Training needs in the use of media for distance education in Malaysia

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By

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TRAINING NEEDS IN THE USE OF MEDIA FOR

DISTANCE EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This paper will discuss the training in the use of media for

distance education in Malaysia under the following topical

guide.

1.1 Definition of terms used in the general sense namely

training, media and distance education.

1.2 Scope of the terms in the context of Malaysia.

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possible.

1.3 Successful **experiences and problems** in media use in general and at the Off-Campus Studies Centre, Universiti Sains Malaysia in particular.

1.4 **Training needs** in the use of media for distance education in Malaysia.

2.0 **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

2.1 **Distance education** is an educational approach in which the learner is separated from the institution by time and/or space. Communication in distance education is non-contiguous but interactive. Courses involved various media rather than face to face teaching.[1]

2.2 **Media** are means by which information is communicated. They cover all forms of communications but usually designates audio-visual and computer communications.[2]

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[1] J.S. Daniel, M.A. Stroud and J.R. Thompson, Learning at a Distance. A World Perspective (Edmonton: Athabasca Univesity International Council for Correspondence Education, 1982), p.308

[2] Ibid., p.309

2.3 **Training** is the systematic practice in the performance of a skill.[3]

2.4 **Needs** arise when there is a gap between the current state and the required or desired state.[4]

3.0 SCOPE OF TERMS IN THE CONTEXT OF MALAYSIA

3.1 **Distance education in Malaysia can be categorised** under the following divisions.

   3.1.1 <u>Distance education at the tertiary level</u>: This includes universities, colleges, technical institutions and other organizations offering education whereby the learner is not attending courses or taking courses full-time at the given

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[3] G.T. Page and J.B. Thomas, <u>International Dictionary of Education</u> (London: Kosan Page, 1977), p.346

[4] J.S. Daniel, M.A. Stroud and J.R. Thompson, <u>Learning at at Distance. A World Perspective</u> (Edmonton: Athabasca University International Council for Correspondence Education, 1982), p.309

institution. The most established and well known in this category is the Off-Campus Studies Centre at Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang. This category also includes private and commercial agencies, organizations and institutions offering to prepare students for external examinations like the London University LLB degrees and the like. From a certification capability point of view, distance education institutions at the tertiary level in Malaysia can be grouped as:

(i) certification or degree granting arrangements and,

(ii) non-degree granting, but act as clearinghouse or agents for some other certification and degree granting institutions, usually external and foreign.

3.1.2 <u>Distance education at the secondary level</u>: This is usually in the form of courses leading towards fulfillment of the general certificate of education ordinary level or advanced level which ordinarily is at the end of five years or seven years in the normal

secondary education. Here again the agency or
institution merely acts to prepare their clientele
for the external examinations.

3.1.3 Distance education for continuing education:
Continuing education are usually job-related,
hobby, recreational and for general purpose su_jects.

3.2 **Training in Media for distance education in Malaysia**
cannot be easily ascertained especially in cases where the
organization or institution is not well establised or large
enough to afford extensive media use.
However, based on the sixteen years of experience of the
Off-Campus Studies Centre at Universiti Sains Malaysia, the
rough framework under which training in the use of media for
distance education in Malaysia could be divided fall under
the following types.

3.2.1 **Type 1:**
**An external academic or practising consultant in
distance education is wholly charged with the role**
and function of organising and training for certain
aspects of media use for a particular institution.

3.2.2 **Type 2:**
An external academic or practising consultant is

partially responsible in organising and carrying out the functions of training. Part of this responsibility is shouldered by the institution or organization concerned.

3.2.3   Type 3:

Local personnel or academics are sent f r training either within the institutional set-up where such training are available or to external agencies and institutions for training in particular aspects of media production and use.

3.2.4   Type 4:

Having received the training the local personnel or academic are then charged with the responsibility of training his or her colleagues in the same area of media development, production and use.

These types of training arrangements are not mutually exclusive. Very often one type of arrangement could occur at a particular phase of development, while another at yet another phase. Alternatively type 1 or type 2 could subsume the subsequent other types. However the most pervasive has been that of type two, three and four.

4.0   SUCCESSFUL USE OF MEDIA

4.1   Objectives and targets

It is the writer's opinion that the most successful kind of training has been the kind that at the onset has analysed the requirements of media use in the institution or organization. Having done that, certain achievable objectives and targets for training are laid out clearly and then the necessary expertise or personnel from within the organization or external institution identified.

4.2   Multiplying effect

The identified expert or consultant is now responsible for the training of personnel in the required media areas with the help of the institution. Trained personnel would later pass on the training to his or her colleagues. The most critical aspect for this kind of arrangement is ensuring that the multiplying effect really takes off and gets going.

4.3   On-the-job training

Another arrangement that has been found successful is on-the-job training of media personnel either by following currently offered courses or training within the institution

or by other agencies. The trainees will use the facilities
of the parent institution to which he or she will return, to
develop, produce and use media materials suitable for
distance education purposes.

4.4 Media exposure for Course Writers

The other important aspect of training is the course writers
as members of course teams being exposed to media production
and use. It seems to me that all course writers involved in
writing for distance education should get enough exposure
and practice in media development, production and use to
enable them to be at a certain confidence level such that
they could personally initiate the media development and
use. The most common stumbling block for writers is the
fear of not being confident in the media area and not being
very aware of media possibilities that could be used for
their courses. Although the ideal course team approach to
course and media development could overcome this problem, in
many cases the course writers still play an important
determing factor.

4.5 Full-time media production

Large numbers of academics and personnel could be trained in

media but the most productive kind of media work has always
resulted from academics and personnel that have been given
no other responsibility but the sole responsibility of media
development and production.

4.6 Media as essential component of the course

These organizational and administrative arrangements alone
may not be entirely successful for media development and
production. From our experience it has been necessary to
incorporate the use of media at the very beginning during
the course curriculum development phase.   In other words
when designing the curriculum certain aspects and components
of the course have been delineated from the very beginning
to the use of the most appropriate media. Having done that
the course writer and the media producers can then build the
course such that both the print media and the non-print
media are developed with equal urgency and importance. If
on the other hand the course curriculum is developed with
the prime concern for the print media, then in the end only
the print media is produced with the exclusion of the other
non-print media. It is very difficult and almost always
unworkable in terms of the practical and curriculum aspects
to add on the media component to the course that has been

designed, developed and produced in the print format only.
If additions to the course in the form of non-print media
are made as adjuncts to existing courses then the non-print
media that gets developed will be used as adjuncts also, not
as an essential and intergral component of the course.
Therefore it is important from the beginning when designing
a course to incorporate the non-print media as an essential
and integral component of the course if this incorporation
is appropriate.

5.0 SUCCESSFUL FORMS OF MEDIA

5.1 Media use

Media are said to be the means for communicating
information, and in the usual sense designates the audio-
visual and computer means of communicating. This paper will
take a similar stand and therefore excludes print media for
the purpose of discussion and the seminar.

From our experiences the most commonly used media are:

5.1.1 Radio and audio-cassettes.

5.1.2 Slides and audio-graphics are available for some
courses but not as commonly used.

5.1.3 <u>Videotapes and films</u> are the least used because of inconvenience and insufficient facilities at the students' receiving end. Henceforth this paper will concentrate on the use of the radio and audio-cassettes with some consideration for slides and audio-graphics. Also the problems of videotape and film use will be discussed in light of Malaysia's training needs.

6.0 PROBLEMS RELATED TO MEDIA USE

6.1 Radio

From our experiences we have been most successful with the radio and audio-cassettes because they are cheaper than the other media, easily used and easily available. For radio, Radio and TV Malaysia (RTM) has allocated us a half-hour slot for fifty two weeks to be used for broadcasting information pertaining to our courses. To date we have 92 courses that have been written and packaged in the distance education format while another 35 courses are in the

pipe-line. Only courses that have a larger audience receive the radio broadcast. Essentially these are the foundation and year one courses. For this purpose we have a Producer and a Script Writer to handle this aspect of media production.

For radio production the main problem has been getting the course specialist to prepare the required scripts on time. Another concern has been the radio as mass media. A few hundred students taking a course who are scattered all over Peninsular and East Malaysia could not warrant the use of this medium. Hence the scripts for the radio production need to be tailored for public consumption as well. This dual purpose of course specialisation and content generalities for public consumption has not always been very easy for certain courses. However most courses did find certain aspects within the course that could be projected with greater interest for the general public as well as students.

6.2 Audio-Cassettes

The production and use of audio-cassettes have been well received both by students and the administration mainly

because this is a cheap medium. Provided the cassettes are paid for by the students, production cost and problems are almost minimal.

6.3 Slides and Audio-Graphics

The production and use of slides and audio-graphics have not been as expedient and as successful as the radio and the audio-cassette media. This is tied to the higher cost of producing the slides and audio-graphics in Malaysia compared to producing the audio-cassettes. Furthermore students have greater access to radios and the audio-cassette players. Another factor that has affected greater use of slides and audio-graphics is again tied to the initial course curriculum and development. Adding slides and audio-graphics into established courses is not as pressing nor totally necessary compared to a situation whereby at the onset it was determined that the use of slides and audio-graphics are essential towards the complete development and unity of the course.

6.4 Videotapes and Films

The use of videotapes and films have been the least mainly because these are more expensive both for the institution

and for the students at the receiving end. Distance education students in Malaysia do not have easy access of video-cassette players and film projectors.

The following data shows that only 22.9% of students have access to video cassette players compared to 74.9% of audio cassette players and 85.1% of radio. Although 81.2% of students have access to a television set, broadcast television at this point in time with limited student numbers is not the most appropriate media and certainly not the cheapest.

Student Ownership or Access to Facilities at Universiti Sains Malaysia (in percentages)[5]	
Postal service	93.5%
Electricity	94.4
Piped water	93.6
Radio	85.1
Television	81.2
Audio cas. player	74.9
Video cas. player	22.9

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[5] Sharifah Alwiah Alsagoff, "A Study of Learning Styles, Student Characteristics and Faculty Perceptions of the Distance Education Programme at Universiti Sains Malaysia, (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Washington, 1985), p.122

7.0 FUTURE TREND AND DEVELOPMENT

7.1 Audio-conferencing

It has been said that the most effective technology for
developing countries is the most advanced technology. This
is indeed true for distance education at the Off-Campus
Studies Centre, Universiti Sains Malaysia. For the months
of August, September and October 1987, the Off-Campus
Studies Centre will carry out an experimental study on the
use of audio-conferencing for tutorial purposes, both in the
Arts and Science subjects. As an experimental phase we
would be engaging two regional centres namely that at
Malacca and Kuantan with the Penang Off-Campus Studies
Centre as the input and originating source. Essentially the
course managers or academics would conduct an audio-tutorial
for the period of three months to cover the important
aspects of their courses to groups of students taking them
at the two regional centres. Preparations for training the
course managers or academics as tutors and training the
student-group managers at the two centres are underway.
Evaluation procedures and audio-conferencing protocol,
methods and techniques are also being lined-up. At the end
of October we hope to have gained some experience in

audio-conferencing which will then determine whether this media mode is cost-effective for our purposes. Presently the Off-Campus Studies Centre engages tutors for all year one courses and for all science courses in twelve regional centres. With the successful use of audio-conferencing the employment of these course tutors in the twelve regional centres can be partially replaced by simultaneous tutorials conducted by the course managers and academics themselves.

8.0 TRAINING NEEDS IN THE USE OF MEDIA

From the past discussions pertaining to the various types of distance education, training, successfully used media and the problems related to their production, the training needs can be summarily outlined as follows.

8.1 Present training needs

8.1.1 To a greater extent

1. Increase personnel involvement and capabilities for audio-cassette production.

2. Train all course writers and course managers in radio script writing.

3. Train all course writers and managers in
   photography for slide production and graphics in
   audio-graphics.

4. Train all course writers and managers in audio
   script writing for slide-tape and audio-graphic
   production.

5. Train all course managers and relevant
   technicians in audio-conferencing protocol,
   methods and technique.

8.1.2 To a lesser extent

Involvement of more personnel in

6. video production

7. super-8 film production (because this is
   cheaper than 16 mm) and

8. film dubbing (i.e. from English to Malay)

8.2 Future training needs

1. Continuation of 1 - 8 above emphasizing training areas
   of greater concern and demand at the time.

2. Further training in line with the development of audio-
   conferencing to video-conferencing if the situation
   warrants such development.

3. Writing CAI programmes for the personal computer.

9.0 SUMMARY

The following overview represents a summary of the training needs in the use of media for distance education in Malaysia in general and at Universiti Sains Malaysia in particular.

9.1 What to train for

The three broad categories of distance education in Malaysia are at the:

1. tertiary level, both for certification and non-certification
2. secondary level and
3. continuing education.

9.2 How to train

The four common practices of training are:

1. external consultants only
2. external and internal consultants' joint effort
3. local personnel trained externally or internally
4. multiplying effect of training to colleagues

9.3 What to consider when training

9.3.1 Media has been successfully used when the following conditions are present.

1. Clear institutional objectives and targets.

2. Better to do training partially or wholly on-the-job.

3. Exposure in media production and use for course writers to initiate or increase the use of media.

4. Incorporate media as essential part of course.

9.3.2 Present successful forms of media

To a greater extent:

1. Radio

2. Audio-cassette

To a lesser extent:

3. Slides and slide-tapes

4. Audio-graphics

5. Videotapes

6. Films

7. Audio-conferencing, i.e. still experimental.

9.3.3 Problems related to media production and use

Problems arise because the following media skills are not fully developed.

1. Script writing for radio by course writers or course managers who are specialists.

2. Script writing for audio-cassettes by course writers or managers.

3. Photography, graphic design and script writing
   skills for slides, slide-tapes and audio-graphics
   for larger number of personnel.

4. Videotape production for specialised personnel.

5. Super-8 film production for specialised
   personnel.

6. 16 mm film dubbing for specialised personnel.

9.4 What kind of training for now and the future

9.4.1 Now, to a greater extent

More and better production of

1. audio-cassettes.

2. radio scripts and radio programmes.

3. photography and graphic design for slides, slide-
   tapes and audio-graphics.

4. script writing for slide-tapes and
   audio-graphics.

5. audio-conferencing requirements.

9.4.2 Now, to a lesser extent

More and better production of

6. videotapes

7. super-8 film

8. 16 mm film dubbing

9.4.3 Future

1. Continuation of 1-8 above stressing on demand areas.

2. Possible move from audio-conferencing to video-conferencing.

3. CAI programme writing for the personal computer.