

A CHALLENGE FOR THE OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION IN TAIWAN

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ABSTRACT

Owing to fulfill the policy of the multi-education system in Taiwan, the government adopt the open strategy of the high level education system, the number of universities is increase drastically since the late of 20 century, so the students have a large of chances to select the institute to learning, there are many universities have already adopt the media-teaching style of the Open and Distance Education (ODE), it enlarge the score and model of course's selection in the traditional universities, so the only multimedia-teaching university, the National Open University (NOU) have already lose her monopoly power in the open and distance education system in Taiwan, the NOU also faced the problem that the number of students had decreased drastically during these years. In order to improve the development of the instructional media teaching and learning in the NOU, it need to change the policy of teaching and learning style in order to match the challenge for the ODE in Taiwan in the near future.

Key words: media-teaching, Multi-education System Open and Distance Education (ODE), traditional university

The National Open University (NOU) established in 1986, is the first university in Taiwan to use a variety of media for its main teaching and learning activities. The University provides learning opportunities for adult continuing education and lifelong learning. Its special features are multiple teaching media and multiple learning channels. The media used include print, TV, radio, audio and video cassettes, telephone, floppy disks, CDs and the Internet. The NOU mainly provides teaching at a distance, with face-to-face teaching once a month as the supplement.

The NOU provides learning opportunities to learners who can learn anytime and anywhere via multiple learning channels. It provides collect phone-call and fax for students to call content expert tutors to clarify their study difficulties in each course. Students can also raise questions by e-mails. Moreover, the University organizes meetings for students to meet course tutors, other students and school administrator. New students are grouped and allocated a tutor to help them though the orientation process. A counseling service is available for those who search for psychological and emotional assistance.

Taiwan is an island-country, to facilitate learning of our island-around students, NOU set up 13 Learning Centers in most cities in Taiwan, include to the off-coast islands like Penghu and Kinmen. There are computer lab, library, media centers and counseling office available in each Learning Center. Students can attend face-to face classroom instruction, guidance and

counseling or extra-curriculum activities in any learning centers at their convenience. For the only NOU have enough facility to service our island-around students, the NOU had a monopoly power in distance education in Taiwan until the government fulfill the new policy of education at the late of 20th century.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY AND METHODS

The distance education and traditional education are one of the educational model in the educational system, most of students study in the traditional university, but there are many universities accept the model of distance education in many countries even in Taiwan, so the distance education is very important in the 21th century, in fact, distance education has existed for well more than a century, beginning with correspondence courses that were developed in the late 1800s, it continues to the present, with a number of colleges and universities in many country to offering courses by mail. It is the beginning style of distance education in the world.

Distance education can be defined as any formal approach to instruction in which the majority of the instruction occurs while educator and learner are not in each other's physical presence (Mehrotra, Hollister, & McGahey, 2001).

In the early of 21th century, the gradually accelerating pace of technological invention led to many new forms of distance education, the timeline of distance education technology from the correspondence courses(1850s), radio broadcast(1930s), television channels(1950s), videocassette courses(1960s), microwave transmitted courses(1970s),satellite courses(1980s), ITV courses(1990s), to the online courses(2000s), and a large number of universities in many countries used the modern media in the open and distance education.

However, what make distance learning seem new is the development and wide availability of new technologies for connecting learner and instructor, the rapid pace at which these technologies have been adopted by educational, governmental, and commercial organizations, and widespread publicity. These new technologies simply result in high-technology correspondence courses. The delivery methods for distance education include the synchronous, asynchronous, and web-based asynchronous.

In general, the delivery method for distance education by synchronous include those methods such as the interactive television (ITV), telephone (conversation), internet conferencing (audio), internet conferencing (video and audio), internet conferencing(chat), internet conferencing(whiteboard); the delivery method of distance education by asynchronous include those methods such as the print(paper), audiocassette, telephone(answering machine), telephone (facsimile machine), videocassette, radio broadcast, television broadcast, electronic files(magneto-optical storage), electronic mail(e-mail). The delivery method of distance education by web-based include those methods such as web pages, file transfer, audio, video, animation/movies, bulletin boards, comprehensive commercial packages....etc.

The technology revolution had developed the personal computer, the Internet, the World Wide Web (www) where it became feasible to deliver educational content directly to students' home and offices. However, even through the technological improvements have made the expansion

of distance education possible, technology is not the only factor driving the interest in distance learning. Broader changes in the environment of higher education are also at work, including the following. (Mehrotra, Hollister, & McGahey, 2001)

1. The increased requirements for higher education for career advancement.
2. The demand for flexible scheduling by potential students whose daily routines are complex and do not mesh with the rhythm of the traditional educational day.
3. The growing market for personal fulfillment courses driven by increased personal income in some sectors of society.
4. The general shift in the public's attitude from one that views education as a youthful pursuit to one that values lifelong learning.
5. The growing requirement in many professions that members take additional coursework every year or two for license renewal.
6. The emphasis that many employers today place on specific competencies, rather than degrees, in their hiring.
7. The shift by educators from teacher-centered education to student-centered learning.
8. The increasing awareness among educators that students vary greatly in their learning styles.
9. The need for greater flexibility in providing educational access to students with disabilities.
10. The variation in students' willingness to participate in class.
11. The increased pressure on public institutions of higher learning from legislatures and governors to develop cost-effective models of collaboration with other institutions of higher education.

Therefore, not only the hard wares like the technology of distance education in university is very important, but also the soft wares like the mental of student.

A CHALLENGE IN NOU

The NOU had the biggest university in Taiwan, not only the campus at every big city in the island-around, but also the number of teachers (include the part-time teacher) and students is too. However, the condition and situation of distance learning in the NOU have already changed since the government changed her education policy in the late of 20th century.

Policy Change

Owing to fulfill the policy of the multi-education system in Taiwan, the government adopt to the open strategy of the high level education system, the number of universities is increase drastically since the late of 20th century, so the students have a large of chances to select the institute to learning, there are many universities have already adopt the media-teaching style of the Open and Distance Education (ODE), it enlarge the score and model of course's selection in the traditional universities, so the only multimedia-teaching university, the National Open University (NOU) have already lose her monopoly power in the open and distance education system in Taiwan, the NOU also faced the problem that the number of students had decreased drastically during these years. In order to improve the development of the instructional media teaching and learning in the NOU, it need to change the policy of teaching and learning style in order to match the challenge for the ODE in Taiwan in the near future.

The Problems

From the point of distance education circumstance in Taiwan, we find the number of students decreasing during these years. According to the statistical data in the National Open University, the number of students had decreased since 1998, because the number of enrolled students is 51,355 persons in the first semester in 1998, it is the highest point in the number of students in NOU, however, the number of students decreased little by little, the number of enrolled students in the first semester in 2004 is 24,642, the decrease rate is 52.02%. (see table 1), the revenue of university is reducing for the number of students is decreasing, the financial situation of university worse gradually, and it is not a good factor to the university development in the near future.

Table1. A Comparison on the Number of University and Student in Taiwan (Unit: person, %)

No year	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2004
Universities	27	28	50	60	127	159
Students of Universities	153,088	179,344	239,082	314,499	564,059	894,528
Student of NOU	-	27,151	26,401	37,934	38,057	24,643
Graduated student	-	0	10	578	1,352	1,472

Source: Ministry of Education, 2005
National Open University

Owing to the education policy changed in Taiwan since the late 20th century, the number of universities increased rapidly, Owing to the NOU is the only university to accept the distance education in Taiwan, it seems had a monopoly power to the distance teaching and learning, however, the monopoly situation isn't exist for the education policy have already changed since the 2000. The government announced the open policy which encourage to established universities, whether the national or the private universities were allowed, so the number of university is more and more, the number of university from 60 in 1995 increase to the 159 in 2004, the increase rate is 165%, the number student from 314,499 increase to 894,528, the increase rate is 184%(see Table 1), all the young person have a chance to study in the university, and a part of university accept the part-distance education system simultaneously, it mean the NOU isn't the best choice in the open and distance education in Taiwan.

Table 2. The Economic Indicator in Taiwan (Unit: 1000 person, %)

No year	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2004
Population	17866	19314	20401	21357	222767	22689
Economic Growth rate	7.30	4.95	5.39	6.42	5.78	5.71
Per capita GNP	2155	2992	7413	11630	12781	12381
Inflation(CPI)	19.01	-0.16	4.12	3.67	1.26	1.62
Unemployment rate	1.23	2.91	1.67	1.79	2.99	4.44
Foreign exchange rate	36.00	39.86	26.89	26.49	31.23	33.43
Number of baby	413881	346208	335618	329581	305312	216419
Birth rate	2.34	1.80	1.66	1.55	1.38	0.96

Source: CEPD, Executive Yuan. 2005

Besides that, the economic is a big factor to affect those students to study in the university, and according to the statistical data of the Council for Economic Planning and Development (CEPD) in Taiwan, a large of economic indicator show the worse situation since the late of the 20th century, such as the economic growth rate, the per capita GNP, the unemployment rate...etc. (see Table 2), so the NOU faced to the serious challenge in the near future.

In summary, the bigger problems in the NOU include those items such as the decreasing of the student number, the worse situation of finance, and the competition of distance teaching and learning, the challenge in the NOU as following:

- (1). The number of traditional university is increasing.
- (2). The number of students in the university is increasing.
- (3). The number of university to accept the distance learning system is increasing.
- (4). The population is decreasing.
- (5). The rate of birth is decreasing.
- (6). The rate of economic growth is decreasing.
- (7). The rate of unemployment is increasing.
- (8). The number of enrolled student in the NOU is decreasing.

The Strategies at the Distance Dducation in NOU

Strategies in distance education

The terms of strategies include models of teaching ,actions, performance and tactics, a model of teaching contains quite a number of components, including goal focus, phasing, social system and support system; performance has been defined by Cooper and McIntyre(1996) as including “decisions made in proactive and/or interactive phases of lessons, their (teachers’) teaching methods”.(Marland,1997)

Learning from discussions among distance students or between them and distance teachers can be promoted via telephone or video links. In-class tutorials can be simulated in the package of learning materials through a printed version of a tutorial, referred to as a tutorial-in-print (Rowntree,1992). In addition, many of the conventional strategies commonly used in face-to-face teaching, such as overviews, pre-tests, advance organizers and summaries can be adapted to suit the distance education context. In fact, many of the strategies which teachers use in classrooms can find, after some metamorphosis, a useful place in distance education.

Renovation and reformation

To be the leader in e-learning in great China region, and to be the mentor for lifelong learning, NOU tried to transform by applying new technology to construct multimedia-based instructional platform, and to broaden its production capacity of digital instructional materials, in order to cope with the change in the new century.

Further study

To be competitive and to renovate itself, NOU endeavor lately in setting up internet-based instructional systems to construct better learning environment. Starting from the second

semester of 2003, NOU offers trial web courses for Master program once the trial courses prove to be effective, with the approval of the Minister of Education, the Master Program will be formally set up and award Master's Degree to those who successfully fulfill the requirements.

CONCLUSIONS

We have been encouraged to place considerable faith in the power of scientific knowledge, this tacit knowledge is a product of learning from experience. The accumulate knowledge is acquired through a thoughtful process of trail and error, is gradually refined until it provides a reliable and serviceable basis for action, or until events unfold which challenge its worth. Then, if it no longer serves us well, we look for a substitute. It can make a significant contribution to solving many of society's problems and improving our quality of life, those items of conclusion as follows.

The New Policy of Distance Learning

For the NOU is a national university, her major finance resource is come from government budget, the government need try to solve those problems of distance education such as the financing supplement, suitable education policy, adjustable budget system, and the new and effective policy of distance education. Besides that, the NOU herself need to try to adjust and fulfill the policy of distance learning system, the new doing include to developing the technology of distance education, adjust the number of TV programs, increase the learning channel such as VOD, MOD...etc.

Perspectives

The grand perspectives for better tomorrow, the perspective of NOU as following:

- (1). To be multiple in instruction: multiple study fields, multiple instructional media, multiple programs and courses, to fulfill multiple needs.
- (2). To be networked: to set up administration and instructional network system, to elevate the standers of instructional services.
- (3). To be efficient: to increase the quality of instructional materials, to improve the audiovisual quality and the effect of interactive instruction.
- (4). To be global: to expand the oversea market, to be international.
- (5). To be community-oriented: to promote regional learning centers as community resources centers.

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