Effective design of e-learning makes a difference: Expert

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KOTA KINABALU: One of the biggest challenges educators in higher education face in teaching online courses is engaging students through virtual learning environments, said an award-winning educator.

Education Ministry's Higher Education Department (Academic Excellence) Director, Prof Dr Wan Zuhainis Saad, said effective design of online learning spaces can facilitate constructivist pedagogy and student engagement.

She said this on the topic of Inspiring Transformative Educators at the University Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Gallery here on Friday.

"How do you (educators) actually engage with your students, attract them and interact in that virtual learning environment like they are accessing their Facebook in every second?

"Online education changes all components of teaching and learning in higher education. It is very challenging but I think it is important for us, educators to brainstorm this because student engagement is important for a high quality learning experience," she said.

Zuhainis posing with UMS lecturers and staff.

She said the mode of delivery is an important consideration when designing learning activities that will support students to develop the skills, knowledge and understandings required to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Educators need to select the most appropriate mode of delivery for each activity based on what will best support student development of the skills, knowledge and understandings students are expected to achieve, she said.

"In the Wiley Faculty Fellows, it demands for engaging experiences for students which means that expectation that learning will be entertaining, immersive, purpose-driven and experiential.

"The effective educators choose strong activities, tasks, and assignments that sparks students' interests, and not necessarily straight from the slides. Active learning requires students to participate in class, as opposed to sitting and listening quietly.

"For example, you have 99 slides to present in your lecture, do you think students will be able to understand and absorb that many slides? You need to challenge the student's thinking, keeping them connected throughout the class as well as helping them when they need it," she said.

Zuhainis said teaching with technology is central in higher education to enhance learning.

She said with technology, one can expect increased efficiency and effectiveness on both the part of teachers and students.

"According to John Dewey, if we teach today's students as we taught yesterday, we rob them of tomorrow, meaning that technology is central in today's world and its integration into the education process has great promise for student learning," she said.