

## **DISTANCE EDUCATION MODEL – THE EXPERIENCE OF UNIVERSITI TELEKOM (MULTIMEDIA UNIVERSITY) IN MALAYSIA**

### **Mr. Amat Taap Manshor**

Co-ordinator, Distance Education  
Universiti Telekom (Multimedia University) Malaysia  
E-mail: [amat@unitele.edu.my](mailto:amat@unitele.edu.my)

### **Ms. Shaharimah Ibrahim**

Assistant Director, CIRDE  
Universiti Telekom (Multimedia University) Malaysia  
E-mail: [shaharimah@unitele.edu.my](mailto:shaharimah@unitele.edu.my)

## **Introduction**

Information will become the main raw material in the future, and technology will definitely be the most important tool for dissemination of information. Consequently, virtual learning and/or distance education will be the common mode of transferring knowledge, skill, and experience. Technology is a major contributor to the dramatic transformation of distance education (Potashnik and Capper, 1998). In the era of information technology, internet-based training and distance education programmes are expected to play a key role in transforming the world into a borderless educational arena.

Consistent with the Malaysian Government's effort to adopt information technology in most activities, the Universiti Telekom (Multimedia University) has taken an important step by launching its first distance education programme in June 1998. This programme has fully utilised University's facilities of which is based on telecommunication and information technology. With the view of catering various needs of learners, the medium of instruction is combined between conventional and the so-called multimedia approach.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to share the models of course development and delivery adopted by the University's distance education programme. It is believed that the discussion derived from this session will benefit both the distance education provider and the user.

## **Distance Education – An Overview**

### Definition

Distance education (DE) has been defined in various ways. In its most basic level, DE takes place when a content provider and a learner are separated by physical distance. Technology acts as an interface for face-to-face communication, bridging the instructional gap (Smith, 1998). However, in today's environment, DE may be better defined as education in which the student and the instructor, while physically separated are intellectually connected via technology (Burke, 1998).

### Communication modes

Distance education has come into being more than a decade ago. However, as the development of technology progresses over time, the mode of communication has changed substantially. Nowadays, on top of the conventional mode of communication (mail), the following modes have been widely appreciated and applied:

- Web-based
- E-mail
- Teleconferencing
- Audio and video streams

### Why distance education?

Studies show that DE is a cost-effective mode of instructional delivery (Ancis, 1998). This is because it increases learner access by accommodating the schedule of a non-traditional student body such as older

adults with job and family responsibilities. Additionally, DE offers the following opportunities and flexibility (Burke, 1998; Smith, 1998):

- Convenience – DE allows students to study according to their personal schedules.
- Improved learning opportunities – DE students enjoy the same achievement and satisfaction of those students in traditional classrooms.
- Self-paced learning – DE allows students to have their own pace of learning. Studies show that better learning results are achieved from self-directed methods rather than from teacher-directed methods.
- Collaboration – With the development of communication technology, DE students will have better opportunity to interact among themselves and between their instructors.
- Variety of media – DE offers a variety of media geared to various learning styles. New courses and modules can be delivered in a timely and convenient manner to learners.

On top of that, research shows that there is no significant difference between traditional face-to-face and distance education as far as the method and technologies used are appropriate to the instructional task, student-to-student interaction takes place, and there is timely interaction between teacher and learner (Smith, 1998).

### **What next?**

With the advancement of information technology, the next millennium DE will heavily depend on online learning. Some of the major concerns of the next trends and challenges of DE are as follows (Potashnik and Capper, 1998):

- Globalisation and accreditation. The globalisation of DE will impose significant concerns on accreditation of degrees earned from unknown institutions in other countries. Perhaps, it is timely for the DE providers to form their accreditation board to look after this issue in more detail.
- Quality and effectiveness. Some DE programmes are lacking in their quality and effectiveness due to limited resources (expertise and fund).
- Technology. The decision on choosing the right technology to be used for DE should not at any time jeopardise the curriculum and instructional quality.
- Affordability. Careful planning and budgeting is required for a sustainability of DE programmes.

### **The University Telekom (Multimedia University) DE Programme**

#### The concept

The DE concept adopted is “student can learn at anytime and at any place”. No regional centres provided. Students can interact among themselves and between instructors through electronic mail or other conventional communication modes. The University still uses printed materials to cater for those students without Internet access. BBA in Management is offered at this stage. The length of this programme ranges from a minimum of 3 years to maximum of 6 years.

#### The course development model

The course development model consists of three segments, course development, learning structure and assessment (Figure 1). Each segment falls under the responsibility of content expert, course developer and instructor. Major responsibilities of each segment are as follows:

- Content expert – develops subject contents
- Course developer – develops learning structure/learning materials
- Instructor – facilitates learning process, and design and evaluates students’ assessment.

The learning structure consists of four components, study guide, course schedule, notes and learning activities. These components are designed to facilitate students’ learning process, particularly for distance learners. The products of learning structure include web pages, printed materials, CDs, videos, and audiotapes. For quality control purpose, the assessment is designed to evaluate students’ overall understanding of the subject through two modes, course works and final examination.

### The delivery model

The delivery model is based on web-based and conventional mode (Figure 2). The delivery model consists of multiple multimedia modes such as the Internet/Lotus Learning Space, CD-ROM, radio net and conventional communication modes such as printed material, videotapes, and audiocassettes.

Students are able to study at anytime and at any place, communicate with instructors and course-mates through the World Wide Web, and exchange vital information, references, ideas, and do many other Internet related activities at their own pace. Additionally, other means of interfacing are e-mail, ordinary mail, phone, and fax.

### **The Challenges**

Some of the main issues at present, and perhaps in the future are listed below:

Human Resources – Training and development

- Content provider
- Content designer

Students' Readiness

- Isolation syndrome
- Students' learning styles

Technology

- The technology interfaces
- The advantage of IT
- Cost

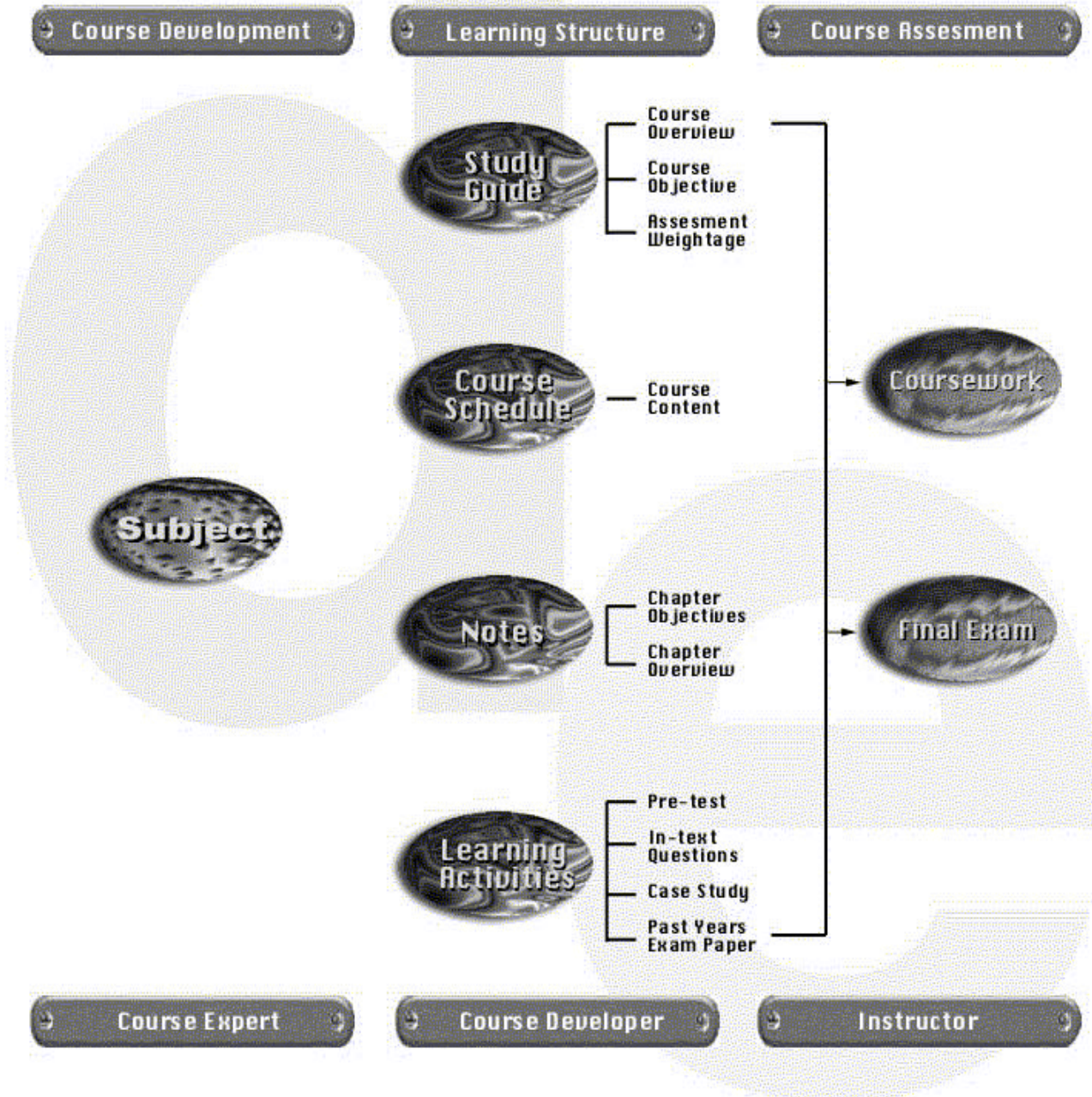
Quality Control

- Student monitoring and motivation
- Course work and final examination

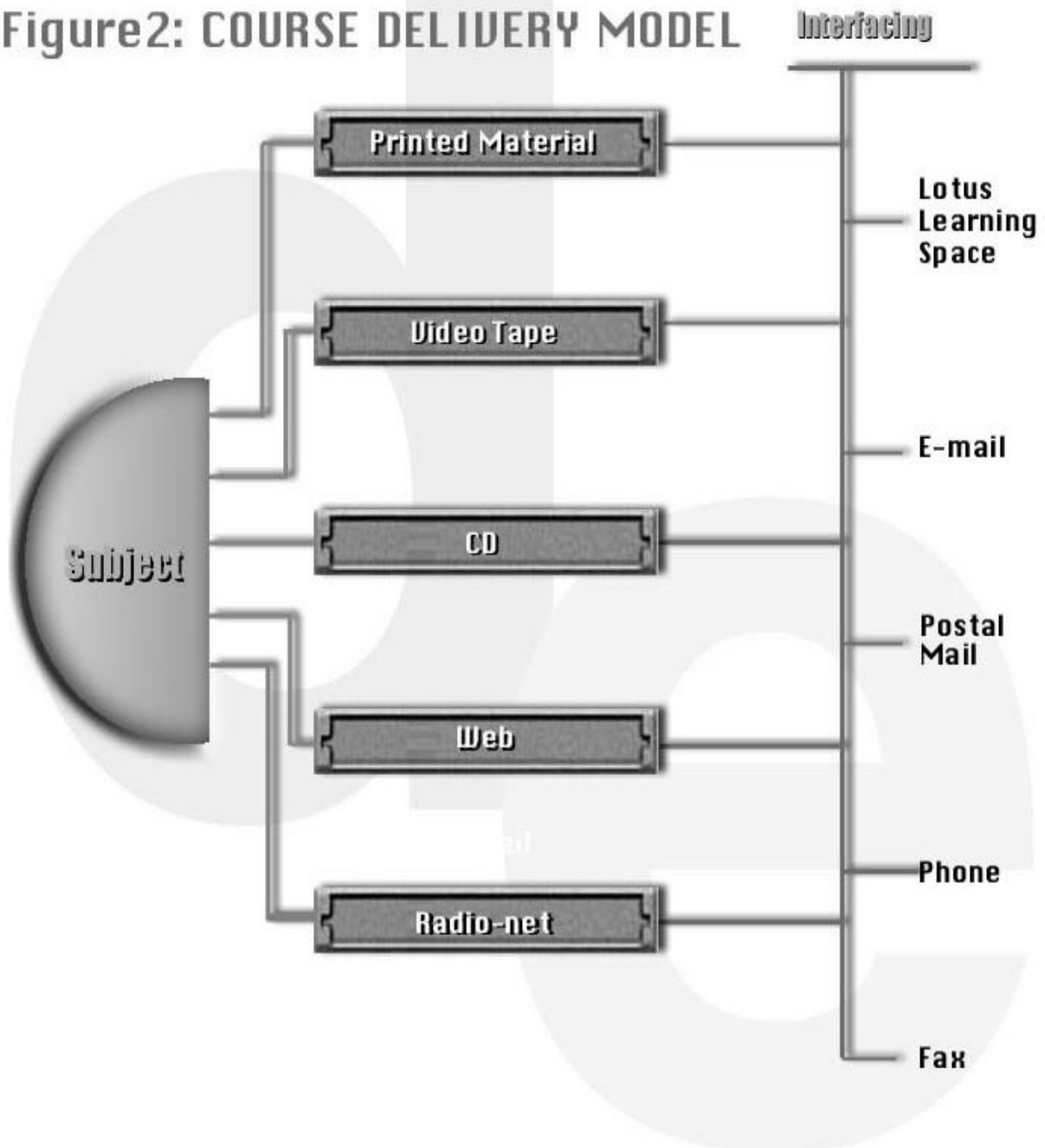
### **Conclusion**

The demand for education will increase dramatically in the near future. Distance education will become one of the main contributors in enhancing and upgrading the quality and opportunity of education particularly in the developing countries. An integrated policy and mechanism at national level will then become very important for co-ordinating the planning, development and implementation of DE as a whole. In this perspective, the University's DE programme believes in providing equal opportunity to the public seeking higher education. In the future, the focus of the programme will be to further enhance multimedia application aspects and to offer a wider range of courses.

# Figure 1: COURSE DEVELOPMENT MODEL



**Figure2: COURSE DELIVERY MODEL**



**References**

Ancis J. R. (1998), Cultural Competency Training at A Distance: Challenges and Strategies. *Journal of Counselling and Development* 76(2).

Burke J. (1998), The Internet Highway: A New Learning Tool for Accounting Students. *New Accountant* 14(1).

Chandersekaran A. C. (1998), Education and Training Transformed by Internet-Enabled Electronic Commerce. Business America.

Morris J. M. et al (1998), Teaching Engineering Management via the Web. *Engineering Management Journal* 10(2).

Perry W. and Rumble G. (1987), *A Short Guide To Distance Education*. International Extension College. Cambridge.

Phillips V. (1998), Online Universities Teach Knowledge Beyond The Books. *HR Magazine* 43(8).

Potashnik M. and Capper J. (1998), Distance Education: Growth and Diversity. *Finance and Development*.

Smith G. M. (1998), Education Poised to Go The 'Distance'. *Property & Casualty/Risk & Benefits Management*.