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Instructional Design Training for ICT-Based Distance Learning In Asia

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Introduction

Ironically, one of the most neglected aspects of educational delivery is the design of the content itself. Copious amounts of information are available in the principles of effective educational design, though it seems likely that these are rarely considered in the day-to-day preparation of educational materials. The primary objective of the current project was to ascertain the needs of DE institutions, faculty members and materials developers for training in instructional design across domain/discipline areas and media types. A training needs survey was conducted to determine:

1)   the main responsibilities of the faculty and staff members performing instructional design tasks;
2)   whether or not instructional designers in the open universities involved have had formal training in instructional design;
3)   the types of training instructional designers have had; and
4)   specific topics that instructional designers would include in an instructional design training course.

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Procedure

The survey was conducted among instructional designers from the Open University Malaysia (OUM), Sokhuthai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) of Thailand, Universitas Terbuka (UT) of Indonesia and the University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU). A two-page survey instrument designed and pre-tested among instructional designers at IGNOU in New Delhi was used. Contacts at these universities were identified through their rectors before and during the 19th AAOU Annual Conference in Jakarta, Indonesia (2005). Copies of the survey questionnaire were distributed to the contacts, who asked the instructional designers at their universities to complete the questionnaire. Since not all the instructional designers would be attending the AAOU conference, the contacts were given two weeks in which to retrieve the accomplished questionnaires, and to send them to the researchers.

The principal investigator also interviewed officials and representative instructional designers at UT in Jakarta, and officials from the Open University Malaysia (OUM), who were attending the AAOU conference. A week after the conference, the principal investigator visited STOU, and interviewed university executives and instructional designers. As before, the STOU contact was given ample time to distribute/ retrieve new questionnaires.

Results of the Survey

Out of a potential respondent number of about 80, based on estimates by contacts, the project retrieved 38 usable questionnaires. Data were processed using descriptive statistics.

1)   Demographic Information.

Nine of the 38 respondents are from the OUM, 8 from STOU, 11 from UT, and 10 from the UPOU. The majority of respondents were either assistant professors/ lecturers (34%), or associate professors (32%). Over half of them hold a master's degree, over a quarter hold a doctorate degree, and about one-fifth have earned a bachelor's degree only. More than a third of the respondents claimed they have been doing instructional design work during the last 1-5 years, and over a quarter said they have done so in the last

16-20 years. Over half said they have been doing ID work for more than 11 years, which means they have ample ID experience.

2) ID Responsibilities.

When asked about their main responsibilities, the respondents claimed to be doing varied tasks associated with ID work. Many of them claimed to be responsible for more than one ID activity. The specific tasks by more than 50% of the respondents included:

- designing, developing, and evaluating instructional materials and programs (82%);
- providing consultation and advice to colleagues on ID matters (60%);
- organising and making presentations in ID training sessions (54%);
- conducting formative and summative evaluations (53%);
- designing lessons, developing assessment instruments, and measuring student learning (53%);
- conducting needs analyses (37%); and
- undertaking research and evaluation (50%).

3) Relationship Between ID Responsibilities and Training.

A cross-tabulation of responses relating to the respondents' training and their designation as ID specialists indicated that the majority (60%) of those designated responsible for ID work have had formal training in ID. Only 21% claimed that they did not have any formal ID training. Fifty-eight per cent of the sample believes that their main role is as a full-time faculty member who also does ID work. That is to say, teaching is only one of their functions. A third of the sample (37%) claims to be a full-time ID practitioner.

4) Nature of ID Training Experienced

Those who claimed to have had formal training in ID were also asked about the nature of their training. Seventy-four per cent of them indicated that they had attended workshops and short courses on ID, and 32% had been in formal ID courses. Three respondents claimed to have earned degrees on ID topics. Sixty-three per cent of them indicated that the courses they have attended dealt with ID principles. Other respondents had taken

part in courses on the development of web-based material, open and distance learning, and development of non-print materials. Most of the ID specialists of the four open universities participating in the survey appear to have all had the benefit of recent training. Over 60% claim to have undergone ID training in the last five years. One respondent stated that s/he received such training more than 25 years ago.

When asked whether or not their respective open universities conduct in-house training in ID, 63% reported that they did. Twelve individuals (32%) said in-house ID training is not available to them. Of the 24 respondents who reported that their open universities offer in-house training, 21 reported that their courses dealt with ID principles, while others said their training dealt with the development of DE materials. Other in-house training included the development of evaluation and assessment instruments, online teaching and learning materials, DE management and needs analysis. Respondents from institutions running their own training courses were also asked about the sources of their training materials. The majority (68%) reported that their ID faculty members were the ones who produce their training materials. Thirty-seven per cent reported that they depended on training materials from other universities, or from external consultants (34%).

5) Self-Ratings as IDs.

In their ID functions, 47% of the respondents reported that they employ Gagne's model of ID. Others claim to follow the ADDIE model (32%), Dick & Carey model (29%), or a constructivist model (26%). The ID specialists in these open universities evidently follow generally accepted ID principles. An interesting result of the survey, however, is that 63% of the respondents claim to be proficient as IDs but state that they still need additional training. In other words, it is clear that they are not satisfied with their current levels of ID skill. Only 8% claimed to be very proficient in ID.

A number of specific topics were suggested that should be included in ID training courses. For example, methods and media were mentioned by over half of the sample. Additional topics were: design of lessons plans (47%), and application of research results and theory (47%), curriculum design (45%), evaluation techniques (37%), and needs analysis (32%).

6) <u>Recommendations for ID training</u>.

When asked where they would prefer an ID training course to be held, the majority (71%) said they did not really care. Twenty-four per cent, however, looked forward to attending an ID training course at another open university in the region. Only one respondent said that the training should be in-house.

Since they also qualify as trainers, the sample was asked what role they would take in an ID training course. Eighty per cent said they would prefer to participate as trainees. Only 8 respondents would offer their services as trainers. Of these, all felt they would be ready to handle topics like "development of instructional materials" and "principles of instructional design". Other topics they said they could handle include media selection and production, curriculum design, needs analysis, monitoring and evaluation, and lesson plan preparation. Eighty-four per cent said that they would prefer blended training (online combined with face-to-face), while 30% said they would prefer completely face-to-face training. Only 3 respondents said they would attend online training, and 2 said they would prefer printed toolkits. As to the duration of the training, no consensus was expressed: 37% said that 30 days would be enough if the training took a blended form. The 9 respondents who suggested face-to-face training said that 7 days would be enough for it.

Conclusions

The study examined the instructional design training of materials designers and faculty members at four Asian open universities. While the majority of respondents claim to have received training in theoretical and practical aspects of instructional design, few of them express confidence in their grasp of principles involved. Most stated that they would willingly attend new programmes of training on the topic, designed to increase the educational effectiveness of the learning materials they create.