timely, reliable and accurate information. Upgrading of the e-learning content can be done easily and quickly with immediate distribution of the new information or content to learners. Furthermore, e-learning ensures consistency and universality whereby each learner receives virtually the same content which is presented in virtually the same way (Rosenberg 2001: 30-31).

On the other hand, e-learning has its downsides. Since e-learning involves technology, there are technology issues as organisations deploying e-learning have to make a large up-front investment on infrastructure that is capable of supporting e-learning, for example, a stable Internet connection, including support and maintenance as well as appropriate and adequate training for staff. If organisations fail to give serious consideration to this factor, e-learning users may face unpleasant experiences which may demotivate them. Thus, e-learning will fail (Kruse 2004; Naidu 2006: 3, 67). Course design and development require field experts, content developers, and learning and instructional design experts to work in a team. However, this team-approach creates a considerable amount of work and trained staff which can be costly to the organisation (Naidu 2006: 67-68).

According to Govindasamy (2002: 288-289), there is a lack of guidelines on "how to design, develop, deliver, and manage pedagogically sound e-learning materials." He highlights the fact that some features and tools of Learning Management Systems are not being utilised, are under utilised or even used against pedagogical principles which can prevent effective learning. Tymczyńska (2009: 158) mentions that the advantages of online resources "are often offset by inactive or broken links. Internet sites change addresses, and sites may be temporarily or permanently unreachable." Links must be checked and updated regularly. Therefore, "the amount of time and effort necessary to research, upload and monitor a given multimedia task or complete an activity online should be considered" (Tymczyńska 2009: 158).

E-learning instructors are responsible for developing learning materials that are coherent, structured, technically well-designed, as well as online practices or self-tests for students including online collaboration among learners. This requires instructors to have the knowledge of how to stimulate students' intrinsic or extrinsic motivation (Paechter et al. 2010: 228). This indicates that instructors who are involved in e-learning are

those who enjoy learning, who understand the theories of learning, who are good communicators, who are analytical and have good problem-solving skills, who know about computers and who are also, among so many other

things, creative. These people, who are in fact pretty similar to *Superman* and *Wonderwoman*, are *instructional technologists* (Blasco Mayor and Jiménez Ivars 2007, 295).

Needless to say, the role of the instructors in an e-learning environment becomes more complex and challenging because it is the instructors who design, implement and manage the e-learning system (Tymczyńska 2009: 151). A study by Sun et al. (2008: 1196) demonstrates that e-learning instructors' attitudes positively affect student satisfaction. Committed and enthusiastic e-learning instructors with active and positive attitudes motivate students to a greater degree. For this reason, effective e-learning requires instructors to acquire new skills such as e-moderation and de-skilling, that is, shaking off old teaching habits (Naidu 2006: 61).

One factor of e-learning that is still debatable is the social interaction among learners. On one hand, experts claim e-learning "reduces social and cultural interaction among learners" (Kruse 2004) because of the characteristics of a virtual learning environment. On the other hand, e-learning "builds community—learners come together to share knowledge and insight" (Rosenberg 2001: 31). This is due to the fact that the anywhere-and-anytime learning environment allows learners and instructors to discuss information and communicate effectively by posting messages which are "stored for others to view, comment on, and review" at a time convenient to them (Naidu 2006: 5, 37).

The bottom line is that e-learning on its own does not promise effective learning and teaching. The above factors must be seriously considered to make sure that e-learning users are able to make the most of it.

#### **4. Designing effective e-learning**

Liaw et al. (2007a: 1077-1079) suggest four factors to be considered when designing effective e-learning environments:

##### **1. Multimedia instruction.**

Multimedia instruction utilises materials in verbal form such as on-screen text or narration, pictorial form which includes static materials such as photos or illustrations, and dynamic materials such as video or animation (Mayer and Moreno 2002: 87). Liaw (2004: 313) adds that this allows learners' development of complex cognitive skills; to understand conceptual complexity, to be able to utilise acquired concepts for reasoning and interference, and to have the flexibility of applying conceptual knowledge to new situations. Tymczyńska (2009: 157) further suggests the use of authentic resources in interpreting courses so that learners "will be able to see a tangible connection with the real interpreting world."

## 2. Autonomous learning.

Liaw et al. (2007a: 1078) mention that learners should have “more opportunities for self-directed learning.” According to Little (2003), autonomous learners “understand the purpose of their learning programme, explicitly accept responsibility for their learning, share in the setting of learning goals, take initiatives in planning and executing learning activities, and regularly review their learning and evaluate its effectiveness.” With regard to interpreting courses, Tymczyńska (2009: 157) suggests “a high degree of student involvement.”

## 3. Instructor-led interaction

Instructors’ and learners’ asynchronous or synchronous communications should be further enhanced by e-learning. In asynchronous mode, instructors and learners are logged online at different times and may be in different places. They communicate with each other by leaving posts or comments which will be read or replied at a time convenient to them. In synchronous mode, users are logged online at the same time and despite physical locations, they are able to react to posts or comments immediately upon receiving them (Naidu 2006: 36). The implementation of e-learning does not reduce the importance of an instructor: as a matter of fact “students experience the instructor’s support and expertise as especially important for the acquisition of knowledge skills and competences and for course satisfaction” (Paechter et al. 2010: 228).

## 4. Learning effectiveness.

E-learning can improve learning effectiveness performance through its tools and creative teaching approaches by the instructors. However, the instructor is not obliged to use each and every feature of the Learning Management System, because the most important criterion in learning is knowledge transfer. In interpreting courses, materials must be appropriate and relevant to the student and context characteristics (Tymczyńska 2009: 157).

Adding to the list above, another factor that is equally important with regard to interpreting instruction is the sense of achievement among users. It is important to consider the degree of satisfaction in learners and instructors. Students should feel satisfied with their learning outcome after completing a given task and instructors should be satisfied with “the quality, appropriateness and relevance of online resources on a specific topic in relation to the time and effort needed to integrate it with the syllabus” (Tymczyńska 2009: 157-158).

## 5. E-learning building blocks

Very much related to the design of e-learning are its building blocks. E-learning building blocks “represent the ways in which information can be presented to the learner in order to increase the likelihood that learning will occur... represent a way of thinking about how to construct e-learning experiences” (Israelite and Dunn 2003: 259).

Israelite and Dunn (2003: 258-259) propose four basic elements of building blocks that can be combined in various ways in order to achieve the intended objectives. They are:

1. *presentation*, which is made up of information about the learning context, content, instructions and other information that the instructors want to convey directly to the learners.
2. *elicitation*, i.e. asking learners to respond, which demonstrates their understanding of content, or to act according to the stimuli shown on the screen. Scores or results are not tracked or stored because this block is developmental in nature.
3. *evaluation*, which measures the mastery level of learners with regard to the relevant content. Here, scores or results are stored to enable further reference.
4. *collaboration*, which allows asynchronous interaction between instructor and learners, as well as among learners themselves.

Although instructors cannot be certain that learning occurs, they can provide learning support which is designed to “address all of the various types of support required to provide a meaningful and effective learning experience” (Israelite and Dunn 2003: 258).

## 6. The didactics of interpreting courses at USM prior to e-learning

There are three interpreting courses compulsory for all BATI students: (1) a three-unit sight translation in semester 4, (2) a four-unit consecutive interpreting of technical and non-technical texts in semester 5, and (3) a four-unit simultaneous interpreting of technical and non-technical texts in semester 6 (final semester). Before the introduction of digital technology into these courses, each student was required to attend a two-hour lecture, a one-to-two-hour tutorial and a two-hour recording session every week for 14 weeks in one academic semester. The instructor had to be present in all these sessions which converted the instructor's teaching hours to an exhausting 20 hours per week; a 1-2 hour tutorial for 5-6 groups and 2-3 sessions of a two hour recording. This shows that interpreting course instruction was based on instructor-centred learning. Furthermore, the audio visual laboratory used by students for the recording sessions was an analogue system (Ibrahim-González 2010: 111). In a study conducted at one of the oldest interpreter training

institutions in Europe, the Copenhagen Business School, Gorm Hansen and Shlesinger (2007: 99) have reported that

Motivation in class was difficult to sustain, due to stress, despite the instructors' efforts to put students' minds at ease. Among the many factors that seemed to compound the intimidation effect was the heavy reliance on audiotapes, especially for self-study in the language lab, which students tend to dislike. Despite repeated coaxing by their teachers, most of them avoided using the tapes in independent practice sessions or taking the audio materials home for additional practice.

Based on this important finding, the shift from analogue to digital and web-based technologies in the instruction of interpreting courses at Universiti Sains Malaysia was deemed necessary. Furthermore, this shift also aided the transition from instructor-centred learning to student-centred learning and the introduction of blended-learning where conventional classroom instruction (lectures and tutorials) and e-learning (online learning activities replacing the weekly recording sessions in the laboratory) are combined. This provides opportunity for the students to gain more learner autonomy; in line with USM's APEX transformation.

## **7. The integration of Moodle in interpreting courses**

Universiti Sains Malaysia has opted for Moodle which is a Course Management System (CMS), also known as a Learning Management System (LMS) or a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). It is a free, open-source online course management system. The acronym MOODLE stands for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment. It contains numerous customisable activities such as assignments, forum, glossary, quiz, and Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM). Instructors can add in new activities and manage the course quite easily due to its drag-and-drop feature. Instructors can add new blocks, models and activities well in advance and hide them from students' view. This gives instructors more flexibility in managing the content and at the same time students will not be overwhelmed with too much information at one time. Moodle resources are reusable; content can be moved from one course to another if necessary and improvements can be made continuously. Another key benefit of Moodle is its ability to track the learning activities of the students (Rice, 2006). E-learning for interpreting courses using Moodle was first developed for BATI programme in Semester 1, 2009/2010.

## **8. The e-learning building blocks for interpreting e-learning**

The e-learning for interpreting contains several blocks which are:

1. Introduction; containing instructor's contact details, course synopsis and course outline.

2. Current course updates; where students are kept informed of current notices, instructions, and information. This eases viewing as they do not need to scroll down to other blocks for new course updates.
3. Lecture; consisting of weekly lecture topics and lecture notes prepared in powerpoint and pdf formats, as well as relevant reading materials.
4. Online activities; where activities such as voice practice, interpreting exercises, and quizzes such as listening exercises are placed.
5. Group project; where students share and exchange information and views among themselves and the instructor regarding their group projects.
6. Glossary; where students are able to upload and share new words or phrases in both A and B languages.
7. Links; consisting of external links to online resources such as English as a Foreign Language (EFL), online newspapers, BBC Learning English and VOA Special English, and Translation and Interpreting online journals.

All of the activities mentioned above are performed asynchronously, including instructor-student and student-student communications via e-mail. Synchronous activities such as online chats are not used. All these building blocks fulfill the four basic elements of e-learning building blocks proposed by Israelite and Dunn (2003, 258-259). The introduction, lecture, and links blocks have the presentation element; the current course update block consists of both presentation and elicitation elements; the online activities block contains the evaluation and collaboration elements; and the group project as well as the glossary blocks comprise the collaboration element.

## **9. The didactical improvisation**

Since interpreting courses require students to record their oral interpretation, the biggest challenge in introducing digital technology in the courses is the nonexistence of a digital laboratory. However, this is facilitated by the fact that all students own laptops or personal computers. Weekly assignments with specific instructions are uploaded onto the USM E-learning portal. Students download the weekly assignments from the portal and carry out their own recording activity anytime-anywhere, using headphones, microphones and a freeware audio recording application. The preparation time is reduced from several days to several hours as they progress. In 2009, due to the limited capacity and instability of the e-learning server, students' digital audio recordings in mp3 format were sent to the instructor's e-mail account. However, with the upgrading of USM internet bandwidth speed in October 2010, students have been able to submit their digital recordings directly to the USM e-learning portal. One interesting feature of online submission of assignments is that the instructor can listen to the audio files without downloading them. This eases storage and access as well as finding a particular student's



assignments. Other plus features of digitally recorded material are that “they can be stored indefinitely, and can easily be retrieved for research” (Blasco Mayor and Jiménez Ivars 2007: 293).

## **10. Methods**

In order to find out students’ learning patterns and attitudes towards e-learning, three short questionnaires were designed and administered separately to 88 BATI students.

The first questionnaire eliciting students’ learning patterns was designed using close-ended style. Questions consisted of access frequency, length of access, time of access, regular internet access point, and social network community. Out of the 88 questionnaires, 75 were returned (85.2 % response rate). The responses were then analysed quantitatively using descriptive statistics, displaying the frequency distribution using percentage.

With regard to students’ attitudes towards the integration of e-learning into the courses, an open-ended question style was chosen so that students were not limited to choosing a rigid set of answers. The questionnaire comprised three questions eliciting feedback from students about the perceived advantages and disadvantages of e-learning, and the technology shift from analogue to digital in the interpreting courses. Out of the 88 questionnaires, 79 of them were returned giving an 89.8% response rate. The responses were then grouped into different categories to see or find out their attitudes towards e-learning and the shift to digital technology.

## **11. Findings and Discussion**

### **11.1 Students’ learning patterns**

In order to find out the students’ learning pattern with the integration of e-learning in the interpreting courses, these aspects have been studied: (1) average frequency of access to e-learning, (2) time of access, (3) average length of access, (4) regular Internet access point, and (5) other social network communities that they are registered with and their average access frequency to the site.

Results show that 34.7% of the students access the interpreting e-learning portal every other day, 32% access it once a week and 24% access it once a day. This demonstrates that the majority of the students are active and responsible learners.

With regard to the time of access, 32.9% of the students log on at the 9 p.m. to 12 midnight range, and 21.9% of them log on at the 12 midnight to 3 a.m. range. This shows that with the introduction of e-learning in

interpreting courses, learning is done at a pace, time, and place convenient to the students. Moreover, students also achieve learner autonomy as defined by Little (2003), they are self-directed (Liaw et al. 2007a: 1068) and there is a high student involvement in the course (Tymczyńska 2009: 157).

As for the length of access, 46.7% spend less than an hour, 33.3% spend one to two hours, and 10.7% spend two to three hours on e-learning. The variation in the amount of time spent by students on e-learning was due to the limitations and instability of the Internet connection at the time when this study was conducted. Students could attempt most of the exercises offline by downloading the relevant files though others prefer to do the exercises online.

The results also show that most students log on to e-learning at night (54.8%) which indicates that asynchronous learning is more popular among BATI students.

When asked about their regular internet point, especially for submission of assignments, 62.7% use USM hotspot, 28% use the Internet connection at home, 6.7% use wireless broadband. Other points of access are the USM library, internet cafes and restaurants. This result shows that they depend heavily on the Internet infrastructure provided by the university. This supports the fact that the organisations deploying e-learning must make sure that they provide and are able to provide adequate technology infrastructure to ensure the success of e-learning (Kruse 2004; Naidu 2006: 6, 67).

As for the social network community, 97.3% report that they are registered with Facebook and 45.3% of them access this site several times a day while 25.3% access it once a day. This shows that no user "ramp-up" time is necessary because students are already familiar and at ease with browser technology. Thus, learning to access e-learning is a non-issue (Rosenberg 2001: 30), meaning they do not need additional training on how to navigate through e-learning.

## **11.2 Students' attitudes towards e-learning and technology shift**

With regard to students' attitudes towards e-learning, all respondents (100%) provide responses for perceived advantages and only 39.5% provide responses for perceived disadvantages which indirectly shows a high acceptance level of e-learning among students for interpreting courses.

There are 186 responses for perceived advantages of e-learning which have been grouped into five categories. The results show that the primary advantage of introducing e-learning in interpreting courses is its flexibility because it can be accessed from anywhere and at any time. All course

information and latest updates are available round-the-clock which means that students can personally check for any updates and do not need to depend on their friends or lecturers (52.2%). Sun et al. (2008) obtained similar result with regard to flexibility and e-learning satisfaction among students.

The second feature of e-learning which is perceived as an advantage for interpreting is that lecture notes, reading materials, weekly assignments and exercises with very clear instructions, and other information can be viewed and downloaded at any time. Because learning materials are consistently available, it decreases search time because students can download them again as and when the need arises. They also report that with e-learning, the need for paper printing is greatly reduced and this saves money (18.8%).

Compared to analogue recording sessions in the laboratory, students find that digital recording allows them to use current technology and eliminating the use of cassette tapes saves them money. They also mentioned that nowadays it can be difficult to purchase cassette tapes.

E-learning provides them with more privacy as students can choose to work at their own pace and more preparation time is available. They also highlight better time management because they are able to work smoothly and efficiently (14.5%). Preparation time is important for them because they are non-interpreting students in a non-interpreting environment. This means students do not become professional interpreters upon graduation (Ibrahim-González 2010: 116). In this environment, students should only be exposed to general practices of interpreting, its fundamental characteristics such as the market and work processes, and the basic interpreting principles and strategy. Professional aspects and assimilation of methodological principles of interpreting should only be taught at a postgraduate level (Jiménez Ivars et al. 2003: 196). Thus, the opportunity to work at their own pace with ample preparation time to acquire the basic interpreting principles and strategy is deemed important in nurturing their interests in interpreting.

According to the students, the interactivity of e-learning facilitates communication with lecturers and friends via the forum and e-mail. Besides better communication, e-learning also promotes knowledge sharing via the glossary building activity (9.7%). They can ask questions or ask for explanations by posting them on e-learning or sending an e-mail at the moment the questions arise, and the instructor or friends are able to view and reply to the posts immediately when they log on. Students no longer have to wait for classroom hours to have their questions answered. Replies or solutions to problems posted on the forum can also be shared with other students. This result supports Rosenberg's community building via e-learning (2001: 31).

Finally, students report that the e-learning site is loaded with information, there are many exercises available, assignments can be viewed easily and instructions are very clear. All these help them with learning (4.8%). This result is in line with learning effectiveness as posited by Liaw et al. (2007a: 1079).

There are 57 responses regarding the perceived disadvantages of e-learning which have been grouped into five categories. The most problematic aspect of e-learning in interpreting is instability and limited Internet connectivity (80.9%). This is one of the fundamental characteristics of e-learning stated by Rosenberg (2001: 28), i.e. e-learning is delivered using the standard internet technology and computers. Stable Internet connectivity is essential as most students (62.7% of the respondents) depend on the USM wireless network system. Another perceived disadvantage of e-learning is that, unlike Facebook, which is linked to the students' private e-mail accounts, Moodle does not have the facility to send notifications whenever a new update is made, thus students must visit the portal daily (10.53%). Students also report technical problems such as computer breakdown (7.02%) as an obstacle to e-learning. Finally, students mention that scrolling up and down the page during the online exercises is troublesome (1.75%).

As for the shift from analogue recording sessions in the laboratory to digital anytime-anywhere recording activity, 100% of the respondents prefer the latter. They further add that when they had to use cassette tapes to record their interpreting assignments, they did not (and did not want to) listen to their recordings because they were not able to correct or improve their output due to the limitations of the analogue system. Even if they did, they could not because cassette players are already obsolete. This shows that Gorm Hansen and Shlesinger's finding (2007: 99) mentioned earlier is not an isolated case. However, as a learner autonomy element in digital recordings, students mention that they are able to listen to their recordings, and make the necessary effort to improve their output before submitting them to the instructor. Nevertheless, the unavailability of a digital laboratory at the students' disposal may cause problems for students who do not own computers (though this is not the case for BATI students) because they may need to go to the library or internet cafes (which may not be a conducive environment for recording their interpretations) or they may have to borrow their friend's computer. This unsatisfactory experience may impede or complicate the whole learning process instead of facilitating it, as emphasised by Govindasamy 2002: 289; Kruse 2004; Naidu 2006: 67).

Universiti Sains Malaysia also practices a standardised end-of-semester course evaluation where students are given an opportunity to evaluate each of the courses they have taken for a particular semester using standard questionnaires designed by the university. In one of the questions, students are asked to rate the quality of teaching. For

interpreting courses in this study (sight translation and simultaneous interpreting for semester 1, 2009/2010), 67 questionnaires were returned (76.1% response rate). The analysis shows that 73.1% of students agree that the teaching quality for these two courses is excellent, 25.4% say the quality is good, and 1.5% rate the teaching quality as mediocre. This shows a high satisfaction level among students (98.5%) in terms of the teaching quality of the interpreting courses. They associate this high satisfaction with the new didactical method; the technological shift and the integration of e-learning. This is highly related to what Tymczyńska (2009: 158) calls "sense of achievement" among learners and instructors.

## **12. Instructor's challenges**

The first main challenge faced by the instructor is the distraction due to technology. Because of the limited internet capability, the design and development of learning objects, especially multimedia materials, goes through several editing processes before they can be finally uploaded onto the portal for students' use. For instance, multimedia materials have to be edited in terms of their file size because the USM e-learning server is incapable of supporting large files. Because these are interpreting courses, authentic materials are best delivered in high quality audio and video formats but this poses a serious problem due to the Internet limitation. Nevertheless, as suggested by Tymczyńska (2009: 157), the effectiveness of the learning process is far more important than creating a cutting-edge website, so only useful and relevant features of Moodle are used in interpreting e-learning. Secondly, the unavailability of a development team and the limited or lack of training and guidelines on the technical side of e-learning also pose a problem for the instructor.

Thirdly, as a 'self-trained Moodler,' the workload of a "materials creator, technical trouble-shooter, and classroom teacher" (Warschauer et al. 2002: 77) was overwhelming. A lot of time and effort are spent not only on preparing classroom materials and designing the e-learning contents, but also on regularly checking and updating the contents and links including responding to students' questions and comments. The failure to meet these demands may show instructor's incompetence in managing the course effectively. This can have adverse effects on students' learning enthusiasm and motivation as well as their overall satisfaction with the course. Thus, in addition to all the responsibilities mentioned earlier, an e-learning instructor must de-skill, unlearn and relearn by acquiring new skills such as self-taught e-moderation.

Nonetheless, due to the 'one-woman' show, an effective communication channel between the instructor and students is definitely of paramount importance in continuously evaluating and improving the teaching and learning materials and learning outcomes. The students have been very helpful in providing feedback so that improvements can be made. Due to

the novelty of this project, many aspects such as content, delivery and design are open to future changes and modifications.

### **13. Improvements to interpreting e-learning**

Based on the findings above, several improvements have been carried out in the consecutive interpreting course of semester 1, 2010/2011. The improvements are:

1. Quizzes using SCORM.  
Hot Potato software makes it possible for the instructor to develop customised listening exercises for the students to perform self-assessment on listening and comprehension skills.
2. Peer-assessment and feedback.  
The shift from analogue to digital technology opens up the path to the introduction of alternative assessment in the course. In addition to self and tutor assessment and feedback, students are divided into smaller groups and exchange their audio recordings via e-mail. Recordings are assessed by other group members. Group members post their constructive comments and feedback on the forum created by the instructor for the respective group.
3. Assignment submission in Moodle.  
With the recent upgrading of internet bandwidth, assignments can be submitted to the e-learning portal using the assignment feature in Moodle. This is better than sending them to the e-mail account as was done previously because assignments can be arranged and retrieved in a more systematic manner. However, uploading large audio files and video files is still problematic.
4. Online grading and feedback.  
Moodle's assignment activity facilitates systematic online grading and individual feedback to students.
5. Submission and receipt of assignments.  
Previously, automatic notification of receipt had to be set up in the e-mail account so that students would be notified that their assignment files were safely submitted. Such a feature is unnecessary when uploading files onto the USM e-learning server because students are able to see if their files have been uploaded successfully.
6. Authentic materials on DVD.  
To overcome the problem of limited internet capability, authentic materials in high quality audio and video formats are provided to students in DVD format. They receive detailed instructions via the e-learning portal.

7. Alternative mode of communication.

Besides USM e-learning and e-mail communications, a Facebook account has also been created. This is especially helpful when connection to USM e-learning is not available due to maintenance or upgrading work.

8. Customised evaluation. In addition to the university's standard course evaluation form, a customised questionnaire has also been designed to evaluate the effectiveness of interpreting didactics so that further improvements can be made. This is especially important to ensure continuous efficacy of the teaching and learning processes.

## **14. Conclusions**

From the above findings and discussion, it can be deduced that students have adopted, adapted and integrated e-learning into their learning patterns without much difficulty due to the flexibility and autonomous learning characteristics of e-learning. E-learning that is carried out effectively plays an important part in the overall learners' satisfaction with the course. It can be inferred that the instructor's role is not reduced with e-learning but is enhanced. The findings also show that the students and the instructor depend on each other's support in the acquisition of skills and knowledge for overall learning and teaching efficacy and satisfaction. However, factors such as the provision of sufficient training in all areas related to e-learning, the availability of adequate and efficient technology infrastructure, the possibility of teamwork in terms of subject matter and technology, as well as the augmented role, responsibility and workload of an e-instructor must be taken into serious consideration to make sure that motivation to deploy e-learning remains high.

E-learning is definitely a promising pedagogical tool in the didactics of interpreting, in combination with classroom instruction. It has indeed been a most useful and rewarding experience for students and instructor, especially in honing students' basic skills and knowledge needed for interpreting, and in nurturing their interest in the profession.

### **Note:**

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## **Biography**

Noraini Ibrahim-González is a Senior Lecturer in Interpreting at the Section of Malay Language, Translation and Interpreting of the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia. She received her doctorate degree from the Universidad de Granada, Spain in December 2008. She is also a freelance Malay/English-Spanish court interpreter. Her research interests are conference and public-service interpreting, interpreter training and education, blended learning, and Spanish language.

Contact: noni@usm.my; [noni\\_is@yahoo.com](mailto:noni_is@yahoo.com)

