USING TECHNOLOGIES IN ODL ENVIRONMENT

By Christine Ling Bee Fong

In seven years, OUM has developed and continues to enhance its learning management system (LMS), e-library, e-content and i-Radio to facilitate the dissemination of information throughout the nation regardless of geographical and time barriers as well as providing face-to-face training. Technology, especially information and communication technology (ICT), has undergone dramatic changes, each time producing new and exciting opportunities for the education sector and breaking down the barrier of distance in education.

Distances between educators and learners are bridged through the use of e-learning technology. This has led to accessible education for all in this digital age. As online education continues to emerge, new pedagogy and mobile computing instruments on teaching and learning are needed as the power of learning is shifting to "just-in-time" e-learning independent of location in time or space.

Open and distance learning (ODL) is the only model which ensures uniformity in the quality of delivery. ODL institutions invariably use technology and the expenditure on students, infrastructure and faculty is relatively less compared to that of a regular institution. Socially disadvantaged groups have limited places in regular institutions. In contrast, ODL institutions place no ceiling on the number or any other condition for entry. Moreover, technology ensures that lessons reach far and wide even to remote areas with the help of various tools and applications.

OUM has its own instructional development team whose members are experts in technology. They convert the knowledge of subject matter experts into e-platforms and e-content which could be uploaded to mobile technologies. The integration of technology into the instructional content bridges the gap between distance learners and the institution. The standardisation of information technology in education, by way of widespread adoption of robust and dependable Learning Management Systems (LMS) via web interface, has made distance learning courses possible and easy to use by the institution and its learners.

As the nation's first ODL provider, OUM has also embarked on efforts to introduce mobility in its teaching and learning approach through the use of mobile technologies. Both open learning and m-learning enable learners to study at their own pace, place, time and convenience. Learning

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and teaching applications in m-learning can significantly complement ODL by creating additional access for mobile users with mobile devices such as mobile phones, PDAs, tablet PCs and pocket PCs.

M-learning benefits information providers or instructors as well. Instructors may use mobile devices to distribute recorded lectures for students to review after class. Quizzes and topical discussions may be drafted and podcasts sent to students while waiting in line or in traffic. It reduces time wasted since it allows information to be created and transferred virtually anywhere.

The technology deployment of mobile learning in learning and teaching presents a few significant challenges that needs to be considered. The development of m-learning standards and best practices must also address issues such as the creation, delivery and interoperability of the content.

A technology does not replace conventional learning but rather, enhances learning through information and instructions. The challenge now is to choose the appropriate technology that can enhance communication, interaction and articulation among learners and teachers. Proper pedagogies are needed to cope with the digital divide and to suit the knowledge and preparedness of OUM learners. TCX