Chapter 80
The Art and Science of Designing and Developing an Online English Language Training Module for Adult Learners

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of e-learning in the education world poses a growing demand for online training for lecturers to master web-based applications in teaching and learning. As a knowledge hub, higher education providers can play a more proactive role in knowledge dissemination and acculturation by taking advantage of what the internet can offer. This challenges some fundamental issues in education in propagating paradigm shift among the lecturers and designing a module that fulfils the lecturers' need to upgrade their knowledge and skills, including English Language proficiency to be better lecturers and researchers. One way of doing so is through e-training, which offers flexibility and cost saving. This chapter describes the design and development of the online English Language Training module for professional adult learners. This includes the criteria for selecting suitable URLs, topics to include as proposed by respondents from the needs analysis and the stages in constructing OLELT, a website for lecturers to upgrade their existing knowledge to be better researchers, writers and academicians. This chapter also delineates the challenges in implementing an e-training program. This is important for the management to consider so that higher education providers can harness human capital to propagate lifelong learning and acculturate a learning academic organization.

E-TRAINING AS A MEANS FOR CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As formal education and schooling remain highly valued in most societies, many educators, employers, policy makers and average citizens place high value on keeping current on constantly changing knowledge. Having basic computer literacy is no longer sufficient as they are expected to be able to use computer technology for teaching and learning and for their professional growth. At a higher education level, radical changes have been planned at a pragmatic level to produce professionals who can meet national human resource needs and requirement. One of the changes fostered by educational programs is "individual change related to acquisition of new knowledge, building of skills, and examination of personal values and beliefs" (Caffarella, 1994). Such changes, though necessary for lecturers in order to keep updated to current changes and challenges must be supported by administrators by providing adequate training to meet their needs for continuous professional development.

Using internet as a resource based learning tool is not something new among Malaysian students and lecturers (Ng & Sharmini, 1998) due to the benefits it offers to the users' learning experience. Students found the use of technology in the course delivery was beneficial and facilitating and they prefer the cyberspace mode of learning as the instructional technology could stimulate classroom experience, support collaborative learning and interactive feedback (Hadidi & Sung, 1998 & Shuell & Farber, 2001). Effective and rich usage of instructional technologies in presenting the educational materials would account for effective distance education programs (Milheim, 2001) in terms of motivation (Gagne & Briggs, 1979). Therefore, it is important for lecturers to be familiar and comfortable with an online learning experience before enforcing them to adopt e-learning. Internet can open up new opportunities

in lifelong learning and upgrading human capital in the following ways (Jeffries & Hussain, 1998):

- As a means of a holistic, multi-faceted approach to education.
- Removing constraints of time and place, and dependence on conventional resources for learning.
- A resource for lifetime learning which is already available in the workplace and will become increasingly in people's homes.
- Provision of a facility which enables "… educators to publish their projects, writings and curriculum materials in a way that is both similar to, and different from, traditional methods (Mermit, 1996 in Jeffries and Hussain, 1998).
- Providing support for collaborative working which various researchers believe to be extremely important for the learning experience.

The infusion of Internet also expands students' space and access to greater world of knowledge with the mushrooming of websites offering information on anything students can possibly imagine. This has led to what known by Warschauer and Kern (2000), as 'network-based language teaching', where computers are connected to one another in either local or global network. With such rapid development in integration of information and communication technology in schools and higher learning institutions, soon e-learning will be adapted widely and English language gains its prominence as it is the main medium of instruction in the Internet.

As Malaysia was moving towards a knowledge-based economy in the mid-1990s, the demand for knowledge workers to support the knowledge-based economy calls for lecturers to keep abreast with the technological upgrading and be familiar with the latest teaching and learning innovations. Educators at higher learning institutions have varied roles not just as instructors; they are facilitators

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