

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the role of teleconferencing at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara. In addition, the discussion will also focus on the findings of the Student Questionnaire.

5.2 The Role of Teleconferencing at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara

University of Malaya is using teleconferencing as its main delivery system to conduct distance education programmes. Video teleconferencing courses has been offered to the distance students since it was launched officially by the Minister of Education, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak (Berita Universiti Malaya, 1996, p. 1). Teleconferencing programmes are offered by the University of Malaya with the cooperation of Telekom Malaysia Berhad.

Telekom Malaysia Berhad is in charge of providing the equipment and facilities for video teleconferencing. To date, they have provided six units of video teleconferencing equipment to the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Malaya, two units to the Faculty of Computer Science at the University of Malaya, and three units to the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara. The transmission is conducted by microwave. Thus, Telekom Malaysia plays an

important role in the video teleconferencing programmes organized by the University of Malaya.

5.2.1 The Centre for Distance Education at the University of Malaya

The Centre for Distance Education or Pusat Pendidikan Jarak Jauh (PJJ) was set up in order to coordinate and conduct distance courses to the remote learning sites all over Malaysia. The Centre for Distance Education is responsible for conducting both short and long term distance courses at the University of Malaya. In addition, the Centre for Distance Education is also responsible for the transmission of lectures to the distant students at the different learning sites. For instance, lectures are transmitted to the learning site at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara in Ipoh, Alor Star, Johor Baharu, Kota Bahru, Kota Kinabalu, Kuching and Kuantan.

The transmission room at the Centre for Distance Education is equipped with cameras, two units of television monitors and transmission is made possible through the use of a Codec system. One of the monitors is used to preview and the other is used to observe distant students at remote learning sites. The function of a Codec (coder and decoder) is to digitalize and code analog signals before transmitting them to the various learning sites, while at the receiving sites digital signals are decoded and converted to video signals.

However, the Centre for Distance Education has to ally with other faculties at the University of Malaya in order to present distance courses. At present the Centre for Distance Education is conducting courses for the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara distant students via video teleconferencing.

5.2.2 Distance Courses at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara

The courses that are offered by the University of Malaya through teleconferencing to Yayasan Pelajaran Mara are Bachelor in Malay Studies, Bachelor of Engineering, Bachelor of Computer Science and Certificate of Computer Science. The duration of each course varies according to the period set by the University as shown in Table 5.1,

Table 5.1: The Duration of Distance Courses at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara

| Course | Duration per course |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| Certificate of Computer Science | 6 months |
| Bachelor of Engineering | 3 years |
| Bachelor of Computer Science | 3 years |
| Bachelor of Malay Studies | 3 years |

The Certificate of Computer Science is a 6 month course while the Bachelor of Engineering, Bachelor of Computer Science and Bachelor of Malay Studies are 3 year courses. However, the students may extend their courses to 3½ years which is equivalent to seven semesters with the approval of the Senate. A student can take 12-18 credit hours of study per semester.

Most distant students at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara attend lectures via live video teleconferencing except for the students of the Bachelor of Malay Studies and Certificate of Computer Science studies. These students attend transmission of recorded lectures. The Bachelor of Engineering students

attend to their laboratory activities and tutorials at the main campus in the University of Malaya. In addition to this, these students have to attend a year of full time lectures in the University of Malaya during their final year.

The distant students at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara have to attend an hour of lecture and another hour of tutorial for each of the papers that they are taking. The Bachelor of Engineering students attend an hour of live transmission of lecture via video teleconferencing which is usually from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. every working day. After the session, they will have to attend an hour of tutorial at the University of Malaya. However, students of the Computer Science studies both for the Bachelor and Certificate level will have their lectures and tutorials at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara.

The Bachelor of Malay Studies was introduced at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara in 1997 and the students of this degree have to attend teleconferencing lectures that have been recorded earlier. However, these students get the privilege of attending live tutorials at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara itself. All the tutorials are transmitted from 8:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. every Monday, Tuesday and Thursday.

All students irrespective of courses have to attend four hours of English tutorials per week. The students of the Bachelor of Computer Science are lucky because English tutors go to the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara personally to conduct tutorials. Engineering students, however, will attend their English tutorials via teleconferencing.

The Certificate of Computer Science studies is a short term course which is conducted over 6 months. Most of the students are part-time students and have their own responsibilities. Therefore, classes are conducted on

Saturdays and Sundays only. Live tutorials are conducted on Saturdays via teleconferencing from 2:15 to 4:15 in the evening, and the same students attend transmission of recorded lectures from 4:15 to 6:30 in the evening. However, on Sundays recorded lectures are transmitted from the Centre for Distance Education from 8:00 a.m. till 12:00 p.m. and computer laboratory activities are from 2:00 to 4:00 in the evening.

Most of the time the Centre for Distance Education ensures smooth transmission of lectures and tutorials. However, if a particular lecturer is unable to deliver the lecture, then that lecturer will have to give prior notice to the Dean of the respective faculty. In this way, the transmission will proceed according to the schedule and the faculty will appoint another lecturer to replace the one who is unable to give the lecture.

The other alternative for the Centre for Distance Education is to play recorded lectures. Hence, transmission is seldom cancelled but unavoidable reasons such as electrical breakdown or malfunction of technical devices may cause cancellation of video teleconferencing. If this situation happens the officers or the technician in charge at the Centre for Distance Education will inform the main office at Telekom Malaysia Berhad at Jalan Raja Chulan, Kuala Lumpur to stop the transmission at once. On top of that, the distant students at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara will be informed by their coordinator if there are any changes in the time table.

Lecturers who are involved in teleconferencing are given briefing by the technician at the Centre for Distance Education at the beginning of each session. The lecturers therefore, are expected to conduct their courses to the distant students at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara smoothly. However, there is no

specific training is given to the lecturers at this moment. Furthermore, there are no specific modules prepared by the Centre for Distance Education for the lecturers to follow. However, the respective faculty decides the subject and content to be taught to the distant students.

One of the main advantages of teleconferencing is that the students are able to interact with their lecturer and peers at other learning sites. The engineering students at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara, for instance, are able to communicate with their peers at the Lecture Hall (Dewan Kuliah) in the University of Malaya during teleconferencing. This is made possible by the use of a Multipoint Control Unit System in teleconferencing which is provided by Telekom. Thus, the students at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara or at other learning sites can interact with their lecturer simultaneously and a two-way communication is made possible.

According to Encik Mazlan, the executive officer at the Centre for Distance Education, lecturers do not go to the learning sites to conduct lectures, tutorials or to meet their students. A coordinator and a technician are in charge of maintaining and helping the distant students at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara. However, no tutors are assigned to assist the distant students at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara during the transmission of lectures.

Distant students at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara are evaluated according to their assignments and examinations. The distant students are required to submit their assignment to their respective lecturers personally; through their friends or through the coordinator at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara. The coordinator will then send the assignments to the lecturers through a dispatcher from the University of Malaya. The distant students at the

Yayasan Pelajaran Mara are required to sit for the same examination as the on-campus students at University of Malaya and normally the examination centre is at the University of Malaya.

5.2.3 Transmission Receiving Rooms at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara

The transmission receiving rooms at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara are sound proof and air-conditioned. Each of the three rooms available are equipped with two speakers and four microphones which are used to enhance interaction between the students and the lecturer. These rooms are also equipped with a camera. There are two units of 29" monitor and a projector which can enlarge the images on the monitor to a screen placed in front of each room. Besides that, there is a document camera which is used to screen documents or text to the respective lecturer. There is also a tablet which functions as a control panel. This control panel can be activated by the students. This tablet when activated focuses on the student who is addressing the lecturer.

5.2.4 Coordination at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara

Encik Noor Idzwan bin Nordin is the coordinator of the University of Malaya distant courses offered at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara. His working hours are from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. with an hour for break from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. His duties as a coordinator are:

- to ensure the smooth flow of all distant courses at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara

- to ensure that the equipment used for teleconferencing are in good condition.
- to coordinate all programmes offered by the University of Malaya at the other learning sites such as the ones in Kota Bahru, Kota Kinabalu, Ipoh, Johor Bahru and Cheras.
- to represent the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara to discuss about the possibility of conducting new courses to the distant students via teleconferencing; for instance, new distance courses such as Masters in Education, Bachelor of Accountancy and Bachelor of Business Administration are in the planning stages.
- to make sure that details regarding the distant students are relayed to the respective faculties and also to the Centre for Distance Education. This includes taking students attendance and noting truancy.
- to ensure that the distant students are well informed about the latest development and changes regarding their courses, and
- to distribute study materials to the distant students on time.

5.2.5 Technical Support at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara

Encik Sharifuddin is the technician in charge at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara. He is involved in the maintenance of the teleconferencing devices. In addition to that, he is also responsible for informing the Telekom when technical faults or electrical breakdowns occur during teleconferencing sessions.

His duties also include checking all transmission receiving equipment half-hour earlier before every transmission session. The technician is also

required to be present at the learning site during every session of teleconferencing.

5.2.6 Facilities at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara

Since most of the students at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara are full time students they are allowed to use the on-campus facilities such as the library, counselling services and computer facilities at the University of Malaya. Encik Mazlan at the Centre for Distance Education said that all new enrolling distant students have to attend an orientation session conducted by the faculty.

The new distant students are also given a briefing by the coordinator of the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara regarding the facilities that are available at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara and the University of Malaya.

Distant students at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara can use the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara Library and it is open from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. every day, including Saturdays and Sundays. However, the library is closed for break from 6:00 - 7:30 every evening. The library is closed on public holidays.

Reference books for the Bachelor of Malay Studies are available at this library but the engineering students and computer science students have to get their references from the main library at the University of Malaya. The distant students at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara can borrow books for a week each time either from the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara Library or from the main Library in the University of Malaya. Apart from this, the library at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara has photocopier machines for the students to use.

Computer facilities are available for distant students at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara but the students have to get permission from the coordinator

beforehand. There are two computer laboratories at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara with 23 units of computers at Lab 1 and 24 units of computers at Lab 2.

However, Yayasan Pelajaran Mara does not have any counselling services for its distant students. These students have to go to the University of Malaya to get their counselling services. Furthermore, no extra co-curricular activities are organized for the distant students at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara whereas, the on-campus students at the University of Malaya enjoy such activities.

5.2.7 Loans

'Pinjaman Tabung Bantuan Nasional' is the only form of loan offered to the distant students at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara. The Centre for Distance Education is in charge of distributing the forms and normally notices are put out at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara and at the Centre for Distance Education to inform the distant students. The Ministry of Education, however, is in charge of processing and selecting successful candidates.

5.3 Findings of the Student Questionnaire

The analysis of data in Chapter 4 provides important information about the viewpoints of the distant students regarding the effectiveness of teleconferencing at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara.

One of the advantages in teleconferencing is it allows spontaneous interaction between students and lecturer and between students and their peers at other learning sites. However, the findings of this study show that the majority of the distant students at Yayasan Pelajaran Mara are not satisfied

with the level of interaction with their lecturer and peers at other learning sites. These students are also not satisfied with the preparation of lectures by their lecturers. The level of satisfaction regarding the use of visual images, audio quality and the content of their lectures via teleconferencing are about the same.

Whereas, regarding the level of dissatisfaction with teleconferencing, the students are slightly dissatisfied about the visual images during transmission. However, these findings show that the students gave misleading answers about their level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction regarding the use of visual images in their courses. They also face difficulties in concentrating and taking notes during lectures. A small number of students are 'dissatisfied' about the technical problems and the inability to see their lecturers during transmission.

The analysis of data in Chapter 4 also provides some important information about the effect of teleconferencing on students learning. The findings show that most of the students do not agree with the claim that teleconferencing increases their concentration during lectures. The majority of the students also do not agree to the statement that teleconferencing increases their interaction with their peers at other learning sites.

However, the data show that there is not much difference between those students who agree and who do not agree to the claim that note taking during teleconferencing influences their learning. Information gathered through this study shows that the students agree that it is difficult for them to communicate with their lecturer during lectures.

Most of the suggestions by the students in this study discuss the various aspects that should be improved in teleconferencing. The majority of the students wanted their lecture notes earlier so that they can prepare in advance for their lecture. In addition, the students also wanted a camera which is focuses on their lecturer. This interesting finding shows that the students want to see their lecturer during the lecture and they also expect to see non-verbal cues from their lecturer such as eye contact, smiles and other body movements (Walker & Hackman, 1992, p. 86; Lovell, 1986, p. 130).

Apart from that, the students suggested that equal attention should be paid by the lecturer to both the distant students at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara and to the on-campus students at the University of Malaya. The above suggestions seem to indicate that distant students at the Yayasan Pelajaran Mara are expecting more attention from their lecturers.