Learning Patterns of Learners’ Interaction in Learning Management Systems: A Comparative Study of China and Malaysia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the rapid development of open distance education and the enrichment of online resources and Learning Management Systems in Asia, the quality of interactions amongst learners and online content, teacher and peers has become one of the imperative factors in determining the efficacy of web-based teaching-learning. Online learning is distinctive as compared to face-to-face interaction in terms of how the course material is presented, the nature of interactions, and overall learning experience. This case study explores the understanding, expectation and experience of learners from China and Malaysia based on vital aspects of learning in
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the web-based environment such as the concept of teaching and learning, the role of the teacher, communication patterns in the virtual classroom, relationships with the teacher and the classmates, and attitudes towards learning achievement. These are reflected in the learning patterns and behavior of online learners as observed in their interaction with the web-based content and participation in the online forum discussions within the online Learning Management Systems. In addition, this case highlights the influence of national culture towards learners' interaction as displayed in their online learning activities.

INTRODUCTION

The People’s Republic of China, located at Eastern Asia, has a population of 1,338,612,968, with 72.1% in the age group of 15 – 64 years (male 51.4%/female 48.6%), a median age of 34.1 years, and having about 253 million Internet users (Central Intelligence Agency, 2009a). China has more than five thousand years of culture and the people in China are strong influenced by the Confucian philosophy. ‘Han’ is the major ethnic group in the population of China and the ‘Han’ language, or Mandarin language, is the official language of the country. For the past three decades, China has experienced rapid economic growth as well as a more open society. China has a nationwide system of public education, which includes primary schools, middle schools (lower and upper), and universities, with literacy rate of about 92% (Wikipedia, 2009a). Online education in China has benefited students of remote and under-developed areas in China while students who failed university entrance examinations and working people are provided with an opportunity of lifelong education. The Ministry of Education in China has approved 68 ordinary schools of higher learning and the Central Radio and TV University to pilot modern distance education. By the end of 2003, these schools had established 2,027 off-campus learning centers around China, offering 140 majors in ten disciplines, and had a total enrollment of 1.373 million (Wikipedia, 2009a). The utilization of broadband technology has also promoted online education while the China Education and Research Network started in 1994, is China’s second largest Internet network, covering all major cities of China.

Malaysia, located in the Southeastern Asia, is a country with an open economy and stable socio-economic development. Malaysia has a population of 25,715,819, with 63.6% in the age group of 15-64 years (male 50.2%/female 49.8%), a median age of 24.9 years, and having about 15.868 million Internet users (Central Intelligence Agency, 2009b). The personal computer penetration level in Malaysia is about 11 per cent, i.e. below the world average of 35 percent and only 5 percent of Malaysians surf the Internet, compared with the world average of 30 percent (Netto,
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