CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions have vital roles in fulfilling the need for education in society. In recent years, Malaysians have started emphasizing their need to access educational programmes since they have realized the importance of education in their everyday life. The Malaysian society has realized that education allows them to attain a higher position in the social strata; promote social mobilization or gain knowledge. Hence, there is a greater demand by the public for educational programmes offered by both government and private institutions in Malaysia.

This increasing demand for education has become the major dilemma to educational institutions especially in the higher educational settings in Malaysia. Many higher educational institutions face this problem and consequently distance education is introduced to provide education to the increasing number of students. The need for knowledge is increasing and the fact that distance education is capable of providing knowledge to a large number of students is recognized widely. Garrison (1990, p. 9) states:

> There is a growing recognition of the worth of distance education as the knowledge base expands and is communicated to the larger educational community.

Distance education can also overcome the shortage of instructors in the educational field. Many higher educational institutions in Malaysia have

already introduced distance education. According to Dhamotharan (1997, p. 1) in her paper presented at the International Conference in Distance Education at the International Conference in Distance Education and Open Learning; Institut Teknologi Mara (Mara Institute of Technology), Universiti Sains Malaysia (Science University of Malaysia), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (National University of Malaysia) and University of Malaya have already introduced distance education courses. Thus, distance education programmes are providing more opportunities for learners to broaden their knowledge. At the same time, these institutions try to overcome the problems of limited places and shortage of instructors.

Distance education was known as correspondence study in 1880 and mail was then used as the main delivery system (Willis, 1994, p. v). Later, the evolution in telecommunications systems introduced more sophisticated and interactive devices into distance education. Brown & Brown (1994, p. 9) in their article entitled, <u>Distance Education Around the World</u> state: 'Many agree that distance learning is the fastest growing instructional pattern in the world. Technologies of delivery, particularly those related to telecommunications have had a "greening" effect on the distance learning.'

According to Holmberg (1977), Willis (1993) and Steiner (n.d.), in distance education programmes, the learners are physically separated from the teachers most of the time. However, Verduin and Clark (cited in Steiner, n.d., p. 1) have defined the elements of distance education in a broader scope:

- The separation of teacher and learner during at least a majority of each instructional process.
- The use of educational media to unite teacher and learner and carry course content.

- The provision of two-way communication between teacher, tutor, or educational agency and the learner.

The above elements obviously show that the delivery media in distance education has an important role in enhancing interaction and good rapport between distant teacher and learners. Willis (1993) and Holmberg (1995) added that the delivery mode and the development in the telecommunications technology often bridge the physical gap between teacher and learners.

There are various delivery modes to encourage effective learning in distance education. These delivery modes are grouped into synchronous and asynchronous delivery systems (Steiner, n.d.; Romiszowski, 1993). Asynchronous system covers "pre-recorded, packaged learning materials" (Rowntree, 1992, p. 29), while synchronous system encourages interaction among distant teachers and learners.

Two-way video conferencing, audio conferencing, computer conferencing, Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and interactive TV are the examples of synchronous delivery system in distance education. Synchronous system enables communication between learners at remote sites with teachers in the campus and therefore, creates a rich new learning environment by integrating sound, motion, image and text (DLRN Technology Resource Guide, 1996, p. 1).

The innovations in telecommunications have certainly created a new perspective for distance education. Teleconferencing, for instance, provides education to the rapidly expanding number of students. Furthermore, teleconferencing '... is an effective way to use one teacher who teaches to a number of sites' (DLRN Technology Resource Guide, 1993, p. 3).

1.1 Background of the Study

The Malaysian government aims to make the country one of the centres of excellence in education in the Asia Pacific Region. In order to achieve this, many steps are undertaken to expand the educational programmes offered to local and foreign students. The intention to develop educated manpower and to promote the standard of education is clearly stated in the Seventh Malaysia Plan 1996-2000. The necessary measures stated are (cited in Dhamotharan, 1997, pp. 1-2):

- strengthening the delivery system through the provision of qualified and experienced teachers and instructors, as well as greater utilization of modern technologies and computers so as to improve overall quality;
- improving accessibility in order to increase participation at all levels through the expansion of physical facilities and the distance learning programme; and
- encouraging more private sector investment in education and training to complement public sector effort.

The above measures obviously show the Malaysian government's aspiration to improve education in Malaysia and distance education is expected to serve this intention. University of Malaya, one of the higher learning institutions which is involved in distance education in Malaysia, provides education for distant students through teleconferencing.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

It is obvious that distance education enables more students to enroll into courses offered by educational institutions. Single mode educational institutions, which provide courses in conventional classrooms can only offer educational opportunities to a limited number of students. Willis (1992, p. 1)

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noted this point of view as:

> The challenges posed by distance teaching are countered by opportunities to reach a wider student audience; to meet the needs of students who are unable to attend on-campus classes.

According to Elsiddig (1993, p. 145) distance education is essential in providing higher education to more students and he states '... a government has to rely on distance education, which can accommodate a large number of students in building campuses, staff etc.'.

The communication between teacher and distant learners is possible by the introduction of teleconferencing in distance education. In addition interaction among teacher and distant learners may create a lively and effective teaching learning process in distance education.

Distant learners' needs and requirements have to be taken into consideration in distance education although, communication is viable in teleconferencing. The physical separation of learners and teacher increases the need for learner support. Thus, dual mode institutions must arrange for learner support at their learning sites. Moore (1987, p. 4) forwards the importance of learner support as:

> The lesson from this Open University experience is that higher education that employs new technology in meeting the needs of large numbers--that is a system of mass education--where there is distance between educator and the learner, must make provision for giving advice and support to each individual learner.

This research will attempt to review the related literature on teleconferencing and investigate the role of teleconferencing at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara (YPM). In addition, this study will conduct a survey to investigate the effectiveness of teleconferencing at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The concern of this study is to gather information on the role of teleconferencing through review of available literature on teleconferencing. The role of teleconferencing at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara will be determined by conducting interviews with the personnel involved with teleconferencing at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara and University of Malaya. In addition, this study will also conduct a survey among distant learners at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara to investigate the effectiveness of teleconferencing in distance education.

In order to gather information on the role of teleconferencing at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara, the study will:

i.   Review the available literature on teleconferencing in selected distance education institutions.

ii. Review the role of teleconferencing at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara in the light of the review of related literature.

iii. Conduct a survey to investigate the effectiveness of teleconferencing at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The information gathered in this study is expected to contribute to the body of research in distance education in Malaysia. In addition, results of this research may contribute to the information regarding educational alternatives available to learners. Distance education via teleconferencing is transmitted to the students at a few learning sites that have been selected by the University of Malaya and in this case the focus will be on the role of teleconferencing at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara.

Barker and Taylor (1993, p. 13) claim that 'there does not appear to be one best method or approach for distance education'. Hence, information gathered in this study could be beneficial to instructional designers in distance education. Distance education is expanding as an educational option in Malaysia. Therefore, the information gathered may be a useful guide to course developers and to institutions involved in teleconferencing. The results of this research are also expected to provide information about teleconferencing to the Ministry of Education and may enable them to foster more teleconference learning sites in dual mode higher educational institutions.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

This study is mainly based on the review of related literature about the role of teleconferencing. The review of related literature will be compared with the role of teleconferencing at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara. Hence, the information gathered in this study will not reflect the role of teleconferencing in other sites of the University of Malaya. Nevertheless, it is essential to study the mode of instructional delivery used by the University to collect data on the effectiveness of teaching through teleconferencing.