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Paper Title  Quality ELT in Distance Learning Programmes: A Malaysian Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Recent developments in technology-driven education have shifted the focus from teacher/classroom-directed learning to self-paced and self-directed learning. Tertiary-level distance learning programmes now utilize and provide greater access to information that is delivered online or through distance learning means, thus reducing time spent on face-to-face interaction. However, these developments pose several challenges for ELT professionals, especially in relation to effective teaching and learning. This paper presents the findings of related research on ELT in a distance learning programme in the Malaysian context. The paper highlights several issues that are being addressed with respect to assuring quality in distance learning programmes.
QUALITY ELT IN DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMMES
A MALAYSIAN CASE STUDY

Paper presented at the First Asia TEFL International Conference
Busan, South Korea
7-9 November 2003
Kuldip Kaur

OPEN UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITI TERBUKA
MALAYSIA

Scenario
- Open University Malaysia
  - Set up in 2000
  - 13,000 students
  - 6 Undergraduate programmes
  - 3 Graduate programmes
Programmes in Focus

- Malaysian University English Test Preparatory Course
- 715 students; 48 tutors in 16 centres
- B.Ed. TESL
- 4,000 students; 200 tutors in 32 centres

Maintaining Quality

Dealing with people in the most agreeable of environments with the most enlightened of managements is still the most challenging of tasks.

Key Training Areas

- Communication Skills
- Course management
- Assessment techniques
- Information Skills
- Online tutoring & LMS skills
- Academic counselling skills
- Colleague and other academic activity
- Face to Face tutoring skills

Learning Programmes

Quality in Distance
Thoughtful Futures:

A thoughtful learning environment

Key Learning Areas

- Time management skills
- Managing assignments
- Information skills
- Online tutoring and the LMS
- Learning and interaction during face to face sessions
- Examinations and assessment

Focused on learner potential
Analysis and evaluation
Encourage discussion, query
Academic counselling
Academic preparedness

Multi-technique teaching
Seeing or hearing what is actually done to execute cognitive operations:

- Teacher as a learner in the English language classroom
- Adult-learning focused on improving power of observation
- Active learning communities

Guidance and support of students' initial efforts until they can perform tasks on their own initiative and in a self-directed way:

**Instructional Scaffolding:**
- tailor-made print materials
- online interaction and tutorial support
- sub-goaling: tutorial questions
- increasing learner ownership
**Tutor Understanding**

- With OUM students I find that they have a problem with comprehension. Sometimes they don't understand the module. I read and do mind maps for them. I give them the handouts with the mind maps or charts and then they get the big picture, how things are connected to one another. I don't expect everything to change with this, but at least it helps.

- Adult learners also need a lot of guidance. A lot of tutors think they can rehash what is in the module but I think the students fall asleep. I give them guidance and I get them involved and I think they are able to follow the lesson.

  Sukesh, 22 years' ELT experience

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**Doing what helps**

*My tutor gave me lots of exercises on paper and for speaking. When we want to do a writing exercise, she will discuss and share a lot of ideas on the topic.*

Maziah, 23, Bachelor of Management
Tutor Involvement

- I try to lessen the distance between student and teacher. You are dealing with adults and they want to talk to you. I tell them stories. I tell them about what I did what my father did. Sometimes they like to have a tap on the shoulder.

- I try to have handouts—things they can see; charts; I do a lot of poster work. This gets them all involved. My students call what I carry a "cute kit" which has paper, pencils, scissors...I take newspapers to class. Even the older students like posters.

Sukesh, 22 years' ELT experience

Socio-emotional Perspective

The basic thing about them is that they are adults and they are thinkers. They come in very nervous as they have academic material which they have not been in touch with for a long time. One thing I have to do is to boost their confidence. They come in thinking they are not going to be able to do it. They feel shy of the fact that they are experienced in their jobs but have to bring up a silly small question. I as a tutor think of the weak students in my adolescent class and I notice adult students also have the same problems. Sometimes I begin with the "stupid" question and then they also ask questions.

Anna Cherubin, 25 years' ELT experience
I prefer to be corrected...

- Whenever we do wrong in speaking, the tutor will correct us immediately.

- I feel I improved by taking the MUET class. The tutor gave us a lot of exercises. She will ask us to sit and be in groups and we have group speaking and talk in front of her. She will give us a topic and she will ask us to talk on that. For listening lessons she brought a lot of tapes that helped us a lot.

- She is very friendly and I don’t feel afraid. We can very freely ask her what we want. She will give us homework and immediately she will correct it and give it to us and tell us what is wrong.

Parames, 43, Bachelor of Management

Understanding the Learner

- They also don’t have much time. You have to find the right methodology.

- I provide all the necessary things. I give the answers in a sealed envelope. Those who have time try the exercises first then open the envelope for answers. Those who don’t have time, learn from the answers.

- During the holidays, I give them work without the answers. Then I send them the answers in the mail.

Anna Cherubin, 25 years’ ELT experience.
Learning English

- She corrected all my grammar mistakes. Especially on the writing. When I write I make a lot of mistakes. She helped me with public speaking. She correct me when I'm not quite sure.

- She gave me confidence in public speaking. She increased my confidence.

- We know English but our weakness is in grammar and spelling. And how to create a correct sentence in proper English. Sometimes we sound like Malay-English or Singapore-English or it just doesn't sound English. The tutors correct it immediately and so we learn from there.

- Like "I'm too painful lah" but it should be "I'm in pain."

Liza, 39, Bachelor of Management

Performance Outcomes
Quality ELT

All can learn; all can drink of this lake. It is given to few to add to the store of knowledge, to strike new springs of thought, or to shape new forms of beauty...the future of the world lies in the hands of those who are able to carry the interpretation of nature a step further than their predecessors; so certain is it that the highest function of a university is to seek out those men, cherish them, and give their ability to serve their kind full play.

Thomas Henry Huxley. (1825-1895)
An Address on University Education

Thank you.
Appendices A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Num.</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Rates</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular HEI</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCRTVU</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Enrollment Number & Rates of Employed in MDE (thousand persons, %)
## Scale

### Basic Statistics Of MDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pilot Univ.</th>
<th>Enrolled Student</th>
<th>Learning Center</th>
<th>Learning Center of PSS</th>
<th>New Added MCW*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>32,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>185,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>456,000</td>
<td>966</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>675,000</td>
<td>2,012</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3,217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>949,792</td>
<td>2,347</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3,776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>2,301,305</td>
<td>2,347</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>10,045</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*PSS: Public Service System  
**MCW: Multimedia Courseware

## Speed Increases Continuously

- The size of MDE in China is expanded continuously.

- Percentage of students enrolled in DE among all universities in 2003: 83%

- Percentage of students of DE among all universities: 90%

This shows the speed of MDE doesn't weaken.
Graduates

The Statistic Of MDE Graduates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>32641</td>
<td>153708</td>
<td>186888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Colleges</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>1305</td>
<td>19422</td>
<td>21266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCRTVU</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31336</td>
<td>134286</td>
<td>165622</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- By now, there are nearly 1.9 M students graduated from about 27 Universities including Beijing University, Hunan University, Central China Technology University, Zhejiang University and CCRTVU etc.. The number of CCRTVU students upgrading from junior college to university is up to 165 thousand in the academic year of 2002 and 2003.

Subject

- All the DEUs have 10 types of subjects, 153 specialty and 18 thousand courses, including engineering, management, medicine, literature, sciences, agriculture, economics, education, law and philosophy, which cover senior vocational students and part of graduated students.

- Because of the limitation of experiment condition of scientist research, graduated students of MDE are few, and have great difficulty to get Master Degree.
Teaching Management Troops

From the stat. of 2003:

- 3,360,000 staffs are engaged in the Modern Distance Educational Work of Experimental Unit, 190,000 of them work in campuses of experimental colleges, and 3,170,000 of them work in Learning Centres and public service systems outside the pilot university.

- 1,710,000 teachers work for Modern Distance Education, in which there are 150,000 full-time teachers and 1,560,000 part-time teacher.

Learning Centers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of learning center</td>
<td>966</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2393</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 65% others
- 32% regular, adult and private HEIs and CRTVU
- 3% no-educational institute

Percentage of different types of learning centers in 2003
Source of fund and studding model

Pilot universities total invested 1845 million RMB, among which CRTVU total invested 214.6 million RMB up to the end of 2003.
Hardware Set & Resources Developed

As for hardware environment construction, about 48% pilot HEI utilized satellite transmission system, and 57% pilot HEI equipped with video conference system.

By the end of 2002, there were 135 network platforms in 63 pilot HEI, among which 36% were developed by pilot HEI, and 24% were developed by cooperation between pilot HEI and organization outside school, and 22% were purchased from organization, others were unknown type.

By the end of 2003, about 12393 course wares were developed, including online courseware(for wide band or narrow band), Multimedia courseware, educational video tape and audio tape.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Before 2002</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Num. Of Courseware</td>
<td>6433</td>
<td>2184</td>
<td>3776</td>
<td>12393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular HEI</td>
<td>6327</td>
<td>2151</td>
<td>3738</td>
<td>12216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCRTVU</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Resources Developed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource Type</th>
<th>Total Num.</th>
<th>Num of Colleges with such type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Book</td>
<td>273081</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Tape</td>
<td>420001</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compact Disk</td>
<td>724032</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tape</td>
<td>47904</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multimedia Classroom</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Video Course Ware (Hours)</td>
<td>4899277</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Transmission System</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone Conference</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio Conference</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Conference</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Learning System</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Comparisons between China's DE and Abroad (1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Accreditation</th>
<th>Risk taking</th>
<th>Structure with branches</th>
<th>Philosophy of leadership</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>Accredited by government</td>
<td>Small, Parent institution takes almost overall responsibility</td>
<td>hierarchy</td>
<td>Grounded in adult education, lack of Instructional Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other countries</td>
<td>Accredited by the third agency like regional or professional accreditation association</td>
<td>Large, Operate on their own</td>
<td>Contracted partnership and collaborative system</td>
<td>Grounded in educational technology and business management, directed by ID</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Comparisons between China's DE and Abroad (2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learner support</th>
<th>Technology used and resources</th>
<th>Society rating of DE effectiveness</th>
<th>Learners' competency</th>
<th>Vocational training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>Stress on learning affairs management (logistics), less on academic guidance and consultation</td>
<td>Up-to-date facilities while lack of learning resources</td>
<td>Superior to traditional campus-based higher education</td>
<td>Lower degree in information literacy, cheating seriously during final examinations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other countries</td>
<td>Learner-centered, offer both administrative and academic support</td>
<td>Integrated various tech., many free resources open through government initiatives</td>
<td>Equivalent to campus-based higher education</td>
<td>Competent in PC skills and learning skills. Cheating is not as common as Chinese learners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>