

Present Situation of Distance Education in Myanmar

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Abstract

This paper deals with the present situation of distance education implemented in Myanmar, particularly the role of distance education system in higher education sector. It presents how Myanmar is trying to enhance distance education in terms of technology, quality assurance and partnership. It focuses on how Universities of Distance Education in Myanmar make use of advanced technologies to increase the development of open and distance learning (e-learning, m-learning and technology-enhanced learning). To facilitate distance learning, online learning system and Satellite Data Broadcasting System is utilized to transmit the educational programmes to learning centres located at higher education institutions, education colleges and basic education high schools all over Myanmar. Educational resources cover printed materials, radio, audiotapes, videotapes, broadcasting from Television channels and live teaching from Electronic Data Broadcasting System (e-DBS) studio. The degrees offered from Universities of Distance Education are accredited by international universities and institutions and the standard guidelines for quality provision in Myanmar distance education are still being arranged. Collaboration between existing universities and international institutions needs to be enhanced.

Keywords: ODL, quality assurance, partnership

Introduction

Higher education institutions in Myanmar are reinforcing their role as a centre for creating and disseminating knowledge in the local community. They are defining the services, skills and knowledge that they could provide to rural areas and the community in which they are located and strengthen linkages with local and rural communities and contribute to their development. They are able to harness technology to act as a driving force in the delivery of knowledge and skills. They also carry out research on local resources and identify educational programmes they can offer using the networks of learning centres and other means available. Community-based human resource development is being activated in order to buttress development of the local resident's lifelong learning and promote the growth of local industries.

Like other countries of the world, Myanmar realizes that conventional education alone cannot cope with all the demands of education and training. In this new millennium 21st Century, through new and flexible approaches, open and distance learning will play a bigger and more important role in developing human resources across sectors.

Present Status of Higher Education

The Ministry of Education is the main provider of education in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and is functioning with the vision to create an education system that will generate a learning society capable of facing the challenges of the knowledge age. The Ministry of Education is implementing short-term and long-term education development plans to upgrade the education standard and to develop a lifelong learning society. The implementation of the education development plan has not only brought about the enhancement of the quality of higher education for a wide diversity, but it has also markedly increased accessibility to both basic and higher education.

There are 168 higher education institutions in Myanmar. Among them 68 institutions are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education while 100 institutions are under 12 other ministries. All the higher education institutions are state-financed and they offer various courses on arts and science, law, economics and business education, teacher education, foreign languages, engineering, computer studies, maritime studies, defense, agriculture, forestry, medicine, nursing, veterinary science , culture and fine arts, etc. and offer a variety of programmes – undergraduate, postgraduate diploma, master’s degree and doctorate programmes. Higher education institutions under the Ministry of Education have also established Centres for Human Resource Development that offer re-education and retraining human resource development programmes ranging from short-term certificate programmes to master degree programmes.

Universities of Distance Education

The distance learning for higher education in Myanmar started from 1970s. The University Correspondence Courses (UCC), affiliated to Yangon University was initiated in 1975-76 academic year and bachelor degrees of Arts, Science, Economics, and Law were offered. In 1980 it was separately organised under the direct control of the Ministry of Education. At that time the teaching-learning process was based on printed materials and radio lessons. In addition, every student needs to submit 16 assignments for each course. At the end of the academic year, students had to sit for the final examination.

UCC was upgraded to University of Distance Education (Yangon) on 9th July, 1992. It was named as Yangon University of Distance Education (YUDE) in 1998. YUDE , leading university for distance education is responsible for 15 regional branches, which are affiliated to existing universities in Lower Myanmar. Another university of distance education, Mandalay University of Distance Education (MUDE), which was established in 1998, is responsible for 19 regional branches in Upper Myanmar. Through these regional branches educational as well as administrative and managerial matters are carried out. The main purpose of the establishment of two universities of distance education is to provide access to higher education to those who are unable to pursue it at conventional institutions for various reasons.

The motto of Yangon University of Distance Education is " *For one 's desire .. Education never too far* ".

Vision of YUDE : *To promote the educational opportunity by providing technology-mediated distance education to all who wish to realize their ambitions and fulfil their potential.*

Mission of YUDE : *To produce qualified students and to upgrade the human capital to create skilled workforce for a knowledge-based economy by leveraging on open and distance education.*

The objectives of the University of Distance Education in line with the educational objectives are:

- to make higher education accessible to all students at minimal cost and without having to leave their homes or jobs.
- to offer courses of higher education to all within the country including those residing in border areas.
- to ensure a high standard of tertiary education to be at par with courses offered at other institutions.
- to produce through a higher education programme, qualified citizens who will be able to serve better in the interest of the state and to equip them with the ability to carry out effectively all tasks given them by the state

Universities of Distance Education implement to fulfill the above objectives. Nearly 60 % of the matriculated students joined the UDE every academic year. The total number of undergraduate and postgraduate students at universities and degree colleges under the Ministry of Education in 2012 academic year is shown in Table 1. There are 19 undergraduate degree programs being offered thereby advancing the Universities of Distance Education's efforts to be more flexible, responsive and open.

Table 1. Number of undergraduate and postgraduate students at Universities and Degree Colleges in 2012

| Sr. No. | Course | No. of Students | | |
|---------|---|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | | Male | Female | Total |
| 1 | Undergraduate Degree | 58469 | 109748 | 168217 |
| 2 | Honours Degree | 981 | 5573 | 6554 |
| 3 | MA/MSc Qualifying | 148 | 897 | 1045 |
| 4 | Postgraduate Diploma | 459 | 1266 | 1725 |
| 5 | Master | 1291 | 5333 | 6624 |
| 6 | Master of Research | 64 | 386 | 450 |
| 7 | PhD | 394 | 1659 | 2053 |
| | Total | 61806 | 124862 | 186668 |
| 8 | Distance Education (Undergraduate Degree) | 125986 | 158258 | 284244 |
| | Grand Total | 187,792 | 283,120 | 470,912 |

Source: Department of Higher Education (Lower Myanmar), MOE , 31st May, 2012

Within a set of criteria set by the Higher Education Department, the students can take up any course of study. However, in the science disciplines there is a limit for the intake, due to the constraints of laboratory facilities in respective regional university. Like other higher education institutions, the credit system was also practiced at the UDE to facilitate students who transfer from conventional institutions to UDE and vice-versa.

Distance learning started with simple means – textbooks, study guides and assignments – to provide education to students. The main mode of delivering courses included printed materials, lab, assignments and intensive classes held before examination. Students have to join the respective university they have attached for laboratory and final examination.

More than 60 % of intake students successfully completed their course studies. Module system is practiced to assess students’ performance on the basis of the credit-point system. Each academic term has an examination. Those who get high grades can pursue postgraduate studies at conventional universities. The total number of graduates from UDE is mentioned in Table 2.

Table 2. The total number of undergraduates from UDEs

| Sr.NO. | Academic Year | YUDE | MUDE | TOTAL |
|--------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| 1 | 1991-92 | 1006 | 0 | 1006 |
| 2 | 1993 | 19447 | 0 | 19447 |
| 3 | 1993-94 | 28352 | 0 | 28352 |
| 4 | 1994-95 | 21243 | 0 | 21243 |
| 5 | 1995 | 31987 | 0 | 31987 |
| 6 | 1996-97 | 25076 | 0 | 25076 |
| 7 | 1998-99 | 17838 | 16210 | 34048 |
| 8 | 1999-2000 | 29957 | 22467 | 52424 |
| 9 | 2001 | 35096 | 22358 | 57454 |
| 10 | 2002 | 72168 | 46327 | 118495 |
| 11 | 2002-2003 | 28620 | 25004 | 53624 |
| 12 | 2003 | 33578 | 27512 | 61090 |
| 13 | 2003-2004 | 37283 | 32017 | 69300 |
| 14 | 2004 | 38833 | 40277 | 79110 |
| 15 | 2005 | 44298 | 35163 | 79461 |
| 16 | 2006 | 33075 | 18812 | 51887 |
| 17 | 2007 | 29297 | 23380 | 52677 |
| 18 | 2008 | 35872 | 25766 | 61638 |
| 19 | 2009 | 32164 | 29556 | 61720 |
| 20 | 2010 | 27274 | 27023 | 54297 |
| 21 | 2011 | 32150 | 26533 | 58683 |
| 22 | 2012 | 31484 | 29863 | 61347 |
| | Total | 686098 | 448268 | 1134366 |

Source : Academic Department of YUDE , 3-2-2013.

Recently, students transferred from other Colleges and Universities increasingly impact on the Universities of Distance Education. Now we have a long-term plan that will expedite the expansion of the distance learning system and transform it into an open university, to create new teaching program, to provide both program leading to degrees.

Yangon University of Distance Education (YUDE) now offers a ten-month course, “**Online Diploma in Law**” under Human Resources Development Program. A person taking the online legal course has to submit assignments, take tutorials and examinations and must have some academic criteria so as to get the diploma certificate. The online law course includes weekly discussions in the evenings on every Tuesday and Thursday. The advantage of this online course is to develop a lifelong learning society and to enhance the quality of legal education. This online program is expected to be better and successful due to the introduction of diploma in law through electronic media in Myanmar.

Use of Advanced Technologies

One of the 12 visions of the Long-term 30-year Education Development Plan relating to utilizing of technology is 'To create an academic environment that is endowed with dynamic knowledge and will emerge according to the times. Today, UDEs can harness a variety of means including sophisticated technology to enhance instruction and provide greater services. To facilitate student learning, YUDE has three studio which has been established to transmit distance education programmes through a separate channel. Satellite Data Broadcasting System is utilized to transmit the programmes from the studio to learning centres located at higher education institutions, education colleges and basic education high schools all over Myanmar, so that distance education students can view the programmes at the centre most convenient to them.

Nowadays there is a total number of 624 learning centres all over Myanmar. Distance learning lets students have access to higher education through various educational resources. Educational resources cover printed materials, radio, audiotapes, videotapes, broadcasting from Television channels and live teaching from Electronic Data Broadcasting System (e-DBS) studio. They can earn a Bachelor of Science or Arts degrees. Without constraint of distance and time, instruction can be delivered. Thus, distance learning can provide students with educational opportunities for students who do not have enough time and favourable conditions to attend conventional institutions.

Throughout the course, doing assignments play an essential role in their learning process as it is part of the course for UDE students. Self-study is required to deal with these assignment questions. Timing and type of the assignment may dictate the analytical goals.

With the help of advanced technology, students of YUDE can easily cope with various types of instructional materials such as video and audio clip. There are two websites of YUDE , www.yudeonline.com.mm and www.yude.edu.mm launched on 20th May, 2013. Recently online learning system was set up in YUDE and Post-graduate diploma in law course was offered using web-based teaching system. But there is still an existence of challenge for

some learners of distance education to use ICT which is not accessible in many places and it is relatively expensive there.

ODL Quality Assurance

How to design and deliver high quality program in distance education environments is a critical issue in Myanmar, for the process of distance learning course is rather complicated. To have quality assurance in open and distance learning, the relationship among teachers, students or learners, and educational resources is a major challenge. The successful distance learning course would depend on systematic management of the whole process of distance learning.

The distance learning environment requires self-regulated students. Attitudes and interests toward the course are crucial to create a successful learning environment in distance learning. Teachers and instructors need to use effective teaching methods and strategies for distance courses. These methods should meet learners' needs, and content requirements. Symposiums are held annually to draw up standard guidelines for quality provision in Myanmar distance education. Experts have been trying to operate the external quality assurance as well as internal quality assurance. In enhancing quality assurance of universities, closely related departments will be organized as faculty so that academic structures of universities in Myanmar will become similar to those of overseas institutions and as a result, more exchange programmes can be launched successfully. Moreover, goals and norms for quality assurance will be set so that external quality assessment agencies can assess the quality assurance of universities using these goals and norms.

Partnership in ODL among Southeast Asian Nations

So far, distance learning programme in Myanmar has not been in partnership with any Southeast Asian nations. Myanmar is still trying to enhance collaboration between existing universities and international institutions. In order to expand collaboration with international universities, direct collaborations with international universities and academic institutions will be made by local universities by means of forming partner universities and establishing international relation centres. Even though , YUDE was tried to be a member of International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) and which accepted YUDE as a member institution of ICDE on 24 th May, 2013.

Conclusion

To sum up, to upgrade the standard of distance learning to the ASEAN universities' level and produce highly qualified and internationally recognized graduates for the society, Myanmar is trying -

- to conduct high quality teaching -learning process, to develop teaching -learning process systematically, to generate and disseminate new knowledge
- to strive towards academic excellence

- to produce competent graduates (who are able to make use of knowledge and skills gained from distance learning)
- to shape our students into independent-minded graduates (Free and vibrant academic culture)
- to take responsibility for both business sector and civil society
- to equip the students with adequate teaching aids (books, libraries, library apparatus, the Internet) and supervise them for effective use

To achieve the goals mentioned above, the degrees offered by Universities of Distance Education need to be accredited by international universities and institutions and students need to acquire knowledge and skills applicable to practicable fields. Open and distance learning is a probable means of supporting attainment of academic development with the present changing society of Myanmar. Improving open and distance education and achieving higher education are strong priorities for the people due to the related prospective for modernization. The Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to transmit and receive various materials through voice, video and data are called for advancement in higher distance learning in Myanmar.

References

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 Department of Higher Education (Lower Myanmar). Panorama of Myanmar Higher Education 2012.

Professional Experience of Prof. Dr. Hla Tint

- First degree - B.Sc (Marine Biology) , Yangon University, 1978
- Postgraduate - M.Sc (Marine Biology) , Yangon University, 1988
- PhD (Marine Botany) , Yangon University, 2012
- Diploma in Education Management (DEM) , Yangon Institute of Economics,
2003 - 2004
- 1980 , Dec. - Lecturing Demonstrator , Department of Marine Science ,
University of Mawlamyine
- 1990 , Feb. - Assistant Lecturer , Department of Marine Science, University of Mawlamyine
- 1995 , July - Lecturer , Department of Marine Science, University of Mawlamyine
- 2000 , Dec. - Associate Professor , Department of Marine Science, Patheingyi University
(Founder of Marine Science in Patheingyi University)
- 2003 , April - Professor , Department of Marine Science, Patheingyi University
- 2005 , May - Pro-Rector , Patheingyi University
- 2006 , Feb. - Acting Rector , Patheingyi University
- 2010 , Feb. - Acting Rector , Yangon University of Distance Education
to (Initiator of set up online education in YUDE)
- Now (Proposer of YUDE as to be a member of International Council for Distance
Education, ICDE)

International Exposure

- (31-10-1983) – (6-5-1984) - Training on seaweed aquaculture ; Philippine
- (18-9-1997) - (12-10-1997) - Training on Marine and Coastal Environmental Conservation ,
Republic of Korea
- (25-10-2004) – (29-10-2004) - 10th Programme Steering Committee Meeting of Partnership on
Environmental Management of Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) ,
Xiamen , China
- (1-8-2005) – (4-8-2005) - 11th Programme Steering Committee Meeting of Partnership on
Environmental Management of Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) ,
Siem Reap , Cambodia
- (3-4-2012) – (6-4-2012) - 1st Head of Delegation (HOD) Meeting for 16th ASEAN
University Game (AUG) , Vientiane , Lao
- (23-10-2012) – (29-10-2012) - 15th Governing Board Meeting of SEAMEO SEAMOLEC and
International Seminar on South East Asia Open and Distance
Learning , Da Nang City , Vietnam
- (10-12-2012) – (21-10-2012) - 16th ASEAN University Game as a Head of Delegation,
Vientiane , Lao