

Open distance learning: Delivering linguistics and education courses in a blended learning environment

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Abstract

Taking cognisance of working adults' aspiration for career advancement, Wawasan Open University (WOU) has been established as the third open university in Malaysia to provide tertiary education via the Open Distance Learning (ODL) mode. This is in line with the country's Vision 2020 (Office of the Prime Minister, Putrajaya, Malaysia, 2010) to steer the country towards a fully developed nation by the year 2020. In this quest, it recognises that "our people are our ultimate resource [and that] Malaysia must give the fullest emphasis possible to the development of this ultimate resource ... [in terms of] the skills of our people ... and knowledge upgrading and self-improvement" (the way forward, p 3). This paper describes WOU's experience in and model for providing such distance education with a focus on the courses offered by the School of Education, Languages and Communications (SELCO). Specifically, it examines the different aspects put in place to sustain and support students' learning which include, but are not limited to, the physical infrastructure, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) facilities and learner support. It concludes with a discussion of some potential pitfalls to avoid and measures for addressing them.

Keywords: *Learner Management System (LMS), learner support, Online Assignment Submission (OAS) system online learning, Open Distance Learning (ODL), Turnitin, working adults*

Introduction

Open and Distance Education has liberalised and revolutionised the educational landscape in the past decades by providing students greater access to tertiary education with affordable fees and the flexibility of learning that is not bound by the constraints of space and time. In Asia, this is evidenced by the establishment of "very large 'dedicated' distance teaching universities e.g. [in] Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bangladesh, Indonesia; others such as Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore have in place much smaller scale operations" (Dhanarajan, 2009, p. 3).

To function effectively, these distance-learning universities need to have in place basic essentials, the chief of which are material design and production, establishment and management of a Learner Management System (LMS) and the provision of learner support and guidance.

Leveraging its edge in capacity building, Wawasan Open University (WOU) was established with a view to providing working adult learners with the opportunity to fulfill their aspiration of having a tertiary education qualification without having to leave their jobs. Given the students' family and work commitments, WOU has adopted the blended learning approach to afford students with the option of attending traditional face-to-face tutorials to supplement the online component of their courses. According to Ausburn (as cited in Ellis, Hanington, Ong & Wilkinson, 2012), this type of presentation has become increasingly popular:

There has, in fact, been considerable support in recent literature for the Internet plus face-to-face blended or hybrid model that joins technology, campuses and people. Some believe that mixing bricks and clicks may be the ideal learning structure for non-traditional adult learners. (p. 73).

Wawasan Open University (WOU): Background

Established in 2006 as the third open learning institution in Malaysia (Loo, 2014), Wawasan Open University provides working adults with the opportunities to pursue tertiary education through the open learning distance mode (ODL), the main mode of delivery for the majority of the courses offered even though it has also begun catering to the needs of school leavers through the on campus learning mode (OCL) since Jan 2014.

Based on the statistics in *Malaysian Qualification Assurance (MQA) Document: Bachelor of Arts in English Studies (BAES)* (Wawasan Open University, n.d.), working adults make up 75% of the population ranging from the ages of 21 to 71 years of age with the majority coming from the age group of 21 to 35 years old (part C, area 1, p. 1). Taking cognisance of the fact that these are mature students with work and family commitments pursuing lifelong learning, the courses at WOU are delivered on a blended study mode consisting of two main components i.e. face-to-face tutorials and online learning via *WawasanLearn*, the university's Learning Management System (LMS).

Under the ODL mode, students have the choice of attending any of the five face-to-face tutorials conducted on the main campus in Penang and various regional centres nationwide in addition to the main online discussion forums and course materials on the LMS. These regional centres are located in Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, Johor Baru and Kuching apart from three other regional offices in Petaling Jaya, Klang and Subang that provide learner support to students.

As these are mostly self-funded adults pursuing lifelong learning, they are highly motivated, self-directed and autonomous in their approach to learning, traits which are suited for the blended study mode.

As a Malaysian university, WOU's programmes are designed to meet the needs of a knowledge society (Drucker, 1994) by equipping her graduates with skills and knowledge that are relevant to the needs of the market and industry, hence developing knowledge workers that contribute to the development of the country and its aspiration to achieve a fully developed nation by the year 2020 (Office of the Prime Minister, Putrajaya, Malaysia, 2010).

Central to a knowledge society is the availability of upward mobility (Drucker, 1994) to everyone through formal education, regardless of age, time and location. As regards this, WOU is well positioned to provide working adult learners with the opportunity to upgrade their knowledge and skills through part-time study by harnessing the latest developments in Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

School of Education, Languages and Communications (SELC): Background and Programmes

Among the 4 schools at WOU, the School of Education, Languages and Communications (SELC) was set up in 2009 to provide programmes at degree, postgraduate and PhD levels in the areas of education, languages and communications in tandem with the needs of the country for qualified teachers, lecturers, education institution administrators, editors, writers and other related vocations. These programmes are fully accredited or in the process of being accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency, MQA. According to The Official Portal of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency, Kementerian Pendidikan

Malaysia (2013), MQA is a statutory body established under the Malaysian Qualifications Agency Act 2007 to oversee “quality assurance of higher education for both the public and private sectors” (MQA at a glance, para. 1).

Currently, SELC offers 2 undergraduate programmes namely Bachelor of Education (Hons) in Primary Education (BEPE) and Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in English Studies (BAES), both of which provide working adults with the opportunities to further their professional and academic qualifications in these areas.

The 121-credit BEPE programme targets in-service teachers in primary schools who plan to upgrade their qualifications from Diploma or Certificate in Education to a degree on a part-time basis without having to leave their workplace and families. The completion of BEPE will qualify graduates for appointment as Graduate Teachers in primary schools (Wawasan Open University, 2015a).

On the other hand, the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in English Studies (BAES) programme requires students to undertake 121 or 123 credits of studies in one of the two core minors i.e. Language and Literature and Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL). Diverse career opportunities are open to graduates from school teachers to journalists, editors and copywriters (Wawasan Open University, 2014).

At postgraduate level, SELC offers Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programme and Master of Education (M. Ed.). The former is a thirty-three-credit programme that caters to graduate teachers without a teaching qualification (Wawasan Open University 2015d). whereas the latter is a forty-five credit programme with two strands of specialisation in Education Management and Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL) (Wawasan Open University, 2015c).

SELC also recently launched its Doctor of Philosophy in Arts and Humanities based on research work that enables students to undertake an in-depth research in an area of interest culminating in a written thesis. This in turn contributes to or expand on knowledge in the field of research. (Wawasan Open University, 2015b).

Entry Requirements: Open Entry System

The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has approved WOU, with another six universities in Malaysia, to admit students via the open entry system. This system admits mature students above 20 years old for undergraduates and above 34 years old for postgraduates with minimal qualifications based on MOHE’s conditions (Liew & Teoh, 2012).

Specifically, these students must possess at least one Principal in STPM / HSC /A-Levels. For students without these pre-university qualifications, they must have PMR / SPM / MCE /UEC Senior Middle III or other equivalent high school qualifications with work experience based on the university’s assessment (Wawasan Open University, 2014).

For candidates without formal qualification, they can take the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) assessment conducted by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) (Wawasan Open University, 2014).

Course duration: Flexible Progression Pathways

In its effort to promote life-long learning, SELC provides students with the flexibility of deciding the number of Open Distance Learning (ODL) courses to study in each semester, taking into account students’ work and family commitments and financial capability, among other considerations. As students are not

constrained by a maximum duration to complete their studies, they take ownership in pacing their own studies with the leeway of opting to take a break from their studies for one or several semesters in between.

Student Profiles

The majority of students from SELC are adult learners with working and family commitments with the aspiration of pursuing tertiary qualification in a move to upgrade their qualifications for better work prospects, especially in the field of education. This calls for learners to develop independent learning, self-discipline and good time management skills that the ODL courses help to promote by providing adequate learner support.

As many of these aspiring teachers and educators are already teaching in educational institutions, their work experience stands them in good stead in reinforcing their studies and vice versa.

Course Delivery Modes: WOU and Conventional Universities Compared

The following table highlights some of the main differences between WOU (an ODL institution) and the traditional / conventional universities in a number of areas:

Area	Conventional / Traditional Universities	WOU (ODL mode)
Access	Limited to traditional campus-based universities	Overcome barriers to access arising from geographical remoteness and other barriers
Student	19 – 23 years old	21 – 71 years old
Academic background	Fairly similar (post STPM i.e. local pre-university qualification)	Very varied (MOHE Open Entry System: PMR i.e. local lower secondary school qualification to PhD)
Experience	Minimal	Extensive
Approach	Teacher centred	Learner centred
Mode	Lectures & tutorials	Self-learning, online learning, tutorials and video tutorials
Time & place	Fixed	Flexible
Learning materials/resources	Lecture notes Library (E-Lib)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-instructional learning materials in multimedia format through study guides, web-based materials, CD ROMs • Online Learning Management Systems • E-library
Accommodation for students	Hostels	Homes
Study Environment	Campus	Office/ Homes

Figure 1: WOU and Conventional Universities Compared

Adapted from: Part C. Information on area 1: Vision, mission, educational goals and learning outcomes. In Wawasan Open University, *Malaysian Qualification Assurance (MQA) Document: Bachelor of Arts in English Studies (BAES)* (p. 5-6). Wawasan Open University: Penang.

Tutorials Sessions for Open Distance Learning (ODL) Courses

Depending on the class sizes, five scheduled tutorials are conducted via various modes such as face-to-face, video conferencing (VC) or Skype by part-time tutors with approximately one-month interval in between.

These tutorials are conducted concurrently at the various Regional Centres (RCs) in Penang (PGRC), Ipoh (IPRC), Kuala Lumpur (KLRC), Johor Baru (JBRC) and Kuching (KCRC), depending on the enrolments at each RC. For courses with face-to-face tutorials, a tutor is appointed in each RC to conduct the tutorials whereas for VC and Skype tutorials, they are usually anchored from one RC to other RCs.

A course can have a flexible combination of tutorial modes based on the class size at each RC. For example, a course is conducted via face-to-face mode in Penang with a large class whereas it is conducted via VC / Skype mode anchored from KL to Ipoh and JB where student numbers are small in these three RCs. As there is no student enrolment in Kuching, the class for the course there is closed.

The five tutorials correspond to the five course units, with each tutorial of two hours focusing on one unit. As such, students are expected to do the relevant reading and discussion points are posted by a tutor on the Learner Management System (LMS) prior to the tutorial to facilitate a meaningful and focused discussion in each tutorial. Tutors go through the course unit PowerPoint slides – generic or tutor-specific – to highlight salient points and to scaffold students' learning.

Although attendance is not compulsory, students are strongly encouraged to attend the tutorials to engage in discussion on the course materials and Tutor-marked Assignments (TMAs), a process that affords students the opportunity to enrich their perspectives and to have their queries clarified by their course mates and tutor.

Learner Support

A multiplicity of provisions of learner support is put in place to help students achieve their course learning outcomes and hence, succeed in their study. Among these provisions are scheduled tutorials, Learning Management System (LMS), consultation sessions and library resources. This is in line with the blended learning pedagogy adopted by distance education institutions involving three learning modes “i.e. self-study, online learning and face-to-face interaction” (Wawasan Open University, Unit 4, n.d., p. 3).

Apart from conducting tutorials, tutors are required to allocate telephone consultation time for students to clarify their queries. Students are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this support to seek guidance and advice from their tutors.

In addition to the course units on *WawasanLearn*, the course Moodle based LMS, students are also supported by supplementary materials, relevant online links, forum discussions and exchanges with course mates, tutor and course co-ordinator. The supplementary materials are sourced from book chapters, research journal articles and Open Educational Resources (OER), online video and audio clips, among others. The

use of different media to supplement the course materials on the LMS serve to deliver the course more effectively by catering to differing learning styles and preferences.

The university is also equipped with extensive electronic library resources which students can access online anywhere anytime in their study and in completion of their TMAs. At the Regional Centre (RC) level, staff members are on hand to help students, and facilities such as computer labs, libraries and free access computer terminals are provided.

Course Presentation / Materials

Instead of using prescribed text books, WOU commissioned content specialists in their respective areas to write course materials that cater to the needs of ODL learners. As such, the course materials are written to approximate tutor explanations so that they are highly readable and accessible to students as they engage in their independent study. As regards this, the materials are organized under different units and sections to guide and pace students' learning.

The Course Guide provides an overview and preview of the course, outlining the aims, learning outcomes, objectives, course materials, a suggested study schedule, recommended learning strategies and assessment, among others. Such crucial information helps to manage students' expectations and prepare them for their tutorials.

Each of the five study units are designed to be reader friendly and to facilitate self-study with the following sections (Wawasan Open University, Unit 4, n.d., p. 9):

Introduction / Overview

Sets of specific objectives

Text

Guided reading

Activities, often with commentaries

Self-tests, usually with feedback

Summary

Reference list

The Introduction section leads students into the materials by activating students' schemata, hence linking their previous background knowledge from earlier units or other courses to what they are learning in the present unit. The unit objectives clarify what students are expected to know from each unit.

The body of each unit is presented in short manageable sections under different sub-headings that can be completed in one sitting so as not to overwhelm students with too much information. The whole unit which can be completed in about three hours (Wawasan Open University, Unit 4, n.d., p. 10) are punctuated with learning activities, in-text questions and self-assessment questions to promote self-study, self-checks and self-reflection. Suggested answers, commentary and feedback are provided at the end of each unit to guide students in their answers.

A summary at the end of each unit consolidates students' learning and prepares them for the next unit. This is followed by a reference list that directs students to relevant resources for further reading. Some units may also include a glossary of key concepts and other notes.

Development of Course Materials

To ensure that they are of high quality, the development of course materials undergoes a rigorous process involving a Course Development Team (CDT) that comprises various parties ranging from content experts (writers) to instructional designers and language editors. As part of Quality Assurance, an External Course Assessor (ECA) is engaged to review and suggest revisions to the materials produced by the writers (Wawasan Open University, Part C, Area 2, BAES, n.d., p. 5).

The end product is a set of comprehensive self-study pedagogically designed course materials that are then uploaded in the form of PDF files to *WawasanLearn*, WOU's Learning Management System (LMS), comprising a Course Guide and five Course Units for students to access. Contemporary issues, self-reflection activities and discussion points are also incorporated into the course materials to foster meaningful exchanges in tutorials and online forums.

Central to this process is the determination of course learning outcomes that takes into account the level of study and the level of anticipated cognitive skills by Bloom (1956). Specifically, these learning outcomes factor in the following considerations (Wawasan Open University, Part C, Area 2, BAES, n.d., p. 5, 6):

- The needs of industry, workplace knowledge and skills
- The overall programme goals
- The alignment with assessment criteria

The following diagram summarises the pathway taken to identify the course learning outcomes:

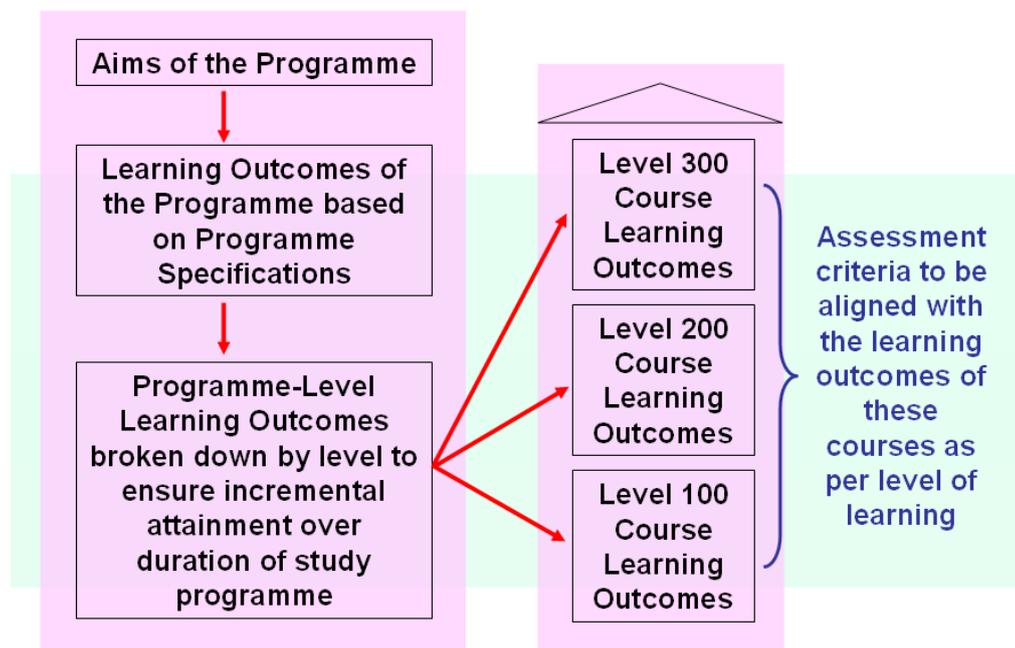


Figure 2: The Learning Outcome Identification Process

Source: Wawasan Open University (n.d.). Part C. Information on area 2: Programme design and delivery. In Wawasan Open University, *Malaysian Qualification Assurance (MQA) Document: Bachelor of Arts in English Studies (BAES)* (p. 6). Wawasan Open University: Penang.

Characteristics of Learning Materials in WOU

This section describes some of the key characteristics of WOU learning materials to cater to the needs and profiles of ODL students (Wawasan Open University, Unit 4, n.d., p. 5, 6).

1. Use of Informal Conversational Style of Writing

To enhance their readability and accessibility in an Open Distance Learning (ODL) environment, the learning materials are written in informal conversational style to ease students' comprehension of potential difficult concepts, hence motivating students in their study. Wherever possible, visuals such as pictures, diagrams, graphs and tables are presented to complement the texts. All these are crucial to pique students' interest in a subject and develop their self-esteem.

2. Stimulating Interaction

Related to the conversational style of writing, the course materials simulate conversation between the course writer and the students in the absence of frequent tutorial sessions. Such a personalised feature to stimulate interaction is further enhanced by interactive activities and well-designed self-assessment tasks.

3. Activating Background Knowledge

In order to scaffold students' learning, the course materials foreground the relevance of new knowledge in relation to students' existing knowledge and needs. Such nexus is central to promoting effective learning as students are made to see the purpose of their learning. As such, the introduction section of the course materials incorporates and reviews previous learning materials as pre-requisite knowledge for the new learning task. In addition, each unit is preceded by a set of clearly defined objectives to activate students' schemata. The summary and conclusion section again consolidate learning and reinforce such link.

4. Interactive Assessment Formats

Another feature that enhances the readability of the course materials is the interactive assessment formats comprising activities and self-assessment questions that are provided at appropriate junctures of the course unit to help students gauge their comprehension of potentially problematic concepts, to reflect on the preceding discussion and to apply their newly acquired knowledge. Students can then check their answers / responses against suggested answers and commentary provided.

The two Tutor-marked Assignments (TMAs) that accompany each course serve as both assessment for learning and assessment of learning as they account for part of the course assessment and also prepare students for their Final Exam. The qualitative feedback from tutors on their TMAs identifies both strengths and weaknesses which students should work on for further improvement.

Learning Management System (LMS)

Introduced in 2007, *WawasanLearn* is a Moodle based Learning Management System (LMS) that serves to provide online support to our students enrolled in Open Distance Learning (ODL) courses at WOU. It is the online platform for course presentation in which course materials, supplementary materials, Tutor-marked Assignments (TMAs), specimen Final Exam papers, online quizzes, updates and announcements, among others, are uploaded and posted.

WawasanLearn enables synchronous and asynchronous communication among its users where the former involves real-time or 'live' interaction such as online forum and chat room whereas the latter occurs with some time lapse. Examples of these are emails and announcements.

Via online forums, chat room and announcements, tutors and the course coordinator post updates and reminders to students and students can have their queries clarified by the tutors and course coordinator.

The system also features an individual Tutorial Forum that allows the respective tutor and students in each tutorial group to communicate with each other at the Regional Centre level instead of the course level. This prevents posting on specific matters related to a tutorial group from clogging up the online forum and, more importantly, it affords students the confidence to participate in online discussion and share their thoughts.

For administrative purposes, the LMS gives access to the course coordinator to monitor discussion and postings in all the individual tutorial forums and to intervene whenever necessary to remedy occurrences of misinformation or irrelevant discussion and postings. Participation and access of the course LMS can also be monitored by the course coordinator in terms of access dates and time, hence managing students who have not been accessing the LMS consistently.

There is also a separate Guide for Tutors section that is only open to the tutors and course coordinator. There, confidential materials such as assignment marking schemes and tutor guides are posted. The course coordinator can also utilise the CC-Tutor forum to communicate with the tutors on course administration, among other matters.

To facilitate the navigation between various course-related online sites, students can click on various hyperlinks in the course LMS that will connect them to other online services such as the Student Portal, the Online Assignment Submission (OAS) system, WOU Digital Library and *Turnitin*, an online text-matching learning tool. To illustrate, the Appendix section provides LMS interface screenshots of selected main sections of the course EED219/05 Foundation in Education, a course taken by PGDE students.

Course Assessment

To evaluate students' achievement of the course learning outcomes, each Open Distance Learning (ODL) course offered by the School of Education, Languages and Communications (SELG) comprises two main assessment components i.e. assignments and a final exam.

The former requires students to submit two Tutor-marked Assignments (TMAs) with each accounting for 25% of the overall course assessment to be submitted on different deadlines that are well spaced out. TMA 1 covers Units 1 and 2 whereas TMA 2 includes Unit 3 and 4 of the course materials, serving as formative assessment on learning. Tutors are required to mark the assignments with descriptive and constructive feedback for students to reinforce their strengths and act on tutor's suggestions to remedy their weaknesses. TMA 1 is to be returned to the students before the submission of TMA 2 with the expectation that students act on the comments and show improvement in their TMA 2. The same assessment process applies to TMA 2 which will be returned to students before the Final Exam to inform students about areas that they need to further work on in preparation for their Final Exam, hence both TMAs are also a form of assessment for learning.

To safeguard academic integrity, students are to submit their assignments to *Turnitin*, a plagiarism detection software that tries to match the assignments with other sources. Students whose assignments have high similarity indices are required to revise and resubmit them to *Turnitin* until the indices are low before submitting them to the university's Online Assignment Submission (OAS) system.

At the end of the course, students sit for a three-hour Final Exam that is invigilated concurrently in all Regional Centre exam halls. This summative assessment gauge students' mastery of the course learning outcomes and understanding of the course materials through structured and essay questions covering a range of skills in the cognitive domain based on Bloom's taxonomy from the level of knowledge to evaluation.

Strengthening Academic Standard: Potential Pitfalls to Avoid

With a sound academic framework and a reliable ICT infrastructure, WOU can ensure that its courses further benefit from a review of course delivery and course assessment in particular with a view to safeguarding academic integrity, enriching students' learning experience and engendering the culture of the learning community. This works towards consolidating its position as a provider of quality tertiary education. As such, this paper will highlight some of the perennial issues and potential pitfalls inherent in the courses and suggest measures to rectify the situation.

One such issue is the frequent requests for extension of Tutor-marked Assignment (TMA) submission. In consideration of the students' work and family commitments, the current practice allows students to make up to a maximum of three such requests on the Online Assignment Submission (OAS) system, with the first request for seven-day extension, the second request for a fourteen-day extension and the third request for a twenty-one-day extension.

Although such provision is well intended for contingency reason and on compassionate grounds, the increasing ubiquity of such requests citing family and work commitments as reasons is indicative of the students' lackadaisical attitude towards their study and adherence to deadlines. This runs counter to promoting values such as self-discipline, academic responsibility and fairness as students do not incur any penalty by making such requests. On the contrary, they have the edge of additional time to complete their TMAs over students who strive to meet the submission deadlines. To deter students from abusing this provision and to deter diligent students from being demotivated and discouraged in the future, a preventive measure can be implemented to effectively screen such requests with supporting documents and to penalise those that are not genuine by marks deduction.

In relation to TMAs, although students are strongly encouraged to run through their TMAs in *Turnitin*, a web-based plagiarism and text-matching learning tool, and to subsequently revise TMAs with high similarity indices, it is not a mandatory practice, hence, resulting in arbitrary remedial measures in addressing such issue by different course coordinators ranging from substantial to token marks deduction based on different interpretations of high similarity index. As such, the course assessment can benefit from greater transparency and consistency by insisting on assignment submission to *Turnitin* and by standardising the threshold for and quantum of marks deduction to discourage practices of plagiarism, collusion and other forms of academic dishonesty, hence strengthening students' academic integrity.

Tutor-marked Assignments (TMAs) are different from other forms of writing such as descriptive and narrative writing as it comes with writing conventions that are peculiar to the academic writing genre, an area that many students are not aware of and familiar with, hence resulting in submission of poor quality TMAs. Among writing areas that warrant serious attention are organisation and presentation of points, lack of coherence in discussion and arguments, inadequate or absence of elaboration and poor referencing skills. As such, students can benefit tremendously from attending workshops on academic writing / discourse skills which the university can organize as another form of learning support for students.

To ensure the flourishing of a thriving learning community and to engender the culture of collaborative learning among students, various measures can be put in place from encouraging online forum discussion

to improving tutorial attendance, hence enriching the exchange of ideas among tutors and students with different perspectives. A short-term measure to address this issue is to allocate participation marks for online discussion and tutorial attendance given that students pay serious attention to any form of assessment that affects their overall performance. Although such extrinsic motivation is not ideal, it is hoped that such an interim measure eventually paves the way to igniting students' genuine desire to create and participate in a learning community in the long run. Predicated on the theory of situated learning in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), this learning community in WOU has the advantage of bringing together professional working adults to engage in exchange of ideas and discussion that is informed and enriched by their respective professional expertise.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper describes the blended learning environment in which linguistics and education courses by the School of Education, Languages and Communications (SELC), Wawasan Open University (WOU) are delivered from the programme entry requirements to student profiles and learner support. Specifically, the descriptions highlight the flexibility afforded to students undergoing these courses in an Open Distance Learning (ODL) mode under the WOU model.

In the WOU ODL model, various ICT affordances and learner support are required to facilitate a form of student learning that transcends the constraints of space and time. To achieve programme and course learning outcomes through this alternative learning route, students benefit from reader-friendly self-instructional course materials specifically developed for independent learning. These are complemented by a multiplicity of learner support structures, the chief of which are monthly face-to-face tutorial sessions, a highly accessible Learning Management System (LMS) that supports online discussion and communication among students, tutors and course co-ordinator, and a flexible course assessment system that allows online assignment submissions. With all these, adult learners with various commitments enjoy the advantages of conventional face-to-face sessions and the flexibility of ODL in charting their own progression pathways to complete their study.

Nevertheless, the discussion also highlights a number of learning points and potential pitfalls in some areas that can be reviewed to further fine-tune the course delivery, in particular the course assessment system and course participation. The implementation of a reliable assessment system should include an equitable assignment submission practice that only allows genuine requests for assignment submission extension. This entails insistence on documentary evidence and penalty as a deterrent. Of equal importance is the need to safeguard academic integrity by implementing a standard policy requiring students to submit their assignments to *Turnitin*, an online text-matching tool and by formulating clear guidelines on assignments with high similarity indices.

In an ODL environment, online forum discussion is the main channel for students to exchange ideas and engage in enriching discussion. This in turn engenders a learning community whose members support and motivate each other, hence mitigating any potential student isolation. However, students are not taking full advantage of and benefitting from this virtuous cycle as indicated by the lukewarm response to online forum discussion on the LMS. One possible solution is to allocate marks for student participation in online forum with a view to raising awareness of the benefits of such discussion and the ultimate aim of translating this awareness to intrinsic motivation.

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Wawasan Open University (n.d.). Part C. Information on area 2: Programme design and delivery. In Wawasan Open University, *Malaysian Qualification Assurance (MQA) Document: Bachelor of Education in Primary Education (BEPE)* (p. 11-22). Wawasan Open University: Penang.

Wawasan Open University (n.d.). Unit 4: Course presentation & learning support. In Wawasan Open University, *Course Coordinator Handbook* (pp. 1-18). Penang, Malaysia: Wawasan Open University.

Appendix: LMS interface screenshots of selected main sections of the course EED219/05 Foundation in Education.

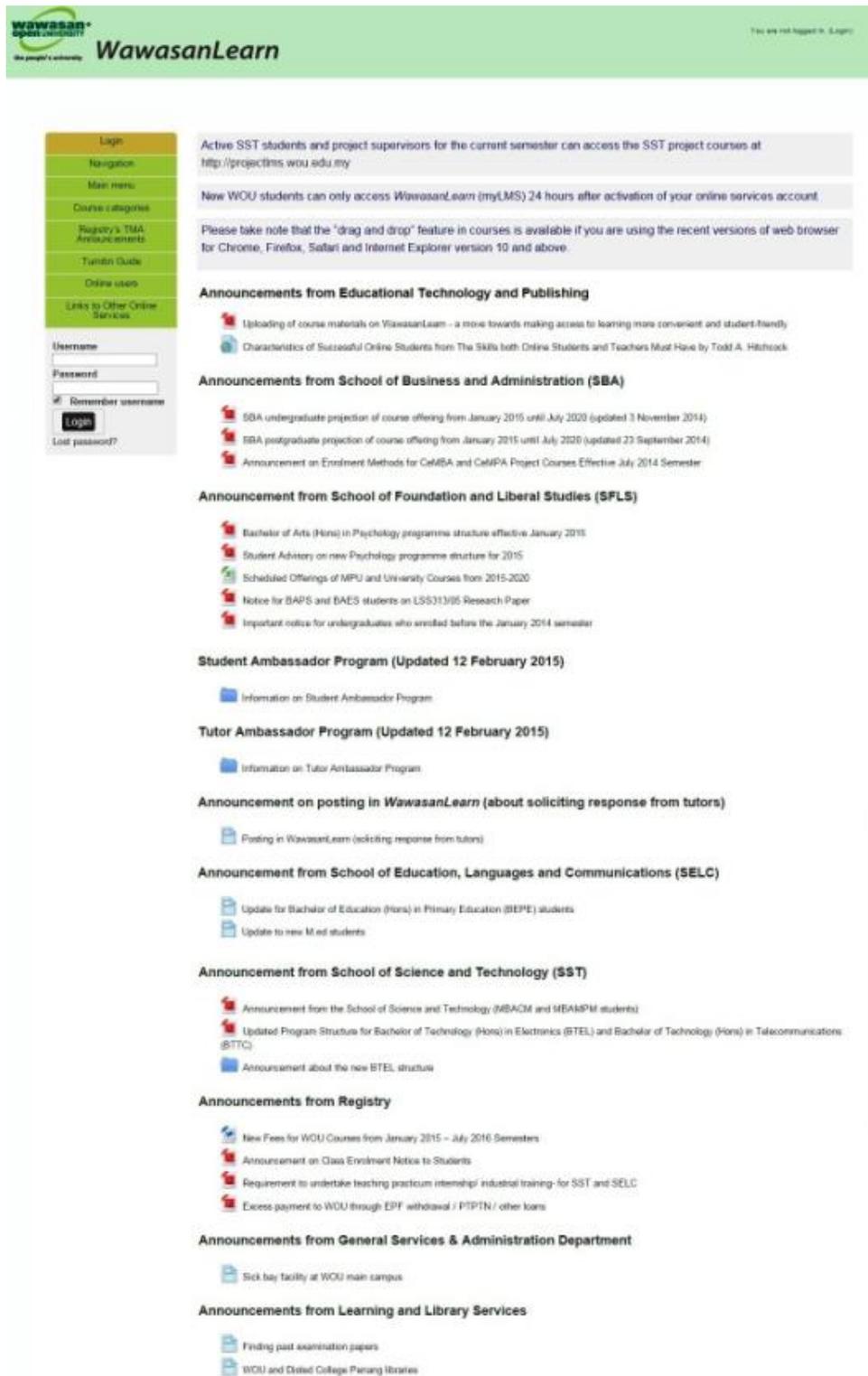


Figure 3: WawasanLearn Login Interface

The screenshot shows the WawasanLearn course main interface for EED219/05 Foundation in Education. The header includes the Wawasan Open University logo and the text 'WawasanLearn' with the tagline 'the people's university'. A user is logged in as ONG CHENG TEIK. The main content area is titled 'EED219/05 Foundation in Education' and includes a 'Turn editing on' button. A navigation sidebar on the left lists various links such as 'Navigation', 'Administration', 'My courses', 'Latest news', 'Registry's TMA Announcements', 'Online Assignment Submission (OAS) Guide', 'Turnitin Guide', 'Search forums', 'Online users', and 'Links to Other Online Services'. The main content area is divided into sections: 'About the course' (with 'Course Overview' and 'Online course materials'), 'Announcements', 'Online Forums', 'Tutorial 1' through 'Tutorial 5', 'Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs), Self-tests, Online Quizzes and Specimen Exam Papers', and 'Guide for Tutors'. Each section includes details like 'File: 1', 'URL: 1', 'Page: 1', 'Folder: 1', 'URLs: 2', 'Files: 5', etc.

Figure 4: WawasanLearn Course Main Interface

EED219/05 Foundation in Education

Home ► EED219/05 Foundation in Education ► Online Forums Turn editing on

Navigation

- Administration
- My courses
- Latest news
- Registry's TMA Announcements
- Online Assignment Submission (OAS) Guide
- Turnitin Guide
- Search forums
- Online users
- Links to Other Online Services

Home

- My home
- My profile
- Current course
 - EED219/05 Foundation in Education
 - Participants
 - Online Forums**
 - My courses

About the course

Course Overview

READ THIS FIRST before going through the Course Materials.

The Course Guide here gives you an overview of the course structure, tutorial preparation, assessment mode, TMA and exam policy, among others.

Online course materials

This folder comprises 5 units of course materials as follows:

- Unit 1: Educational Philosophy and Malaysian Educational Development
- Unit 2: The Sociology of Education
- Unit 3: Educational Institutions and Classroom Society
- Unit 4: Personality, Social Development and Individual Differences
- Unit 5: Critical Reflection and Professional Development

WizIQ Installer

- Announcements from Course Coordinator
- Announcements from Tutor
- Tutor Contact Details
- Public Forum
- Tutorial Forum

Figure 5: *WawasanLearn* Course Online Forum Interface

EED219/05 Foundation in Education

Home ► EED219/05 Foundation in Education ► Online Forums ► Announcements from Course Coordinator Search forums

Navigation

- Administration
- My courses
- Latest news
- Registry's TMA Announcements
- Online Assignment Submission (OAS) Guide
- Turnitin Guide
- Search forums
- Online users
- Links to Other Online Services

Home

- My home
- My profile
- Current course
 - EED219/05 Foundation in Education
 - Participants
 - Online Forums
 - Announcements from Course Coordinator**
 - My courses

Dear students, you may find my latest announcements, materials and information related to the course here.

[Add a new topic](#)

Discussion	Started by	Replies	Unread	Last post
REMINDER TO ACCESS LMS BEFORE TUTORIAL 1	ONG CHENG TEIK -	0	0	ONG CHENG TEIK - Fri, 31 Jul 2015, 10:07 AM
TMA 2 AVAILABILITY ON LMS	ONG CHENG TEIK -	0	0	ONG CHENG TEIK - Tue, 28 Jul 2015, 9:07 AM
Responding to Questions / Points by Your Tutor on Tutorial Forum Before Tutorial 1	ONG CHENG TEIK -	0	0	ONG CHENG TEIK - Mon, 27 Jul 2015, 9:54 AM
REMINDER TO ATTEND FIRST TUTORIAL, SUN 2 AUG 2015, 5PM - 7PM	ONG CHENG TEIK -	0	0	ONG CHENG TEIK - Thu, 23 Jul 2015, 11:53 AM
TURNITIN ID & PASSWORDS	ONG CHENG TEIK -	0	0	ONG CHENG TEIK - Thu, 9 Jul 2015, 2:00 PM
Welcome Note, Timetable and Assessment	ONG CHENG TEIK -	0	0	ONG CHENG TEIK - Wed, 8 Jul 2015, 10:39 AM

Figure 6: *WawasanLearn* Course Announcements from Course Coordinator Interface

EED219/05 Foundation in Education

Home ► EED219/05 Foundation in Education ► Online Forums ► Tutorial Forum

Navigation
Administration
My courses
Latest news
Registry's TMA Announcements
Online Assignment Submission (OAS) Guide
Turnitin Guide
Search forums
Online users
Links to Other Online Services

Home
My home
My profile
Current course
EED219/05 Foundation in Education
Participants
Online Forums
Tutorial Forum
My courses

Separate groups All participants

This forum is created for you to discuss subject matters related to Tutorials with your tutor and your classmates.

Add a new discussion topic

Discussion	Started by	Group	Replies	Unread	Last post
topic one	SHARMINI AP GHANAGURU @ K GHANAGURU -	3FED1	0	0	SHARMINI AP GHANAGURU @ K GHANAGURU - Wed, 29 Jul 2015, 10:54 AM
topic one	SHARMINI AP GHANAGURU @ K GHANAGURU -	3FED1	0	0	SHARMINI AP GHANAGURU @ K GHANAGURU - Wed, 29 Jul 2015, 10:48 AM

Figure7: *WawasanLearn* Course Tutorial Forum Interface

EED219/05 Foundation in Education

Home ► EED219/05 Foundation in Education ► Tutorial 1

Turn editing on

Navigation
Administration
My courses
Latest news
Registry's TMA Announcements
Online Assignment Submission (OAS) Guide
Turnitin Guide
Search forums
Online users
Links to Other Online Services

Home
My home
My profile
Current course
EED219/05 Foundation in Education
Participants
Tutorial 1
My courses

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- Unit 2: The Sociology of Education
- Unit 3: Educational Institutions and Classroom Society
- Unit 4: Personality, Social Development and Individual Differences
- Unit 5: Critical Reflection and Professional Development

WizIQ Installer

Supplementary Course Materials and Resources for Tutorial 1

Online Activities

- Food for thought: Progressive Education in the 1940s
- Food for thought: Changing Education Paradigms (RSA Animate)
- UNIT 1 - PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION AND OTHER EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES
- UNIT 1 - PHILOSOPHY REDISCOVERED - EXPLORING THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN TEACHING PHILOSOPHIES, EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES, AND PHILOSOPHY
- UNIT 1 - PLAYS WELL WITH OTHERS - THE ENGAGEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION WITH OTHER
- UNIT 1 - THE POWER AND LIMITS OF PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Figure8: *WawasanLearn* Course Tutorial 1 Interface

EED219/05 Foundation in Education

Home ► EED219/05 Foundation in Education ► Guide for Tutors Turn editing on

- Navigation
- Administration
- My courses
- Latest news
- Registry's TMA Announcements
- Online Assignment Submission (OAS) Guide
- Turnitin Guide
- Search forums
- Online users
- Links to Other Online Services

Home

- My home
- My profile
- Current course
 - EED219/05 Foundation in Education
 - Participants
 - Guide for Tutors**
- My courses

About the course

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- Unit 3: Educational Institutions and Classroom Society
- Unit 4: Personality, Social Development and Individual Differences
- Unit 5: Critical Reflection and Professional Development

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 CCTutor Forum

 Turnitin for Tutors

 Tutor OAS Guide

 Tutor Q&A for OAS

 TMA 1 MARKING SCHEME

Important Reminder:

Please take note that you are not to show the marking scheme to the students at all time by any means. As such, the marking scheme is not to be emailed, photostated or projected as powerpoint slides for students' viewing. What you can do is to ORALLY explain the marking scheme to your students.

Figure 9: *WawasanLearn* Course Guide for Tutors Interface