

Distance Education in Asia: the PANDora Guidebook

A series of modules
assisting the Asian development
of open and distance learning

Produced by the members of the
PANDora distance education
research network (2005-08)
representing institutions in 14 Asian countries

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The PANDora research network is a
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MODULE: 1a) Index, background, acknowledgments
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 - e) Virtual University of Pakistan (VUP)
 - f) Wawasan Open University (WOU), Malaysia

Background

The **PANdora Distance Education Guidebook** has been created to help in the development of distance education (DE) in Asia. Its modular contents can be downloaded from www.pandora-asia.org/guidebook/ for translation into local languages, in keeping with the PANdora network's Open Resources philosophy. The Guidebook editors will be pleased to hear from anyone who downloads and uses any of this material ([e-mail: jon@baggaley.com](mailto:jon@baggaley.com)). In reusing Guidebook material in its original form or in local language adaptations, users are asked to add the following acknowledgement:

“This material is adapted from the PANdora Distance Education Guidebook sponsored by the IDRC’s Pan Asia Networking Programme Initiative (www.pandora-asia.org/guidebook/).”

The **Guidebook** is one of the outputs of the collaborative *PANdora* research and development initiative (2005-08) between 24 open and distance learning (ODL) institutions, government departments, and non-governmental organisations in 13 Asian countries. The *PANdora* project is funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC: www.idrc.ca)

PANdora stands for ‘Pan-Asia Network Distance Open Resource Access’. In keeping with the philosophy of open access to educational resources, the Guidebooks contents are made freely available for sharing and local translation. Asian interests in ODL are stressed. The Guidebook is modular in design, so that individual sections can easily be updated and selected according to the user’s specific needs.

From 2005-08, the *PANdora* network has conducted research and development studies in the following areas, stressing the development and evaluation of distance learning (DL) technologies:

1. Accessibility, Acceptance and Effects of DLT in Bhutan, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka
2. The Viability of Mobile SMS Technologies for Non-formal DL in Mongolia and the Philippines
3. Evaluation and Adaptation of Open Source Software for DL in Cambodia, Mongolia and Sri Lanka
4. Distance-based Teacher Education in Bhutan
5. Instructional Design Training for ICT-based DL in Asia
6. A Repository of Reusable Learning Objects for DL in Indonesia and Thailand
7. E-assessment Methods and Models for Student Evaluation in Pakistan
8. Best practices in DL Technology for Capacity Building in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam
9. Evaluation of DL Practices for Policy Recommendations in China and Mongolia

Details of the 2005-08 *PANdora* projects are given at www.pandora-asia.org/. Full project reports to date have been published in the international journal *Distance Education* (2007, vol. 28, no. 2), and in books and journals listed on the *PANdora* web site.

Institutions contributing to the *PANdora* network (2005-08) include:

- Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Pakistan
- Beijing Normal University (BNU), China
- English for Special Purposes Foundation (ESPF), Mongolia
- Fisheries College, Bac Ninh, Vietnam
- Health Sciences University of Mongolia (HSUM)
- Ho Chi Minh City Open University (HCMCOU), Vietnam
- ICT4D ASEAN Foundation Collaboratory, Indonesia
- Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), India
- InfoCon Ltd, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
- Institute of Information Technology (IIT), Vietnam
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS), Cambodia
- Molave Development Foundation, Philippines
- National Science Council, Lao PDR

- Phnom Penh International University (PPIU), Cambodia
- Royal Government of Cambodia
- Samtse College of Education, Royal University of Bhutan (RUB)
- Science Technology and Environment Agency (STEA), Laos
- Sukothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU), Thailand
- Universitas Terbuka (UT), Indonesia: *PANdora project co-leader*
- University of Colombo School of Computing (UCSC), Sri Lanka
- University of Hong Kong (UHK)
- University of Philippines Open University (UPOU)
- Vigyan Prasar, Department of Science & Technology, Government of India
- Virtual University of Pakistan (VU): *PANdora project co-leader*

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- Buyandelger Batsaikhan (Learning management systems)
- Chang Yeul Yang (KNOU report)
- Dewi Padmo (Media production)
- Kristanti Ambar Puspitasari (Student assessment)
- Sana Shams, Sarmad Hussain, and Atif Mirza (Gender and outcome mapping)
- Santosh Panda (Instructional design and course development)
- Chen Haishan and Li Yawan (CRTVU report)
- STOU International Affairs Unit (STOU report)
- Ludivica Setyorini and Irma Adnan (UT report)

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Foreword

I welcome this edition of the *PANdora Distance Education Guidebook*, the result of four years of collaborative research and analysis involving 24 Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions in Asia. Included in the list are some of Asia's and the world's largest universities, as well as a few of the newest and much smaller establishments. Together the materials present a valuable insight into the workings of ODL provisions in the participating institutions and countries. It is all the more interesting simply because the studies are focused on developing country environments where the concerns for digital divides and digital dividends are most talked about.

More than any other part of the world, access to learning and the benefits of learning are much sought-after and valued services in Asia. The 3.7 billion people who make up the Asian continent cannot get enough education and are among the most deprived in terms of access to it. As recently as 2006, an East-West Center report put enrolment in higher education in the continent at below 8% (Hawkins & Ordonez, 2007). This could be misleading as participation in the middle and higher income Asian countries is well on par with their counterparts in the west and the Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD). Nonetheless, if one includes provisions for lifelong and continuing education, deprivation levels in Asia are considerable. ODL in its variety of forms therefore provides much needed access.

There is little doubt that ODL provisions are gaining ground and respectability, at least in policy-making levels across the continent. That was certainly not the case twenty years ago when the IDRC sponsored a study of distance education in Asia (Nielsen, 1988). That study clearly showed the levels of skepticism that existed, especially at policy-making levels both nationally and internationally, to an educational innovation which had a great appeal to many forward-thinking educators. From appreciation at policy-making forums to acceptance at the general population level is a very long step, however. Advocates of ODL still have a large task ahead of them. They can be successful in their efforts to promote greater understanding and appreciation of ODL if more knowledge and information is available about the practice. This Guidebook is a great help in this.

The practice of ODL, as most other provisions in education, generally evolves with the increasing sophistication of learning technologies. While text material, traditionally the backbone of most open universities, continues to play an important role, the use of print technology for conveying the text is gradually being replaced by other technologies which have added advantages to both the providers and users. However the uses of sophisticated technologies are not without problems and challenges. These challenges are not unique to Asia but they are exacerbated, in most parts of the continent, by inadequate infrastructure, prohibitive costs, and unreliable telecommunication services, as well as a widespread lack of trained technical manpower.

It is therefore very satisfying to note the extent to which the Asian distance teaching institutions and open universities represented in the Guidebook are applying learning technologies to their trade. There are valuable lessons to be learned from their experiences. Questions of sustainability, leadership, curricular innovations in a technology-driven environment, and the value of the learning experience all matter to those actively engaged in ODL.

Thirty-five years ago, long before the establishment of the Asian Association of Open Universities, about one hundred delegates from most parts of Asia, and a handful of invitees from Australia, Europe and North America met in Penang, Malaysia, to explore a 'new' idea called open and distance learning. By then Asia had two Open Universities (Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University and Allama Iqbal Open University), both a year or so old. Delegates were sharing experiences in distance rather than open learning. Among the subjects explored were technology, curriculum, leadership, management, student support, financing and legislation. Though the technological environment has changed since then, most of the other concerns that confront distance educators today are not dissimilar to those confronted then, except perhaps for one critical difference. Then, knowledge of ODL praxis came mostly from the North; today it may not be wrong to say, as this Guidebook demonstrates, knowledge from the South, especially Asia, is prolific and therefore even more relevant to the Guidebook's readers.

With examples from the mega, older and more established Open Universities in China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Thailand, as well as from emerging and smaller distance education providers in Bhutan, Cambodia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Lao PDR, the Philippines, and Vietnam, the Guidebook is a valuable resource for all those interested or engaged in Open and Distance Learning. It enhances our knowledge of ODL activities in Asia, and contributes enormously to the growing base of distance education literature in the world.

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January 2008

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The Guidebook contains references to numerous literature sources. For Asian researchers and practitioners, many of these are difficult to obtain. Online sources, however, are relatively easy to locate. This section collates all of the online references contained in the Guidebook and in the accompanying *PANdora* volume: *Distance Education Technology in Asia, Parts 1* (Lahore: Virtual University of Pakistan, 2007).

All of the references listed below were successfully retrieved on the same date (30 November 2007). Their web addresses will be periodically checked, and out-of-date addresses will be corrected in the Guidebook's online edition. The Editors will appreciate learning of any out-of-date addresses that users may discover meanwhile. E-mail: <baggaley@athabascau.ca> and <tian.belawati@gmail.com>.

DE and ODL series

The following DE and ODL series each contain editions of relevance to DE technology research and practice, many of them downloadable.

- *Asia-Pacific Knowledge Base on Open Distance Learning*:
asiapacific-odl.oum.edu.my/
- Commonwealth of Learning (COL) *Knowledge Series*:
www.col.org/colweb/site/pid/3129
Recent editions:
 - Norman, S. & Porter, D. (2007) *Designing Learning Objects for Online Learning*.
 - Traxler, J. & Kukulska-Hulme (2005) *Mobile Learning in Developing Countries*.
- Commonwealth of Learning (COL): *Practitioner Research and Evaluation Skills Training* (PREST)
www.col.org/colweb/site/pid/3147
- Digital review of Asia-Pacific (2007-08 update): www.digital-review.org/
- Routledge Series on:
 - Open and Flexible Learning*
 - Studies in Distance Education*; and
 - World Review of Distance Education*:
www.routledge.com/catalogues/0418675503.pdfRecent edition:
 - Perraton, H. (2007) *Open and Distance Learning in the Developing World*, 2nd edition (Studies in Distance Education series).
- UNESCO Bangkok: *ICT in Education Series*
www.unescobkk.org/index.php?id=798

Selected titles:

Meta-survey on the Use of Technologies in Asia and the Pacific (2003-2004)

Performance Indicators for ICT in Education (2003)

Teacher Training on ICT Use in Education in Asia and the Pacific (2003)

PANdora network members: recent books include

- Mukhopadhyay, S. & Kamble, V.B. (2006). *Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Gender*. New Delhi: Vigyan Prasar.
- *Partners in Progress: a felicitation volume in honour of Vidya Jyothi Prof. V.K. Samaranayake* (2007). Colombo: Godage.

Online sources

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Part 1: Browsing speeds: www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/438/917
Part 2: Internet routes: www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/447/910
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