ANALYSIS OF EXISTING E-LEARNING STRUCTURE IN THE COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH SCIENCES, CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY

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Distance education is defined as planned learning structure, which normally occurs in a different place from teaching. Special techniques in course design, teaching techniques and methods of communication and interaction between instructors and learners by digital technology are required to support this mode of education. In this era, distance learning has become an element of "e-learning" because e-learning evolved from a different field of theories and practices. E-learning does not take only course contents into its consideration but also considers face-to-face classroom and interaction between learners and instructors.

In 2002, Thailand introduced a strategy to enhance the quality of higher education by facilitating use of information and communication technology, namely "e-Education". Many universities in the country have adopted e-learning to assist traditional classroom instruction. However, methods and platforms of e-learning in the universities are not well documented. Thus, e-learning in Thai universities needs analysis of current situations to identify weaknesses in the current e-learning platform to enable e-learning to achieve its full potential.

The College of Public Health Sciences, Chulalongkorn University (CPHS-CU) provides a "Learning at the Work Place Program" targeted at public health workforces in Thailand's remote areas and other developed and developing countries. This is a "traditional e-learning" format that uses the internet in a classroom setting and distributes in-class materials. Moving from this mode to an "e-learning system" constitutes one of the goals of CPHS-CU; however, an analysis of the current situation and feedbacks from learners (users) on traditional e-learning did not provide a clear picture.

Hence, a two-day workshop on "Analysis of Existing E-learning Structure at CPHS-CU" was held to document strengths and weaknesses of the current e-learning system from the perspectives of students (users) and stakeholders from within and outside

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Chulalongkorn University. The workshop was attended by 29 participants, composed of current students, former students, support staff and Chulalongkorn lecturers. The majority came from the public health sector and a number of nurses. Support staff from CPHS-CU were academic service staff who conducted the e-learning and IT staff who provided technical support. In addition, two staff members from the Learning Innovation Center, Chulalongkorn University acted as resource persons providing information related to teaching innovation.

In the workshop, strengths and weaknesses of the current traditional e-learning module were critically examined through discussion among the participants. The following conclusions were reached:

Strengths: (1) Current e-learning mode allowed students to manage their schedule. (2) Lecturers could contact students from abroad. (3) Current e-learning mode economized students' expenses and time. (4) Students could submit comments and suggestions online. (5) Announcements regarding the course were readily accessible online. (6) Several learning platforms could be provided through the e-learning mode.

Weaknesses: (1) This traditional e-learning mode was limited to students with internet access. (2) Learning platform lacked mid-stream testing facility. (3) Lecturers could not know students' learning progress or assess class involvement. (4) Copyright status of illustrations and teaching contents were not clearly indicated. (5) Internet system was not stable in some regions of the country. (6) Current mode lacked a two-way communication system. (7) Evaluation methods were not suitable. (8) Both students and lecturers were deficient in their understanding of the e-learning process resulting in uncoordinated interactions between students and instructors. (9) Library facilities were not accessible to students.

The workshop provided space for sharing and discussion of participants' personal attitude towards traditional e-learning mode. The perception of former and current users were exchanged. CPHS-CU was made aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the current traditional e-learning mode, which will lead to changes and improvements. Data gathered from the workshop already have been incorporated as a part of the development of a questionnaire to survey to take place in the second phase of this ongoing program, which will involve the restructuring of the current traditional e-learning mode into an e-learning system.

Objective 4: Faculty/Staff Development and Improved Academic Offerings