

Prior educational experiences and cultural factors in the learners' attitudes and behaviours: A case study of distance learning English course at UiTM, Malaysia

Volume I

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*To two important people in my life
who left me before this journey ends:*

*In loving memory of my dad
(25th Dec. 1926 to 11th April 2012)*

and

*my little sister
(6th March 1968- 12th March 2012)*

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Abstract

This thesis is a case study that investigates the attitudes and behaviours of learners of a Preparatory English distance learning course (BEL 100 e-PJJ) offered at the Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia, and whether those attitudes and behaviours are influenced by their prior educational experiences and whether cultural factors may also have influence in the attitudes and behaviours of these learners. The research adopts a mixed-method case study design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to the data collection and analysis. Thematic analysis has been adopted as a tool to analyse the interview data qualitatively. The thematic analyses constructed thematic networks which Attride-Stirling (2001) stressed served as an organizing principle and an illustrative tool in interpreting the analysed interview data. Another major source of data collected for this study was the asynchronous forum discussion transcripts. To match the needs of this study, several categories and examples of Henri's (1992) framework combined with elements from Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) CoI model and Hofstede's (1991) cultural values tool were adapted in analysing the asynchronous forum discussion transcripts. This was to identify the factors which contributed to the attitude and behaviour of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners. This study has highlighted that the process of learning and teaching of the UiTM Malay/*Bumiputera* learners depend on the support and training given to the distance learners and facilitators. Learners' attitudes, behaviours, facilitators' intervention and purposeful tasks were found to be important in supporting active participation and effective interaction within the course.

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Chapter 1: Setting the Scene

1.1 Introduction

It is the objective of this research to examine the attitudes and behaviours of learners of a Preparatory English distance learning course (BEL 100 e-PJJ) offered at the Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia, and whether those attitudes and behaviours are influenced by their prior educational experiences. In addition, the research also examined whether cultural factors influenced the attitudes and behaviours of the learners. The research adopts a mixed-method case study design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to the data collection and analysis.

The research for this study took place over a four-year period and went through several stages. During the first year of the study, the researcher gathered literature materials on distance education. A pilot study was also conducted. The pilot study used a questionnaire to collect descriptive data on the attitudes, beliefs and practices of the facilitators and learners on the BEL 100 e-PJJ. The pilot study questionnaire and interviews were also focusing on the feasibility of introducing new ways of teaching and learning to increase the effectiveness of the course. At this stage too, the pilot study interviews were carried out at a distance by the researcher via telephone calls; Scotland-Malaysia. Findings from the pilot study confirmed that the focus of the main study should be examining the attitudes and behaviours of the learners and as what is mentioned as the objective of the research. The main data collection and analysis was carried out during the second and third year of the study. A demographic profile survey was carried out in July 2005 on 225 BEL 100 e-PJJ learners. Based on the findings of this survey, 8 learners who matched the main criteria, which is having computers at home, volunteered to be interviewed and 7 facilitators were interviewed. The analysis makes use of the technique of thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling 2001) to identify the main themes in the interview data. The discussion forum transcripts for the period October to

November 2005 were downloaded and the data were collated and analysed as described in Chapter 5. The researcher makes use of the analytic frameworks of Henri (1992), Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) and Hofstede's (1984) Four Cultural Dimension in the analysis of the discussion forum data. Further and detail explanation on the frameworks will be explained in Chapter 5 of this dissertation. In the final year of the research, a final analysis of the data and writing up of the dissertation was pursued.

1.2 Statement of Problem

In keeping with the National Education Policy of Malaysia, English is taught as a second language in all government-assisted schools in the country at both the primary and secondary levels of schooling. English is used not only as a means of communication in everyday activities and job situations but also in local and international trade and commerce. Furthermore, English provides an additional means of access to academic, professional and recreational materials. Thus knowledge of English will help Malaysia participate effectively in the world community. The educational experience of learning English for students in Malaysia started as early on average at the age of 6 years. They learn all the four skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing) at school for a maximum of an hour (for a double period) or a single period of half an hour, six periods a week. Even with the importance placed on English as the second language of Malaysia, the standard of English has not yet reached the level that is desirable in the country as a developed nation. With an aspiration to develop the English language skills of the country's Malay population, the UiTM has established English as the language of instruction for most core subjects at the university. It is here that the Academy of Languages in UiTM plays an important role in providing effective English programmes to all the students.

1.2.1 The UiTM e-PJJ Programme

UiTM is the sole university in Malaysia that serves only the indigenous Malay population (the '*bumiputeras*'). The researcher has been an English lecturer at the Academy of Languages, UiTM for 16 years and during her 16 years tenure as a lecturer, she has taught English to the full time and e-PJJ (Electronic Distance Learning Programme) Diploma learners. The Diploma course is a 3-year programme designed to provide opportunities for learners with lower qualifications from high school. Learners who pass the *Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE)* (an equivalent to the UK 'O' level qualification) with five credits or less would normally be able to undertake a 3-year Diploma programme. Students with better qualifications would normally be given the opportunity to go straight into the first degree programme. The full-time students are on the average 17+ year old students who have just completed their MCE. The e-PJJ students are working adults with MCE qualifications, who have decided to continue their education later in life.

The e-PJJ programme started as an "off-campus programme" and was introduced in 1973 to fulfil the aspiration of the UiTM to produce more *bumiputera* graduates. In 1990 the distance learning programme (*PJJ*) was introduced using manuals and video-tapes of lectures as the main method for the delivery of instruction. Subsequently, for the December 1998 intake, distance learning was introduced in the e-PJJ using digital technology and by the time of the July 2000 intake, all the programmes conducted under the auspices of PJJ were delivered using cyber support and e-PJJ took on the form that it has today.

As the e-PJJ course has developed over the years, there are still many gaps that need to be filled to ensure the delivery of a more effective English course using the distance mode.

1.2.2 The UiTM e-PJJ learners

The e-PJJ learners of UiTM are usually learners who have left secondary school after finishing their fifth year. These learners are working adults and some are holders of certificates, diplomas or degrees. However, the majority of these learners are full-time workers who desire to further their studies to gain a paper qualification in English. Becoming self-directed is what many of these learners find difficult since they have left school quite sometime ago. As e-PJJ learners, these learners are required to study on their own and to manage their own time. They get to meet their facilitators face-to-face only once a month for a seminar. Nevertheless, guidelines for self-study are given to them early in the semester along with a self-instruction manual. The forum discussion room is also available at all times for them to discuss with the course facilitator any difficulties that they may have with the materials and the mode of study.

1.2.3 The UiTM e-PJJ facilitators

The course materials are the primary source of learning for the e-PJJ learners and the facilitator has always been acknowledged as a key provider of support for the e-PJJ students. Facilitators are given a ‘Quick User Guide for Learning Facilitator’ (see Appendix 4), and they are expected to provide both on-line and off-line support to the learners according to the guidelines specified in the guide. Some of the responsibilities that the facilitators are required to carry out are as follows:

1. Marking and commenting on learners’ assignments
2. Providing online support
3. Running face-to-face sessions for their learners

Besides the lecture notes and other supporting materials used in the teaching of the course, the primary material used in the teaching of the course is the Preparatory English Self

Instructional Manual (SIM). The SIM was prepared by a team of English lecturers of UiTM. When facilitators are assigned to teach a distance course by the Academy of Languages of UiTM, they are required to be present on-line with the learners for at least three hours a day to tend to the learners' queries and to manage other on-line activities. The role of the facilitators is to provide flexibility and choice for the learners and to meet the needs of the learners as far as possible by fostering an environment that is conducive to learning. However, carrying out the responsibilities of facilitators is not an easy task, because the facilitators are committed not only to teaching and guiding the e-PJJ distance learners but also to the full time learners at the institution.

1.2.4 The BEL 100 e-PJJ English course

Most of the English courses at UiTM are taught for an average of 6 hours a week. One of these courses is the BEL 100. This course is a preparatory English course lasting one semester designed for remedial instruction in English. Grammar, reading, writing and speaking are being taught in this course. By the end of the semester the students are expected to acquire the necessary skills in reading and writing which prepare them before sitting for the "Mainstream English Language courses" in UiTM (Ponniah, Mahmud, Lim, Alias, Anuar, Abdul Murad, Sivanatham, Abdul Kadir and Mohd.Hashim 2002). The syllabus of BEL 100 e-PJJ course is a reproduction of the BEL 100 full-time course. The full-time BEL 100 students are required to buy a textbook written by the English lecturers of the Academy of Languages in UiTM. The materials for the Self Instructional Manual (SIM) used by the e-PJJ students were written by a different team of English lecturers. Language enrichment and exercises are given throughout the course.

The course (BEL 100 e-PJJ) offers four face-to-face 2-hour seminars per semester, a Self Instructional Manual (SIM) for the students, other web-based resources (computer-based

resources, a discussion forum, e-mail, a chat facility and access to the library) and printed resources provided in the course. Students are also encouraged to go on-line with their course mates and facilitators frequently to discuss matters pertaining to the course materials. The forum is the tool most frequently used by the students to post messages with their queries regarding the lessons in the BEL 100 module and other matters such as technical problems and assessments. The facilitators are expected to respond to the queries as soon as possible. In addition, the students use the forum to interact socially with their peers and at times with their facilitators. The SIM consists of practice exercises (see samples in Appendix 1) that will help them develop the basic knowledge and skills they need in order to function effectively in the English language. The exercises provided in the manual include instructions for the students to follow when attempting to do them. The contents of the module closely follow the syllabus and work schedule for the BEL 100 course. A simple “Recommended Study Plan” is also provided in the manual. There is an answer key at the end of the module for the students to check their answers. Students are also encouraged to note down all problems they encounter while doing their exercises and to seek help from their facilitator if they are not able to solve the problems themselves.

The BEL 100 e-PJJ course is offered to all first year Diploma e-PJJ learners (learners as described in point 1.2.2) from various fields of studies: the Diploma courses in Accountancy, Public Administration, Business Studies, Banking, Tourism, Sports Studies and Information Management. The learning management system adopted by the course is prepared by a specialist E-learning solutions provider, Pointflex. Various forms of technology are provided by the learning environment, including email, a synchronous chat room, an asynchronous discussion forum, print-based such as handouts provided by the facilitators and computer-based learning materials such as exercises provided by facilitators from online links.

1.3 Objective of the research

It is the objective of this research to examine the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners and whether those attitudes and behaviours are influenced by their prior educational experiences and whether cultural factors may also have influence in the attitudes and behaviours of these learners. The study uses a mixed-method case study design combining quantitative and qualitative analysis of the discussion forum transcripts with qualitative analysis of interviews with the facilitators and learners. Finally this study provides implications, limitations and suggestions of further research on this area.

1.4 Research Questions

The overarching goal of this research was stated earlier (p.14). The specific research questions underpinning the research are as follows:

- a. What are the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners?
- b. What is the role of prior educational experiences on the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners?
- c. Is there evidence that cultural factors have an influence on the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners?
- d. What were the attitudes and behaviours that underpinned effective learner activity within this case study?

1.5 Significance of the Study

There were complaints received regarding the course from both learners and facilitators of BEL 100 e-PJJ. Most of the complaints were on the replication of the course

syllabus which was designed for the full-time learners of BEL 100 that do not meet the attitudes and behaviours of the distance learners. There were also complaints with regard to the learning environment, such as the ineffective use of the chat room, the asynchronous forum discussion room, the library and the email system. Feedback and support from all quarters involved in this course were also part of the complaints expressed by learners and facilitators. Despite the complaints, no formal research study has been carried out by any of the academic personnel at the institution to explore the problems stated above. In light of this, the researcher has decided to take up the challenge of pursuing the researcher's PhD programme in examining the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners and whether those attitudes and behaviours are influenced by their prior educational experiences or if cultural factors may also have influence in the attitudes and behaviours of these learners.

It is hoped that this study will benefit the institution, the UiTM, as well as the learners and facilitators involved with the course while also giving a detailed examination of the Malay learners in UiTM, Malaysia. . By pursuing the objective of the study, the extent to which the needs of the learners are currently being met, and ways of raising their interest towards the course will be suggested.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

As a case study, the scope of the study is limited to the BEL 100 e-PJJ course at the UiTM, Malaysia. The learners are, however, representative of an important sector of the Malaysian education system, namely the *bumiputera* adult learner. The findings of the study are therefore relevant to settings which are similar such as other distance English courses offered in UiTM and at other academic establishments in Malaysia.

1.7 Definitions of Terms

In order to avoid ambiguity, some key vocabulary terms applied in this study are listed below. The definitions provided are mainly for the purpose of a working definition in this study alone.

BEL 100	a preparatory English course offered in UiTM for both first year diploma and degree learners.
BEL 100 e-PJJ	a blended mode preparatory English course offered in UiTM for both first year diploma and degree learners at a distance.
blended-mode	a course with a combination of face-to-face and distance/ online sessions.
bumiputera	the indigenous people of Malaysia
Diploma	a 3-year programme in a higher institution.
e-PJJ	an electronic distance learning programme in UiTM. It is a blended programme for learners who only meet for a face-to-face seminar session once a month; the main part of the course is delivered online.
InED	the Institute of Education Development, UiTM
Malay	a citizen of Malaysia, often used to refer to the indigenous population of Malaysia
Malaysia	a country situated in South East Asia, sandwiched in between Thailand and Singapore.
MCE	the Malaysian Certificate of Education for 5 th year high school learners.
PJJ	a distance learning programme in UiTM where learners attend a face-to-face class in the evenings for a 6 hr session a week.
SIM	an abbreviation for Self-Instructional Manual used by the PJJ or e-PJJ learners of UiTM.
UiTM	the Universiti Teknologi MARA, an institute of higher education in Malaysia.

1.8 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of 6 chapters. Chapter 1 describes the background of the study and offers a discussion of the purpose and significance of the dissertation. Chapter 2 reviews research on distance learning, including the evolution of distance learning, the identification of distance learners, the impact of distance learning and the development of distance learning in developed and developing countries. This chapter provides a conceptual framework for the analysis in later chapters, reviews a number of models of distance learning and provides an overview of research on distance learning programmes. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study, including an overview of the pilot study, a description of the participants, a calendar of the data collection, a description of the techniques used in the data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the interview data and Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the discussion forum transcript. Chapter 6 discusses the conclusions and implications of the study. The final Chapter 7 will then end with the limitations and suggestions for further research of this study and suggest possible opportunities for further research.

Chapter 2: Distance Education

2.1 Introduction

Research into distance education has burgeoned over the last years, as the growth of the use of distance learning methods has increased and teachers have required new understandings of teaching through these methods. Today the topic in higher education revolves around the massive growth of distance education (Meyer 2002). The impact of research on teaching and learning at a distance has changed radically (Peters 1998). This is due to the appearance of new technology in education, economics, business, trade and everyday life, coupled with an increasing emphasis on lifelong learning, which has expanded very considerably in response to increasing demand. The demand for these non-traditional modes of study has been remarkable due to an increase in the importance of education as a route to increase social mobility and economic growth, and the growth of communications technology and the application of communications technology to teaching and learning (Koul and Jenkins 1990). According to Mehotra, Hollister, and McGahey (2001 p.ix), “distance learning, or distance education, is not a future possibility for which higher education must prepare, it is a current reality creating opportunities and challenges for educational institutions; a reality offering students expanded choices in where, when, how, and from whom they learn; a reality making education accessible to ever larger numbers of persons”

Therefore, this chapter reviews literature which is relevant to the focus of the present study. This study focuses on the examination of attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ participants. In addition, whether those attitudes and behaviours are influenced by prior experiences and whether cultural factors may also have an influenced to the participants attitudes’ and behaviours. First, the different terms and definitions of distance education are

clarified. Second, the changes and expectations in distance education are discussed as these may influence the attitudes and behaviours of distance learners which is examined in this research. Third, the development of distance education in the developing countries is briefly discussed followed by a review of distance learners within the context of the present study. Fourth, existing research on advantages and disadvantages of distance education is examined. Finally, the cultural perspective in distance education and teaching, which is also examined as part of this research, is discussed in detail. Additionally a review of studies that look into the possibility of culture which may influence distance learners' experiences in the learning and teaching of a distance education course is also provided.

2.2 Distance Education terms and definitions

The term “distance learning” or “distance education” has not one clear-cut answer that is universally accepted. Although there is difficulty in finding a universal definition of distance education, the ideas surrounding the educational milieu are somewhat similar. The generic term “distance education” includes many different terms that have previously been used to describe education that takes place in a non-traditional environment. For example distance education incorporates terms such as, correspondence study, home study, independent study, external study, distance learning, distance instruction and distance teaching, although the terms are not the same (Keegan 1996). They may share a focus on studying at a distance from the instructor, and on learning with the assistance of learning materials such as video-cassette recorded lectures, notes, packaged syllabus and printed materials, or from any other electronic materials and tools. Even though instructors and students are separated by time and space, guidance is still provided to the students via the technology that is available (Rowntree 1992, Jonassen 1995 and Keegan 1996).

Distance education differs from face-to-face teaching at several different levels: at the levels of educational policy, educational administration, learner needs, technology and learning behaviour (Peters 1996). Politically, governments are providing funds to facilitate the development of distance education in tandem with the fast pace of industrialisation. Administratively, arrangements have to be made to enable communication between the institution and a wide group of learners with diverse needs and circumstances. Distance education has also brought about a change of learners from young to older ones who have a need to upgrade and enhance their careers professionally. Teaching in this mode of instruction has also changed from the conventional face-to-face method to a technology-mediated approach with the instructor being the manager of the learning system. For the purpose of this literature review, the term “distance education” will be used. As represented by the following definitions, there are many different views of the research and practise of distance education, and these views will assist to give insight to the theory of distance education highlighted by each definition.

2.2.1 Definitions of Distance Education Cited in the Literature

Pioneering definitions of distance education were made known by a few well known distance education researchers. Desmond Keegan attempted to reconcile these definitions in 1980, and updated his definition in 1986 (Moore, 1995; Rumble, 1989; Holmberg, 2001). Keegan's revised definition (Holmberg, p.13; Rumble, p.9), involves the following five elements:

- quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the learning process which distinguishes it from conventional face-to-face education
- an educational organization that provides planning, preparation of learning materials and student support
- use of technical media to unite teacher and learner and carry the course content

- two-way communication allowing the student to initiate dialogue
- the quasi-permanent absence of the learning group so that people are usually taught as individuals rather than in groups, with the possibility of occasional meetings, either face-to-face or by electronic means

Greville Rumble (1989 p.8) is characteristically to the point in defining distance education which is, "The separation of teacher and learner, found in many definitions, is central to the whole concept of distance education". Rumble (1989 p.18-20) attempted to address the need to recognize one-on-one tutoring outside of an institutional framework. He also addresses the differences between the continuum running from pure distance to pure face-to-face education; the desire by some to exclude education taught to on-campus students; and the potential for group interaction and learning which current technologies enable. The essential elements of his definition include:

- a teacher, one or more students and a course or curriculum
- the physical separation between teacher and learner (but this may be in conjunction with "a considerable amount" of face-to-face education)
- the physical separation of learners from the sponsoring institution (optional)
- an implicit or explicit contract between teacher and student requiring that the student be taught, assessed, given guidance, and prepared for examinations by means of two-way communication

Rumble clearly excludes "private study programs of the 'teach-yourself' and interactive learning variety" (1989 p.18) and "distance education systems that do not provide two-way communication" (1989 p.19).

Moore's definition (1995 p.2) of distance education includes the following elements:

- planned learning
- normally occurs in a different place from teaching
- requires special techniques of course design, special instructional techniques, special methods of communication by electronic and other technology

- specialised organizational and administrative arrangements.

Moore (1995) distinguishes distance education from a learner's casual learning with the adjective "planned". This could include a learning plan developed by the self-directed learner according to his or her preferences. Moore does not burden his definition with the term teacher and learner, whose roles are changing. Rather, he focuses our attention on the *processes* of teaching and learning. Moore allows for teaching that can be accomplished through technological means. He addresses the question of educational programs which combines distance and face-to-face teaching methods by using the term "normally". Distance education may employ a variety of technologies to mediate between the teacher and learner. While Moore's mention of "electronic and other technology" may tend to lessen the importance of text or writing distributed by post, these methods are not excluded. Rather, he emphasizes that distance education requires specially designed materials, teaching techniques and communications. Finally, Moore recognizes that distance education involves more than individual courses: it must be considered as an overall system that includes supporting elements such as support from administrators, distance educators, distance learners and the technology provider. This systems view is shared with Keegan, but largely overlooked by Rumble.

The Moore definition has two general advantages. First, it is inclusive rather than restrictive, and is more general, allowing it to encompass more variations on distance education. Second, Moore's is a forward-looking view, anticipating future developments in distance education that may replace current practices and thinking about role assignments. It is the focus of this study to examine the possibility of variations in terms of the learners' attitudes and behaviours which may be influenced by the learners' prior experiences or if cultural factors may also affect the learners' attitudes and behaviours in the learning and teaching of the distance course BEL 100 e-PJJ.

2.3 Expanding the reach of Distance Education

Two decades after the opening of the Open University (OU) in the UK in 1969, many more open universities have been established in Europe and countries around the world. Due to this, there has been considerable growth in the provision of distance education. Opportunities for the pursuit of knowledge through this means are available for learners, regardless of age, race, and religion or disability. People in different geographical locations who are located either in rural or urban areas also will have the same opportunities provided that there is the availability of telecommunication facilities. This mode of education is practised in most developing countries all over the world. Opportunities to seek knowledge at a distance were minimally seen and heard of and most people who attended universities before the 1970's experienced the "locked residences after 11 o'clock" and all knowledge seeking activities were under the university strict authority (Mason 2003).

In line with the evolution of distance education and its considerable growth, the roles of instructors, facilitators and administrators have also evolved. As Mason (2003) stated this mode of education can be "exciting, interesting and high quality as well as being flexible and adaptable to individual learner requirements without replicating traditional tutoring support systems". However, Trey (2004) found out that there are critics that argued of some universities students expressing dissatisfaction with the distance courses such as experiencing the feelings of isolation since there are limited contact with instructors and fellow students. A few are also wondering aloud if the distance courses are in fact the answer to increasing problems of higher tuition fees for a face-to-face courses (Feenberg 1999, Hara and Kling 2000). Merisotis and Phipps (1999) stressed that by taking account of the importance of interaction and feedback with students, the need to familiarize themselves with the facilities and technology that are provided for the students and the need to accommodate the use of different pedagogic practices with different group of learners will help minimise the

dissatisfaction. Management of distance education programmes is very important. Dillon and Greene (2003) stated that distance education is characterised by a learner-centred system that is, putting learners first, focusing on the learner's attitudes, behaviours, abilities, interests, and learning preferences with the teacher as a facilitator of learning. The role of the instructor is to facilitate autonomy in the learners and to supplement references and other important materials that the learners need. The instructor also needs to have in mind that the key to distance education encompasses a wider role for the instructors. Tait (2003) argued that “plurality” not “uniformity” of approaches is needed in supporting learners engaged in distance education. Additionally, Dillon and Greene (2003) also stated that programme administrators need to take account of the advantages provided by the technology but at the same time to acknowledge the fact that learners have different attitudes and behaviours. Johnson and Barrett (2003) in their study of addressing the learning skills needs of students at a distance, on the other hand, stressed that even with a large and varied student group, there is still a need for a generic study skills materials and it is possible to make them relevant to all without forfeiting the quality of learning and teaching at a distance. Studies such as Gibson (1996) however, stated that awareness of the learners’ attitudes or behaviours and encouraging them to develop themselves as distance learners according to their preferences would help meet the demands of a particular course. Gibson (1996) conducted studies that support the above statement by offering evidence that the learners do change their view of learning over time in ways that impact on how well they learn, even throughout the experience of a single course. Additionally, Hillman, Willis and Gunawardena (1994.p.34) stressed that “the inability to interact successfully with the technology will inhibit his or her involvement” in the distance educational transaction. According to Russell (2001) the technology used to deliver the course is not the most important factor, but rather the well-designed courses and how well they are delivered and conducted are the most crucial.

The faculty members, administrators and instructional designers need to provide a high level of support and the materials provided have to be designed to meet the varying attitudes, behaviours and circumstances of a very heterogeneous group of learners. However, according to Thorpe (2003) there is no one single model of online learner support. There will be expectations of a more sophisticated, more demanding student body and Kenworthy (2003) stressed that no doubt that the kinds of support distance learners require is much more than just on-line help facility and other administrative support. Additionally, other forms of support that are very much needed is support that is particularly related to the “development of successful learning outcomes” such as dynamic learning activities, encouraging participation and interaction and continuous assessment of learners’ attitudes, behaviours, capabilities and involvement that can be provided to the learners on-line (Kenworthy, 2003). These requirements are very different from those imposed by a classroom full of learners where focus and feedback can be given to the learners on-site. Teachers or instructors who are not familiar with the demands of distance education have to accommodate themselves to the changes by taking part in professional training in the techniques of on-line pedagogy. The teachers have to understand the potential of technology in order to assist learning and also to upgrade their own effectiveness.

Dillon and Greene (2003) argue that many researchers have identified learner factors that impact on learning in distance education settings but have neglected to take account of learner differences, especially those relevant to achievement. They also argue that instructors of distance education courses should use a variety of strategies and media effectively in their teaching and also help learners to build a repertoire of approaches to learning using the existing technology tools so that learners can learn to learn in a variety of situations and under a variety of conditions. By doing so, they will take on the role of mediator between the learners and the resources that are available and help learners to become active learners. As

mentioned by Laurillard ([1993], cited in Hannon, Umble, Alexander, Francisco, Steckler, Tudor and Upshaw 2002:2) it is important that there is dialogue between the teacher and student rather than the transmission of information only from teacher to student. With constant support from staff and also frequent feedback, learners may have the sense of belonging and be more interactive online. A further advantage claimed for the latest stage of distance education is flexibility in learning which has changed the scope and nature of earlier distance education models which can be associated with correspondence courses (Gunawardena and McIsaac 2004). According to Dasher-Alston and Patton (1998), if the change in distance education continues to develop at its present pace, it will dominate the delivery of instruction to adult learners and will constitute an important alternative for others who need its flexibility and convenience. Besides that, Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2003) believe that if the impact of the changes becomes so great upon our whole educational system, the technology in use to support this kind of learning will unfold a new chapter in distance education. Moore and Kearsley (1996) stressed that as a result of the flexibility and convenience in distance education, it will be possible to think of distance education programmes as genuine competitors to conventional programmes. Merisotis (2000) however cautioned that the higher education community would have to learn about how, and in what ways, technology can enhance the teaching/learning process in distance education and not at face value. According to Gale (2006), in order to have the ultimate flexibility in learning and teaching environments, institutions and those involved in distance education system would have to realize that they have to cease from creating what may be unreal boundaries. The flexibility in distance education may lead to a learning environment that may be more accessible, a possibility of giving more opportunities to learners to accommodate different learning attitudes and behaviours catering to the different learners' environment.

2.4 Development of Distance Education in developing countries

The growth of distance education is being fuelled by an urgent need felt by the poor countries to close the education gap with the rich nations. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization International Bureau of Education (Benavot 2006), only about 3 percent of young people in sub-Saharan Africa and 7 percent in Asia attend some form of post-secondary education as compared to 58 percent in industrialized countries, and 81 percent in the United States. Developing countries such as Asia and Africa have large populations with minimal formal education and are very interested in cost-effective ways of delivering instruction, particularly in the areas of basic literacy and job-training (Moore and Kearsley 1996). These countries have adopted distance education approaches because they believe that these approaches will help the countries to overcome some of the educational disadvantages faced by their population. However, for some developing countries the existence of economic, technical, political and cultural problems may make even the simplest forms of distance education difficult to implement (Koul and Jenkins 1990). In some developing countries, whether they are developing or progressively developing, they manage to promote the idea of distance education but fail to provide the resources with which to implement distance education programmes. Despite the positive progress of distance education, Reeves (2009) highlighted in his article that there are much to be done such as taking advantage of the unique features in distance education by providing more effective instructional methods that are aligned with its unique affordances.

- **Asian countries**

In Malaysia as in some other Asian countries, large state-run distance education institutions have been established to help meet the growing demand for higher education, which governments can no longer satisfy through traditional bricks-and-mortar schools

(Daniel 1995). But proponents of distance education are finding themselves faced with new challenges and obstacles. There still remain two substantial problems: (i) how to introduce on-line technologies in places where access to computers or telephones is limited and (ii) how to ensure the quality of programmes offered by distance-learning institutions that are operating within their means.

As previously mentioned, the trend towards distance education in developing countries is being fuelled by the need to bridge the education gap with rich nations. Daniel ([1995], cited in Murphy and Yuen 1998:4) identifies five mega universities in the Asian region with an enrollment of over 100,000 students. Although many Asian countries have well-developed ICT facilities, distance learning capacity has generally been developed on a national level without getting any assistance from other developed countries.

Countries in Asia that are known as the “Asian Tigers” (Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) are expanding the size of their higher education systems. The aims and purposes of the expansion of higher education in these countries are closely related to the economic needs of the country. The most recent Malaysian development plan is based on the assumption that there is a demand for an educated and skilled workforce that will increase in tandem with the country’s rapid industrialization (Dearing Report 1997). This is also true in many of the other developing countries in Asia. In Hong Kong, distance and open learning is provided not only to bridge physical separation, but also to make access to education as open as possible to those who want to take the opportunity to improve themselves in response to the demands of Hong Kong’s ever-changing socio-economic environment (Aylward 2003). It is the fast pace of business development in a financial capital such as Hong Kong that places a lot of demand on the educational system and the needs of the country’s human resources (Dearing Report 1997). It is the increasing need of the

developing nations to raise the quantity and quality of human resources through higher education that is putting pressure on the demand for distance and open learning.

2.5 Distance Learners

Distance education at the open universities has been serving isolated and remote learners for a very long time (Daniel 1996). Distance learners are no longer located specifically in remote geographical locations; distance learning is aimed at part-time students, executives with heavy work commitments, housewives or other adult learners who did not have the opportunity to pursue their educational ambitions at an earlier age, students who are trying to work full-time and at the same time trying to earn a paper qualification and people who do not feel comfortable attending a formal classroom setting when seeking education. Moore and Kearsley (1996) stress that, the unique benefit of distance learning is that it is able to provide access to education for learners who, regardless of age or gender, or other demographic characteristics, do not have access to conventional modes of education. It is therefore important that attention be given to the understanding of learners' particular conditions and limitations in order to provide them with positive distance learning experiences. Anderson and Haddad (2005) presented in their study that if students' demographic profiles are ignored, this may cause some limitations on certain distance education programmes. It is the students' satisfaction, attitudes and behaviours towards the distance learning course or programmes that verify the positive aspects of a course. Moore and Kearsley (1996) suggest that learner satisfaction with distance learning courses varies much more than with conventional courses according to the learners' personalities and other characteristics and with the design of the course which foster positive attitudes and how well it is taught. Cramer, Havice and Havice (2002) also suggested that attitude is important to determine that a distance education programme is successful. Havice (1999) stressed that

most people pay attention to what they enjoy and they retain information easily when it is consistent with their attitude and disregard any information that is in conflict with their attitude. The previous statement is supported in Russell's (2001) study which indicated that a well-designed course which promotes positive attitude among the learners can be delivered effectively through a distance medium such as the online distance course. Thang (2005) conducted a study of the perceptions of a group of distance learners at Universiti Kebangsaan, Malaysia towards their English proficiency courses. She wanted to acquire a better understanding of the differences in attitudes between distance learners and on-campus learners. Her participants were first and second year on-campus and distance learning undergraduate students at three different proficiency levels in English; low, average and high, and from three disciplines; arts, science and business administration. Her respondents were the distance learners. One thousand copies of the "New Course Perceptions Questionnaire" (NCPQ) which included items taken from Entwistle and Ramsden's Course Perceptions Questionnaire (CPQ) were distributed to the distance learners and five hundred copies to the on-campus learners. 715 questionnaires were returned, 368 from the distance learners and 347 from the on-campus learners. The distance learners were adults with working experience, between the ages of 24 and 40. Interviews were also carried out with 13 of the distance learners who had responded to the NCPQ. ANOVA and factor analysis were used to analyse the questionnaire and interview data. The results indicated that overall the distance learners had much clearer perceptions of the goals and levels expected of them, and they also showed more positive attitudes towards the staff and the courses. They were more confident in coping with the courses and appeared to appreciate the freedom in learning besides being able to utilize the teaching materials to a greater extent than the on-campus learners. However, from the interviews carried out on the distance learners, these learners demonstrated the need for support and guidance from the staff and the courses, rather than what the respondents to the

NCPQ's claimed they wanted - greater freedom in learning. Learners were also found to have difficulty in applying positive strategies and they complained about the heavy workload and the lack of time they had for studying. Tang (2005) also found out that the learners disapprove with the course modules. The learners felt that the content of the modules focus only on specific learning objectives, appropriate tasks, keys and feedbacks; however, the examination questions were not based on the content of the course modules. These learners did not realise that the learning objectives were to guide them to learn independently and English proficiency examinations are to assess skills not content. The findings of Tang's (2005) study clearly suggest that measures need to be undertaken to train distance learners and that their individual learning needs should not be neglected. The awareness of the different types of learners in distance learning will lead to learners being encouraged to develop themselves, to identify techniques that work for them, and to make decisions about the use of the course materials. With proper motivation and guidance of the learners in their use of the distance learning materials and facilities, the particular course could have been effectively carried out. Distance education which is very much associated with e-learning in the 21st century as Garrison and Anderson (2003) state in their book, distance learners' limitations and capabilities should be made well aware to create a rich community of inquiry in an asynchronous, any time, any place context.

2.6 Advantages and disadvantages of Distance Education

There are many advantages and drawbacks of offering distance learning education mentioned in the research literatures. Following are some of the factors stated in the writings of Reeves (2009), Selwyn, Gorard and Furlong (2006), Garrison and Anderson (2003), Mason (2003, 2000, 1989), Ryan, Scott, Freeman and Patel (2000), Moore and

Kearsley (1996), Feenberg (1989), Harasim (1989), which are claimed to be favourable to the students:

- Learners who are not in favour of traditional educational setting are able to attain higher education qualifications regardless of age, gender, race, religion, or any other demographic background differences.
- Schedules are flexible; learners are able to access study materials at convenient times and locations.
- Learners are able to receive individualised attention from the instructors whenever needed either through e-mail, chatting, postings, telephone, video-conferencing and other related media.
- Travel time to location of study is very minimal depending on the course approach: whether the mode of study is fully on-line or blended (face-to-face and online).
- Learners are able to supply responses to instructors or peers whenever it is convenient for them, using either synchronous or asynchronous channels of communication.
- Learners have more time to think about questions posed by instructors or peers and to produce feedback later and are able to learn at their own pace.
- Learners have the option to be anonymous during postings, interaction or discussion. This can enhance the confidence of some learners.
- The instructional materials and technological tools are there to be evaluated in detail and continually to be improved.

Distance learning has taken advantage of the new technology by providing a platform to acquire knowledge and also forces people in the field of education to examine issues related to the technology available (Selwyn, Gorard and Furlong 2006). Bates and Escamilla, J. (1997) stated in their writing that with this world wide choice, distance learning interactive technologies could empower individual learners on a wider scale by making education more focused on their needs. They also stressed that the reality is that any information-technology

based distance education relies on developing curriculum and providing learner supports that are relevant to the learners wherever the learners happen to reside.

However, a few studies contradicted the fact that with the increasing number of distance learning courses will in no time expand educational opportunities world wide. Hara and Kling (2000) in their studies found problems that arose in a Web-based distance education course at a major U.S university. The study found that the learners were frustrated by the lack of prompt feedback, ambiguous instructions on the Web and technical problems that they have to face. The frustrations that the learners faced inhibited educational opportunities and failed to satisfy the learners learning experience. This is supported by Elvers, Polzella and Graetz (2003), they claimed that online distance courses that have no strict study schedule provide more opportunities for procrastination when compared to the traditional face-to-face classes. In Dunbar's (1991) study, distance education was found to be a failure in Indonesia due to the adoption of western models without any adaptation "to suit the acculturised behaviours of the Indonesian teachers and learners" (p163). The western model imported by the Universiti Terbuka Indonesia takes for granted that the learners are capable of independent learning behaviours and psychologically prepared of a self-study regime. Additionally, Dunbar (1991) stated in his writing that Indonesian society is strongly heteronomous; the teacher-student relationship is built on one-way respect--from students to the teacher, and these learners are acculturised from small children to avoid behaviours that may be interpreted by others to be expressions of personal autonomy. Hara and Kling (2000) argued that what is needed is research that is aimed to educate us on learners' experiences in terms of their attitudes, behaviours and preferences and the appropriate use of technology and pedagogy which could make distance education beneficial to the learners.

With all the advantages of distance learning, using up-to-date technology and appropriate pedagogy with flexibility in seeking knowledge, there will be some liabilities and

setbacks that are unavoidable or unresolved. If the technology and pedagogy fails, the distance learning course offered can fail. With the increase in demand for distance education, the growing concerns were on the effectiveness of distance education and the changes in pedagogy and what is required by the advancement of technology (Gunawardena and McIsaac 2004).

2.7 Cultural factors in Distance Education Teaching and Learning

Perhaps culture is one of the most difficult things in determining its meaning. According to Jones and Alony (2007), there are more than 164 definitions for the word “culture” alone. Depending on the discipline, culture can become a shared processes and understanding, shared experience, language, values and how people function in a certain group. Distance education teaching and learning via the cyberspace does breakdown the boundaries between different cultures and countries. However, the participants in distance education can be very different. Huang and Deng (2008) stated that in technology development, the most essential concern is to comprehend the needs of users all around the world, especially with regard to their differences in language, customs, attitudes and behaviours. In aspiring to meet the needs of the distance education participants, consideration should be taken in looking into the cultural differences that emerge with regard to the participants’ attitudes and behaviours. Cultural component is vital in understanding how people interact in online communication. Although most of the time cultural differences are subtle, realising the differences can also assist us in understanding the contextual constraints and many other possibilities, and develop a culturally adaptive approach to learning technology innovation (Zhang 2007).

As Hofstede (1991) defines; culture is the software of the mind that guides us in our every day interactions, a value that is ingrained and, therefore, often we are unaware of. It is a

mental program that lies within the social environment in which one “grew up and collected one’s life experiences” (Hofstede 1991 p.4). Basically what is said here is that from a cultural standpoint, the programming starts from our own family, it follows through within the neighbourhood, at school, at the work place, in the living community and at times in the age group that we are in. According to Hofstede (1991), culture is something that we learned and not inherited which draws from one’s social environment and not from one’s genes.

Hofstede (1984) has classified cultural differences along four dimensions: “power distance (PDI) which examines how inequality is experienced; individualism versus collectivism (IND) which explores how individuals relates to the group; masculinity versus femininity (MAS) which concerns with the nature of social values as either nurturing or competitive; and uncertainty avoidance (UAI) that explores the manner in which cultures deal with the uncertainty of everyday life” (Venter 2003). There are implications of the cultural dimensions in teaching and learning as suggested by Hofstede (1984). For example, according to Hofstede’s (1984) study, countries with high PDI scores (such as Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong) may be expected to display an emphasis on learner conformity. There may be an emphasis on teacher superiority and teacher-centred education in which learners expect the teacher to initiate communication and to outline the paths they should follow (Hofstede 1986). In Aylward’s (2003) writing on the Open University Hong Kong distance learning courses, one of the issues that arose is teacher superiority, in which the learners are the ones who have preference of their teachers telling them what to learn and to interpret course materials. The teachers on the other hand, feel obliged to respond to their students demands particularly in the foundation level course. The value of not being an independent learner is clearly practised here the teachers too shared and practised this value in their learning-teaching approach of a distance learning course (Aylward 2003). As Hofstede (1986 p.301-320) states, countries with low PDI scores (such as USA, Great

Britain, New Zealand, Australia) may practise a more student-centred learning, in which learners favour independence and teachers expect learners to carry out activities on their own and also to initiate communication.

Countries with high UAI scores (such as Japan, Greece, Portugal, Peru, Mexico) may display less motivation achievement, more fear of failure and a preference for clear instructions. Low UAI scoring countries (such as Singapore, Sweden, Hong Kong, Great Britain, USA) may demonstrate a stronger motivation achievement to succeed as opposed to fear of failure (Hofstede 1984). In Venter (2003 p.273) it was stated that studies carried out looking at the cultural values along the four dimensions mentioned by Hofstede (PDI, IND, MAS and UAI) from the Asian perspective found that values corresponding to UAI within the Chinese culture did not occur but the rest of Hofstede's dimensions did emerge in the Chinese culture (Chinese Culture Connection 1987). This suggests the need for caution when dealing with the UAI dimension in a Chinese context and perhaps other Asian context such as the Malay learners in this research study.

High individualism scores (such as USA, Bahrain, Australia and Netherlands) show a greater importance in freedom and challenge in work, in which learners are more independent and participative in learning how to learn (Hofstede 1986). By contrast countries with low individualism scores (such as many Asian and South American countries), the learners were suggested to be more passive and dependent (Hofstede 1984). According to Hofstede (1986) in terms of teacher-student interaction, the learners are expected to learn "how to do" in a harmonious environment, maintaining face and getting the certificates is a greater motivation compared to acquiring competence (Hofstede 1986). A study conducted by Venter (2003) argues that the Asian cultures of Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia are characterised by a 'surrogate teacher' model, while the European cultures are characterised by a 'student identity' model. She argues that even though distance learning clearly produces different

kinds of experiences in different cultural environments, it will still be developing globally and become a dominant form of instructional delivery for adult learners who are seeking education. However, according to Joughin (2006), the notion of Asian students as passive rote learners is no longer realistic; it is just based on failure to appreciate the complex relations between memorizing and understanding. There may still be differences in ways of imparting knowledge to learners, in the way that learners transmit the knowledge received, and in the student-teacher interactions. Joughin (2006) stresses that cross-cultural encounters offer rich opportunities for reflection and learning and for extending our conceptions and understanding. Practitioners of distance learning without a doubt will go on looking for the right answers on how to improve distance courses and programmes, but, as stated by Dasher-Alston and Patton (1998), it is by asking the right questions that quality and the advancement of educational excellence will be ensured.

Countries which demonstrate cultures in which the motivation to succeed is strong, possessed the dimension of masculinity and have high scores. As stressed by Hofstede (1984) there is a tendency for the strong to be admired and students would likely be striving to be recognised, all these are unlikely to be happening in countries with low masculinity score. Trompenaars and Hamnden-Turner's (1999) research is parallel to Hofstede's (1986) in several important respects such as in understanding people's attitudes and competencies in general business practice. What we need to be looking into and understand further is if cultural factors influence the attitudes and behaviours of learners using technologies in distance education.

A few studies like Dzakiria and Walker (2003) indicate that by understanding the common problems and strategies used by distance learners from different cultural backgrounds when learning may help these learners to make an academic transition to study at a distance a success. They stressed that the distance learners' previous experiences, culture

and values, should be acknowledged and valued, then only a quality distance education course is most likely to be facilitated. This is agreed by Dillon and Greene in their article on *Learner Differences in Distance Learning: Finding Differences that Matter* (2003) that focus should be upon modifying the instruction in order to accommodate the preferences of the distance learners instead of focusing on modifying the learning approaches to meet the demand of the instructions. All learners have the potential to succeed regardless of what cultural background they are from. They may lack in the skills and understanding about how they approached learning. Their attitudes, behaviours and strategies that they possessed in tackling the online activities provided are important (Dillon and Greene 2003). It is by developing the distance learners' awareness of themselves as learners, of the strategies that work for them in learning at a distance, and making decisions within the structures provided by the course that teaching and learning at a distance can be successful (Thang 2005, White 2003 p.155, Vanijdee 2003).

A few other sources written by Morse (2003), Gunawardena and Boverie (1992), Lanham and Zhou (2003), Bloom and Hough (2003), and Bauer, Chin and Chang (2000) discuss on other issues that may influence the learning and teaching in distance education. Morse (2003) argues that the emphasis given to the computer-mediated delivery approach in distance education studies such as that of Benigno and Trentin (2000) which focuses on the importance of the teacher approach to his/her students, runs the risk of overlooking the effect of culture communication and learning behaviour. Morse (2003) on the other hand, found that language differences are important in the perception of the effectiveness of asynchronous communications in distance education. The language used in the asynchronous communication was English, and this imposed not only a linguistic but also a burden on the participants who depended heavily on their peers and teachers. Morse (2003) stated that cultural differences should be taken account of in planning an effective distance learning

course if the course is to be offered to learners all over the world. In their study, Gunawardena and Boverie (1992) however, argued that the learning environment the learners are in and the support received by the learners either on-campus or off-campus both play a crucial part in the provision of an effective distance learning system which will lead to positive distance learners' attitudes and behaviours. Lanham and Zhou (2003) argue that what is at issue here is a lack of awareness that different cultures require different learning approaches even though the learners are given the same materials to be used. They believe that being aware of the diversity in classes and taking into consideration the needs of all learners by designing and providing an environment that is fully understood by the learners is important (Lanham and Zhou 2003). It is the educational content and resources provided to the distance learners that will enhance the learners' motivation in learning besides being aware of the learners' cultural differences (Lanham and Zhou 2003). The awareness of cultural diversity is stressed in Bauer, Chin and Chang's (2000) work, in which they contended that cultural diversity has an impact in distance learners' attitude and approach towards distance learning. In contrast, Bloom and Hough (2003) believe that faculty expertise in the creation, selection and use of the technology is the major factor in influencing distance learners' attitudes, behaviours and preferences towards a distance course. This is also agreed by Beattie, Spooner, Jordan, Algozzine and Spooner (2002) who emphasized the fact that the success of a distance course depends on access to the best instructors and educational resources available. Instructors may have different instructional approaches for presenting the learning content, they may use different approaches to facilitate the collaboration of learners, and they may use different methods to support communication between themselves and their learners (Paechter 2004).

Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) suggested for the blended mode as a favourable mode to be used in distance education which can be applied in tandem with their

Community of Inquiry (CoI) model. Once the distance education learners are identified, an appropriate alignment of curriculum, faculty and learners interactions to the environments best suited is determined. The guiding principles, learning objectives and activities of the distance course are to be developed to support cognitive, social and teaching presences essential to foster critical discourse in the asynchronous discussion environments. Cognitive presence is characterised by “exploration, construction, resolution and confirmation of understanding” (Garrison, 2007, p. 65) through practical inquiry. Social presence, on the other hand, requires the participants to establish personal and purposeful relationships to foster effective communication (Garrison, 2007). In order to keep the interactions in an asynchronous part of the distance course focused in a specific direction, teaching presence is seen as essential in balancing cognitive and social issues (Garrison et al., 2000). Teaching presence contains instructional design and organisation, facilitating discourse and direct instruction (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). Within this CoI framework, the challenge is to recognise and assess indications of meaningful collaborative learning in the transcripts of computer mediated discussion forums as in this study (Garrison et al., 2000). As Henri (1992) stated in his study of computer conferencing and content analysis, the messages found in the asynchronous discussion part of a distance course and through the analysis of its content can help us to understand the learning process and also offers data that may be very useful in improving the efficacy of interaction with the distance learners. This will also promote and support a collaborative learning process at a distance.

All the above studies mentioned issues of developing, designing of the distance education materials and resources, support received by the distance learners from the experts such as the teachers of distance learning courses, awareness of environment and the needs of the diverse learners in distance education. All these issues may lead to the factors that influence the distance learners’ and the teachers’ experiences in the learning and teaching of a

distance education course. As there will be possible changes in the development of teaching and learning along with the rapid evolution of technology, it would be a primary concern that these issues coupled with the cultural factors are to be explored further in order to maintain the quality and effective outcome of distance education courses.

2.8 Summary of chapter

Due to the advances in technology, many imperative needs and challenges related to shared experiences and cultural differences have emerged and need to be confronted in distance education (Huang and Deng 2008). In addition, there is a lack of awareness of learners' attitudes or behaviours in distance education. By encouraging these learners to develop themselves as distance learners would help meet the demands of a particular course (Gibson 1996). As argued by Hara and Kling (2000) what is needed is research that is aimed to educate us on learners' characteristics and the appropriate use of technology and pedagogy which could make distance education beneficial to the learners. Huang and Deng (2008) stated that the emerging technology itself and the social interactions it supports basically fall short when it comes to cultural concerns. This includes those that relate to users' attitudes and behaviours toward technology applications and the potential reasons to use them as communication media (Huang and Deng 2008). There are also possibilities of cultural factors that may influence the distance learners' attitudes and behaviours that are of concerns in learning and teaching of distance course. As stated by Lanham and Zhou (2003) being aware of the heterogeneity in classes and taking into consideration the characteristics of all learners by designing and providing an environment that is fully understood by the learners is crucial. Trompenaars and Hamnden-Turner's (1999) and Hofstede (1986) agreed that understanding people's attitudes and competencies in general and through their cultural experiences are crucial when learning in a new environment. Additionally, it is the need to acknowledge the

factors that are important in distance education course that may fulfil the distance learners' requirement. The changes and expectations in teaching and learning of distance education that were highlighted in some of the studies mentioned earlier have been shown to be important underpinnings in the development of distance education. A few of the changes and expectations that were identified are facilities and technology that are provided to distance learners and the need to accommodate the use of different pedagogic practices with different group of learners which may possibly help minimise dissatisfaction among the learners.

The limited scope of studies on learners' experiences in terms of their attitudes, behaviours and preferences has been highlighted in the literature review. In the context of this study, it has made use of the ideas of Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) in terms of the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model. In the CoI model, once distance education learners have been identified, an appropriate alignment of curriculum, faculty and learners interactions to the environments best suited can be determined. The guiding principles, learning objectives and activities of the distance course can be developed to support cognitive, social and teaching presences essential to foster critical discourse in the asynchronous discussion in distance education course. In addition to the above issues, the awareness of prior experiences and cultural differences of the diverse learners in distance education may have an impact in distance learners' attitudes and behaviours towards distance learning. In the chapter that follows, the research questions and methodology that guide the present study are outlined.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The procedures and methods used to conduct the data collection and analysis of the study will be discussed in this chapter. The chapter begins with a statement of the research questions. This is followed by sections that deal with the following: epistemological stance, the methodological approach, data required, data collection methods, triangulation, data analysis, ethical issues and the pilot study.

The aim of the study was to examine the attitudes and behaviours of learners of a Preparatory English distance learning course (BEL 100 e-PJJ) offered at the Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia, and whether those attitudes and behaviours are influenced by their prior educational experiences and whether cultural factors may also have influence in the attitudes and behaviours of these learners. As emphasized by Dillon and Green (2003), it is possible to modify the methods of instruction on a particular distance course to accommodate the preferences of the learners, but this should not be the ultimate objective. Equally important is the modification of the learners' approach to the learning situation. Being aware of the learners' attitudes and behaviours and encouraging them to develop themselves as distance learners according to their preferences should help meet the demand of a particular course. In the case of the present study, the researcher decided to examine factors mentioned in the aim of the study as stated earlier. This is because of these learners' experiences of learning English which started at an early age of six years old and they were taught through the traditional face-to-face method of instruction. In addition, these learners share the same culture- Malay culture and similar ethnic background (Malay or bumiputera). For the distance learners of BEL 100 e-PJJ to get use to the experience of

having to seek educational knowledge the traditional face-to-face way and being distance learners would be a totally new experience for them. Distance learners and teachers are likely to encounter a variety of problems when first using distance education, however, the transformation of becoming distance education participants may possibly improve with time. As Abas (2009) suggested, with improved learning pedagogies and incorporation of learner-centred environment which meet the needs of the learners more Malaysians will likely find opportunities to improve their distance learning skills and competencies. As already stated the broad aim of this study was to examine whether the learners' attitudes and behaviours were influenced by prior educational experiences and, additional, to examine if cultural factors influenced such attitudes and behaviours. In light of this broad aim the following specific research questions were developed as the basis for the study:

1. What are the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners?
2. What is the role of prior educational experiences on the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners?
3. Is there evidence that cultural factors have an influence on the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners?
4. What were the attitudes and behaviours that underpinned effective learner activity within this case study?

3.2 Mixed-methods research

The research questions of this study may seem to be very common in the study of distance education. Many would feel that the problems faced by the participants of any distance education courses are always similar in any environment or any parts of the world, in reality it is not. Researchers on distance education in Malaysia (Alsagoff 1985, Mohammed

1999, Abdul Rahman 1994) indicate that Malaysian public universities that offer distance education have been seriously taking some effort to tackle problems that arise in distance education. However, there is still very minimal published research being carried out on the distance education issue such as attention to the needs, attitudes and behaviours of the learners with regards to the cultural factors of a multicultural country such as Malaysia.

The approach adopted in this research study is a case study and making use of a mixed-method case study design which examines the issue in a specific preparatory English distance course in UiTM which is the BEL 100 e-PJJ course. Mixed-method studies are a combination of the qualitative and quantitative approaches in a research methodology of a single study or multiphased study (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998).

Creswell (1995 p.177) stated that, “mixed methods research is a research design (or methodology) in which the researcher collects, analyses and mixes (integrates or connects) both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or a multiphase program of inquiry.”

“Quantitative research is a formal, objective, systematic process in which numerical data are used to obtain information about the world. This research method is used to describe variables, to examine relationships among variables, to determine cause-and-effect interactions between variables ' (Burns & Grove 2005 p.23). Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, study things in their natural settings, trying to make sense of, or to explain, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). According to Merriam (2002 p.4), “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding what those interpretations are at a particular point in time and in a particular context.” It involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach like learning how individuals experience and interact with their social world and gives priority to what the data contribute to important research questions or existing information (Merriam 2000).

Several educational researchers (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner 2007, Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998, Meekers 1994) have verified that the two paradigms can be weighted equally in a single study which is relevant to this study. These include: the objective of the researcher is to understand the meaning that the participants have constructed about their educational experiences by examining their attitudes and behaviours and exploring if cultural factors have influence on their behaviours; the researcher is the primary tool to data collection and analysis; the analysis process is both inductive and deductive in that data is represented numerically and textually or pictorially. Content analysis was performed on the transcribed semi-structured interview responses. As part of this analysis, some of the qualitative data was interpreted quantitatively in which the themes and concepts which emerged were validated through their repeated occurrence in the interview data. Also, some of the quantitative data (the asynchronous online transcripts) were interpreted qualitatively on the basis of the responses of each group involved in the present study. The triangulation of methods using multiple techniques and data from multiple sources helps the researcher to achieve a detail understanding of the research questions of the present study.

The context of this study is important to the researcher and also the institution where the course is being conducted, and the object is to find out if there is evidence of Malay culture that influences the attitudes and behaviours of the distance learners of BEL 100 e-PJJ. The participants of the course in this case study; the learners and facilitators were interviewed and also the transcripts of the forum discussions are being analysed quantitatively, besides that the researcher being an observer to the whole context of the study. Research such as this is necessary, as this will inform the teaching-learning process and as White (2003) stated it will also help teachers to accommodate to the learners background, to help develop interaction, to personalise interactions, develop feedback, to help address learners' concerns, to offer support and many more.

This study seeks to help improve the distance learning situation in UiTM by investigating the teaching and learning of preparatory distance learning English course as mentioned earlier in the aim. Additionally, this study hopes that this will then facilitate the development of an appropriate English distance learning courses to meet the distance learners' preferences in UiTM.

3.3 Methodological approach

A case study designed with mixed research methods was adopted for this study. This case study focused on the BEL 100 E-PJJ distance course in UiTM, investigating the learners' attitudes/behaviours, prior educational experiences and cultural factors that may affect the learners' attitudes and behaviours in the teaching and learning of the course. Merriam (1998) asserts that a case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Furthermore, a case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon; what it also does is to offer insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers' experiences (Stake 2000). It is by using the case study research that an understanding of the programme can be presented using the language of the participants (Guba and Lincoln 1994). The case study conducted in this thesis will develop a detail and intensive knowledge of the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners. In addition it will also investigate evidence of prior educational experiences and the Malay cultural factors that may or may not influence these learners in their learning of the course through an analysis of the interview data and the asynchronous discussion forum transcripts. The results of the study will then be presented in detailed in the analysis chapters that follow.

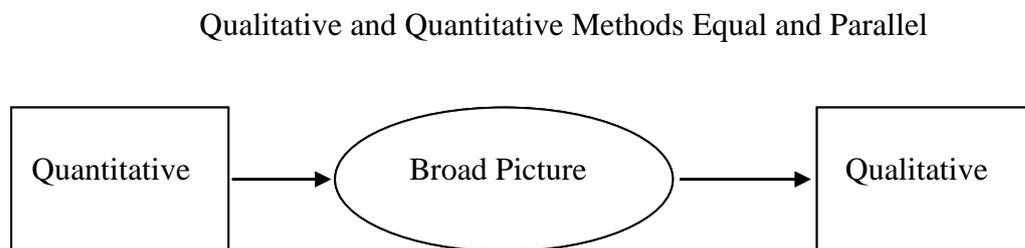
The term mixed-method as stated by Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998 p.43), "typically refers to both data collection techniques and analyses given that the type of data collected is

so intertwined with the type of analysis that is used”. This approach generates numerical and narrative data that answer to the research questions of this study. The researcher carried out an interview on both learners and facilitators of the BEL 100 e-PJJ course and at the same time downloading the asynchronous discussion forum transcripts of the course. The two data collection techniques were adopted to assist in answering the research questions specified earlier (p.48). Interviewing the participants will provide the researcher first hand, genuine and personal answers to the questions post. According to Kitwood (1977), in his critique of the interview as a research tool, “a solution to the problem of validity and reliability might lie in the direction of a judicious compromise”. When interviewed, participants are more likely to disclose about themselves, what they are thinking and feeling. Their attitudes and behaviours towards a certain issue being discussed during the interview will most likely be revealed in a conversation in which they feel at ease. As stressed by Kitwood (1977), the “distinctively human element in the interview is necessary to its validity”. The asynchronous online forum transcript is another data collection techniques used to provide answers to the research questions of this study. By analysing the data as described in detail in Chapter 5, the results will provide a sense of how each element chosen interacts to achieve answers to the research questions. Murphy and Manzanares (2006) stressed that results to online asynchronous discussion can indicate individual patterns of behaviour or overall group and how it matched or did not match with the purpose of the discussion. In this regard, the results of the online asynchronous discussion are enhanced by combining analysis from the interview data to answer the research questions of this study. Hara, Bonk and Angeli (2000) suggested that content analysis of online discussions should be complemented by other tools such as interviews to gain additional insights.

The qualitative part of the analysis is when the researcher analyse the narrative data (interviews) of the learners and facilitators using *thematic analysis* and the quantitative

numerical data of the asynchronous online forum messages using *content analysis*-coding and counting the frequency and percentages of the categories of each domain involved. The above mentioned approach used by the researcher for this study is categorised as an equal status mixed-method design by Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998). In this design, the researcher conducted the present study using both the quantitative and qualitative approaches about equally; the quantitative survey would provide an overview of the phenomena and the qualitative, exploratory, interviews would be used to examine what the issues mean to the actual participants in order to understand the phenomenon of the study (as illustrated in Figure 3.1, Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998).

Figure 3.1: Illustration of a scenario combining qualitative and quantitative methods in this study (adapted from Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998 p.44)



3.4 Data required

3.4.1 Selection of the distance learning course- BEL 100 e-PJJ

DePoy and Gitlin (2005) emphasize that a researcher must establish the limits of the scope of the study so that it is feasible. In this case, the BEL 100 e-PJJ course was selected for this study as the bounded system or the unit of analysis (Merriam 1998) that needs to be investigated. The BEL 100 e-PJJ course is offered to first year learners and it is a compulsory English course for all first year learners who are registered as students at the UiTM. With this in mind, the course has the potential to provide rich information. As Merriam (1998)

suggests, it is important to bear in mind that the purpose of a case study is not to represent the vast majority, but to represent the particular case. The case is unique but the people that are involved in this case, the learners and facilitators, the online learning environment and how it supports the learners' learning constitute a link of domains. The domains may be complex but, as stressed by Lincoln and Guba (2000), an examination of these complexities can be addressed in a holistic manner.

The BEL 100 e-PJJ course is an English language requirement and it is to be taken by all Semester I full-time and e-PJJ diploma students in UiTM. This course constitutes a part-fulfillment of credits for the Diploma students. It is a one semester programme designed to remedy students' weaknesses in the use of English and to raise their proficiency level. It covers the major aspects of grammar, reading, writing and speaking. The syllabus used in the BEL 100 e-PJJ course is a replicate of the BEL 100 full time course which does not have any distance learning elements included in it. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the BEL 100 e-PJJ course should not be thought of as representative of all the English distance learning courses offered at the UiTM, nor should the learners and facilitators involved in this study be considered representative of other learners and facilitators in other distance learning courses in general. In this study for identification purposes, specific learners and facilitators involved will be referred to with pseudonyms to consider the participants' anonymity and confidentiality.

3.4.2 BEL 100 e-PJJ learners

The main informant group of learners in this study was 225 learners of the July-October 2005 cohort of BEL 100 e-PJJ. E-PJJ learners of UiTM are usually learners who have left secondary school after finishing their fifth year. These learners may have years of prior experiences both in education and work. They may have certificates, university

diplomas or degrees. The majority, however, are learners who are committed to full-time work and who wish to further their studies at a higher level. The learners involved in this study were registered for the Diploma in Administration (AM 110), Diploma in Accountancy (AC 110), Diploma in Business Studies (BM 111) and Diploma in Banking (BM 112). The age range of the learner-informants was between 17-43 years old. They came from various occupational backgrounds and domiciles. Since they are distance learners as stated in their BEL 100 Preparatory English Module: Notes from the Instructional Designer (Ponniah et al, 2002 p. 1-2), they are expected to be autonomous learners, with an emphasis on independence and self-direction. They are expected to be responsible for their own learning when they are not meeting facilitators during the face-to-face sessions which are only held four times in a semester. They are expected to follow guidelines as stated in their manual and they are encouraged to be engaging actively with the self-instructional course material, which has been specially designed to promote interaction, with objectives, activities, text questions, activity feedback and self-check answers.

Table 3.1: Distribution of learner participants by age

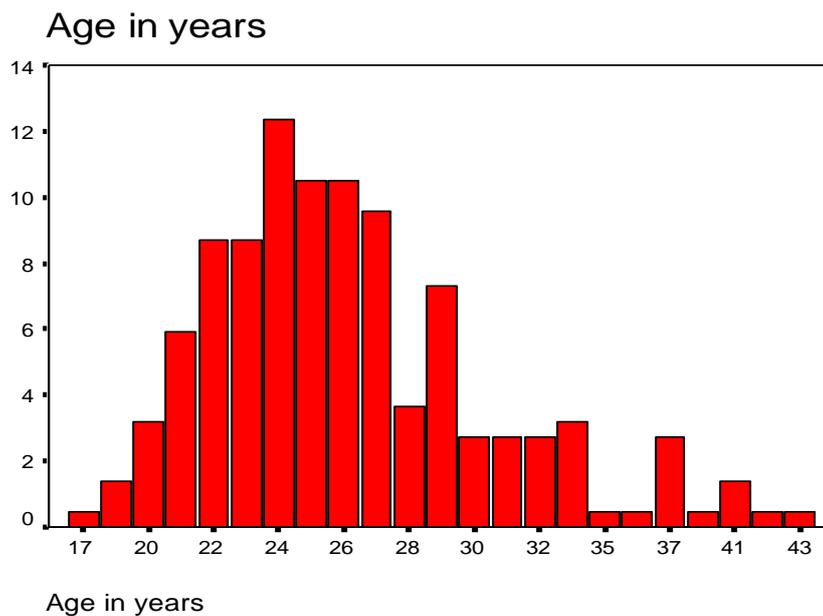


Table 3.1 shows the distribution of ages in the detailed background of learner participant group. The age group ranges from 17 years to 43 years old. Majority of the learners are in the range of the 22 to 25 age group. This age group is the pinnacle of the chart and most of them are holding position as junior staff in their organisations. They are the ones who have left school for a few years, worked and have decided to get back to studying. Decisions of getting a qualification may have evolved after realising that there are better job opportunities with a qualification, or to fulfil the self-satisfaction of achieving a higher qualification which they were not able to achieve after school due to economic or personal reasons.

Table 3.2: Distribution of learner participants by employment sector

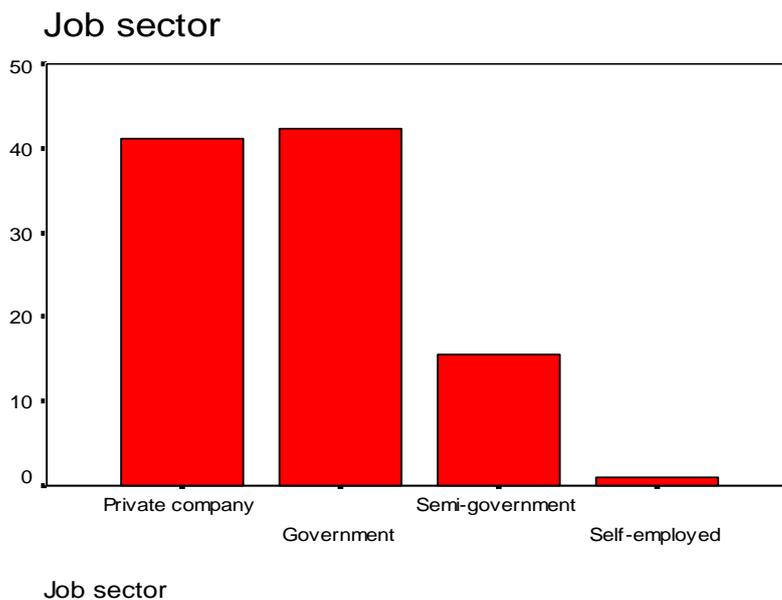


Table 3.2 shows the number of participants in various job sectors. 42.4 per cent of the respondents are working with the government, 40.9 per cent with the private sector, 15.6 per cent with semi-government organisations in which corporations are set up to take over the duties and responsibilities of certain government departments. Finally, a marginal 0.9 per cent is self-employed.

Table 3.3: Distributions of learner participants by state

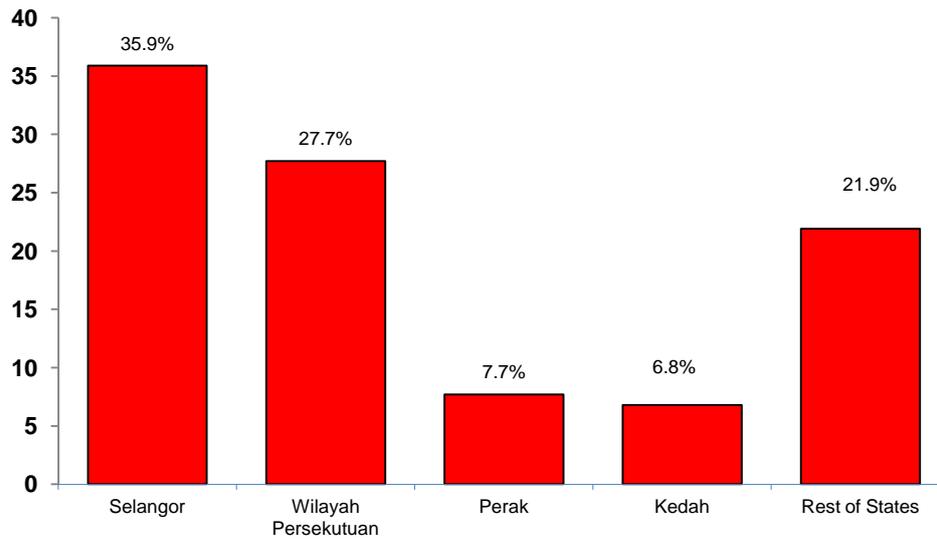


Table 3.4: Malaysia Administrative Divisions

Table 3.3 shows the distributions of respondents by their home state in Malaysia. It can be seen that 35.9 per cent of the respondents come from Selangor and 27.7 per cent from

Wilayah Persekutuan. The number of respondents is bigger from these two states due to the location of UiTM where the e-PJJ programme is being carried out. The university is located in Shah Alam which is Selangor's state capital and about 40 miles away from the Federal Territory. This is then followed by the respondents from Perak, the state just above Selangor, which is 7.7 per cent, 6.8% from Kedah, and the rest (21.9%) come from all the other states combined. (Refer to the map of Malaysia Administrative Divisions in Table 3.4).

3.4.3 BEL 100 e-PJJ facilitators

In addition to the learners, seven facilitators who taught the course during the July-October 2005 semester were interviewed. All these facilitators were willing to be interviewed and they all signed a consent form (see Appendix 2). The facilitators were experienced female English lecturers with more than five years experience in teaching with at least a qualification of Masters in English as a Second Language (TESL). All but one of the facilitators had taught the course for at least two semesters; the exception was teaching the course for the very first time. The facilitators had not received any intensive training in how to facilitate a distance learning course. The only training they received was at the beginning of the semester. This was in the form of a hands-on session of instruction in the use of the Virtual Learning Environment. They were briefed on how to access and manage the course website during the training session and they were also given a 'Quick User Guide for Learning Facilitator' on these topics (Appendix 4).

The facilitators' ages ranged from 28 to 55 years old. They were given pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity. Interviews were set up with the facilitators in September 2005 a month before the end of the semester. The facilitators were chosen to take part in the study since they played a significant role in the course. As Thorpe (1988) states, instructors have an important function as they are the mediators and interpreters of the meaning of the course for

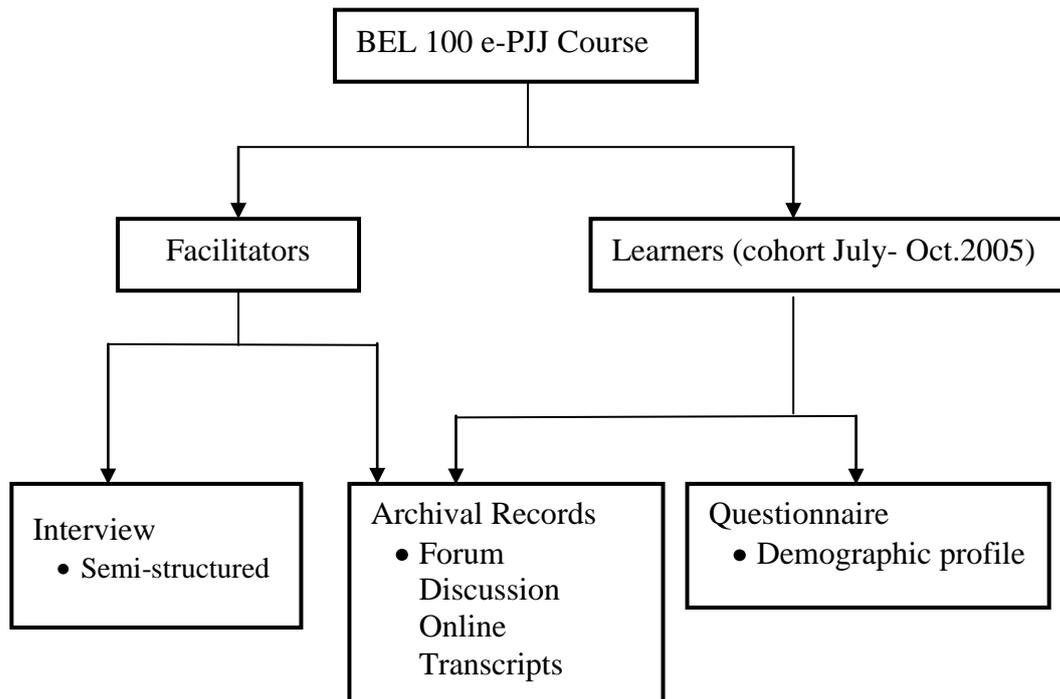
the learners and they also know what is required in assessing a course. As stated in the BEL 100 Preparatory English Module: Notes from the Instructional Designer (Ponniah et al, 2002 p. 1-2), despite the emphasis on the course materials as the primary source of learning, the e-PJJ facilitators have always been acknowledged when it came to the importance of learner support in the learning process.

3.5 Data collection methods

Yin (2003) suggests that multiple data collection techniques strengthen the credibility of findings in case study research as this allows for triangulation. Varied instrumentation enables the researcher to identify consistencies across findings. In this study, information was collected from multiple sources (eg. learners and facilitators) and data was collected using multiple techniques for gathering information such as the interviews, questionnaires and data from the asynchronous online forum discussions but aimed at supporting the same objective of the study. Since this study used qualitative and quantitative methodologies in order to triangulate the findings, the use of multiple sources of evidence may lessen the partial information derived from any single source (Oliver 2000, Anglin and Morrison 2000).

The following research techniques were adopted in the pilot study and/or the main study: interviews, document analysis (discussion forum transcripts; see also Appendix 12), and a demographic profile questionnaire (Appendix 3). Figure 3.2 shows an overview of the instruments used in the main study.

Figure 3.2: An overview of the instruments used in the main study



3.5.1 Profiling the learners' demographic background

In the main study, consent to complete the demographic profile questionnaire was obtained from the learners. Before the profile questionnaire was distributed, permission to carry out the survey was obtained from the Director of InED (see also Appendix 13). A total of 225 UiTM students from the BEL 100 course completed the profile questionnaire. The questionnaire obtained information concerning the following factors: gender, age, domicile, job sector, field of work, position at work, highest qualification, access to computers, number of computers at home, location of computer at home, sharing of computer, frequency of accessing computer, level of expertise in use of computer, level of confidence in use of computer, reason for enrolling in course and expectations of the course.

These categories were included in the survey because they are important to the researcher to have knowledge of the majority of the learners involved in this course. Information from the learners themselves are valuable since the survey responses provide

information about the demographic characteristics of the whole population of the course, their learning behaviour and the learning environment when they are studying online and their attitudes in terms of expertise or self-confidence in using computers. A full report of the demographic profile for the July-Oct 2005 cohort can be found in Appendix 7.

3.5.2 Interviews

One of the main methods that was used to collect the qualitative data in this study was the semi-structured interview. This is a form of conversation in which the purpose is for the interviewer to gather data that deals with the study's goals and questions (Savenye and Robinson 1996). In a semi-structured interview topics related to the study are discussed and explored in a guided but loose and probing manner (Holliday 2002). This is what was practiced when the interviews were conducted for this study.

3.5.2.1 Design and construction of the semi-structured interview schedule

Initial work in reviewing the literature on distance learning courses provided the researcher with the initial impetus for the construction of the interview questions. The interview questions and the procedures for the administration of the telephone interviews for the June 2004 pilot study (see Appendix 5) and the learners' diaries (see Appendix 6) all contributed to the design of the main study interview questions (see Appendix 8 and 9). The following interview topics were selected so as to help answer the research questions which focus on the learners' attitudes, behaviours and preferences and exploring if culture does play a role in influencing their behaviours in learning and teaching of the course:

- i) Background
- ii) Aspects of course materials

- iii) Course satisfaction
- iv) Aspects of assessment
- v) Training
- vi) Collaboration with facilitators and peers(classmates)
- vii) Workload and time management

In a semi-structured interview either all of the questions are flexibly worded, or the interview is a mixture of more and less structured questions (Merriam 1998). What is desired from the respondents is information regarding their learning experiences in the existing BEL 100 e-PJJ course. The largest part of the interview in this study was guided by the list of questions and topics as listed above but the exact wording and the order of the questions was not always strictly adhered to.

When constructing the questions for the interview, careful attention was given to phrasing the questions so as to ensure that the respondents were free to say what they thought and to do so with spontaneity and in depth rather than promoting the researcher's agenda (Oppenheim 2001). The questions used in the interviews for this study were constructed as open-ended question with supplementary questions to encourage and guide the interviewees to expand and elaborate their responses (refer to Appendix 8 for transcripts of the interviews with learners). The first few topics covered areas such as their background experiences such as qualifications, jobs held, length of service in present jobs, age, place of domicile, family background. This was done in order to engage the interest and attention of the interviewee. In addition to that is to create and sustain rapport at the right level and finding out their background experiences. This is then followed by the aspects of the course materials, the learners' satisfaction towards the course and also the assessment of the course. Learners were also questioned regarding the training that they received or did not receive as distance

learners. Their collaboration with their facilitators and peers were also part of the topics covered during the interview. Finally, topics on the workload for the course and how the learners manage their time as distance learners informally ended the interview. However, each interviewee was encouraged to talk about any topics that they would want to bring up that was not covered during the interview at the end of every interview. The interviews in this study lasted, on average, for between forty minutes to an hour of interview. Each facilitator and learner interviewed gave his/her consent and set convenient times and venues for the interview session. All the interviews were conducted at the institution's (UiTM) premises except for one interview which was carried out at a café. The interviewees had all given their permission for the interviews to be recorded for the purpose of transcription. The interviews were recorded using MP3 audio equipment. Transcripts were made of both the facilitators' and the learners' interviews and returned to them via email for verification. The researcher agreed with Merriam (1998) that the recording of the interview data ensures that everything said is preserved for analysis and the best database for analysis. In addition to the recording of the interview data, the researcher also took notes to record the attitude and behaviour of the interviewees whenever appropriate especially before and after the recording. According to Merriam (1998), these reflections might contain insights suggested by the interview, verbal or non-verbal. The schedule of interviews with the facilitators and learners is provided in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: Interview schedule for main study

Interviewee	Date	Venue	Duration
Facilitator 1	September 1, 2005	Classroom, Academy of Languages, UiTM	51.06 mins
Facilitator 2	September 2, 2005	Staff lounge, Academy of Languages, UiTM	60.15 mins
Facilitator 3	September 5, 2005	Language laboratory, the Menara, UiTM	39.55 mins

Facilitator 4	September 6, 2005	Facilitator's office, UiTM	49.36 mins
Facilitator 5	September 7, 2005	Facilitator's office, UiTM	40.41 mins
Facilitator 6	September 8, 2005	Facilitator's office, UiTM	41.32 mins
Facilitator 7	September 8, 2005	Language laboratory, Academy of Languages, UiTM	40.35 mins
Learner 1	August 21, 2005	Lecturer's office, UiTM	40.33 mins
Learner 2	August 31, 2005	Staff lounge, Academy of Languages, UiTM	56.43 mins
Learner 3	September 1, 2005	Staff lounge, Academy of Languages, UiTM	45.34 mins
Learner 4	September 4, 2005	Staff lounge, Academy of Languages, UiTM	40.51 mins
Learner 5	September 11, 2005	Classroom, Sect 17, UiTM	45.34 mins
Learner 6	September 11, 2005	Classroom, Sect 17, UiTM	43.49 mins
Learner 7	September 11, 2005	Classroom, Sect 17, UiTM	40.11 mins
Learner 8	September 11, 2005	Quiet café	40.30ins

3.5.2.2 BEL 100 e-PJJ facilitators' interviews

Seven facilitators were involved in teaching the July-October 2005 cohort of the BEL 100 e-PJJ course. All these facilitators were willing to be interviewed and they all signed a consent form agreeing to take part in the interview. A sample copy of the consent form is attached in Appendix 2. All interviewees were guaranteed anonymity and offered the option to reflect upon the conversations and to raise concerns besides adding further thoughts or amendments if they so desired (Oppenheim 2001). Interviews were set up with the facilitators in September 2005 a month before the semester came to an end. The facilitators were all interviewed in their offices, in empty language laboratories, classrooms or staff lounges as they preferred to be in a comfortable and relaxed environment with no distractions. All interviews were carried out in English and the duration of the interviews ranged from forty minutes to one hour and fifteen minutes. The interviews with the facilitators were all

recorded, with their permission, using an MP3 recorder. The recorded interviews were then transcribed. The transcriptions for the interviews can be seen in Appendix 10. The interview was conducted following the guide to the questions as in Appendix 9.

3.5.2.3 BEL 100 e-PJJ learners' interviews

To get volunteers for the interviews with learners the researcher visited eight BEL 100 e-PJJ classes. Some of the classes were running concurrently and permission had to be obtained from the facilitator to explain the objective of the study to learners. This took between five to eight minutes. Most of the facilitators were very cooperative; a few asked the researcher to come back a few minutes before the class was over. Twenty learners volunteered to be interviewed but not all of the volunteers were interviewed because of difficulties in setting up appointments. All but one of the interviews was held at the institution itself because the learners felt comfortable in being interviewed in a lecturer's office during day time and behind closed doors. Most said that not having other people around them when they were being interviewed gave them more confidence in answering the questions. The exception was carried out in the evening at a quiet café chosen by the participant due to the participant's tight day schedule. The interview appointments were all scheduled after the second month through the semester. This was done to give time to the learners to experience the syllabus laid out in the BEL 100 e-PJJ course and so as to ensure informative feedback from the interviewees. Interviews were not able to be carried out at the end of the course since the researcher had to leave the country before the course ended due to visa requirement.

The learner interviews were mostly carried out in the first language of the learners, Malay. This was because the interviewees felt that they could express themselves better

using their mother tongue. The duration of the interview ranged from forty-five minutes to a little over an hour. The procedure of how the interview was conducted is outlined below:

1. The interviewee was briefed on the purpose and importance of the interview. It was explained that the anonymity of the interviewee would be ensured. The interviewee was shown the MP3 recorder and told that a recording would be made of the conversation. Bernard (1988) stresses that an interviewer should not rely on memory only and that tape recorder should be used to record the exact words.
2. As an introduction, the interviewee was briefly questioned on his/her background to establish a friendly and comfortable atmosphere before going into the main questions.
3. During the interview, the interviewer followed up questions that needed to be clarified in depth with probes and maintained interest and respect throughout the session. The probing questions used were the support or follow-up questions as indicated in the interview schedule (see Appendix 8). The interviewer also used some general, non-directive and non-specific probes, such as for example, “Could you elaborate on that, please?” or “Would you like to add anything to that point?”
4. The interviewer had a debriefing session in which the interviewer summarised some of the points learned from the interview and enquired from the interviewee if he/she wanted to comment on the feedback given earlier.
5. The interviewer ended the interview session by asking the interviewee for any additional issues, comments, complaints or suggestions that he/she might want to raise and also by expressing thanks for the time spent for the session.
6. The interviewer made notes after each interview and recorded her impressions of the interview session, commenting particularly on the interpersonal interaction for later analysis of transcript.

3.6 Triangulation

Many researchers have recommended the mixed-method approach in evaluations of distance learning programmes, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches so as to be able to triangulate the findings, thus heightening the quality and credibility of the evaluation (Oliver 2000, Anglin and Morrison 2000). The combination of multiple methodological practices in a single study is best understood as a strategy that contributes rigour, breadth, validity, richness and depth to any inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). The triangulation which is of interest in this kind of study as suggested by Yin (2003) cannot depend on a single data collection method and is likely to use multiple sources of evidence. Robson (1993) argues that one important benefit of multiple methods is in the reduction of inappropriate certainty. Many researchers advocate using multiple methods in investigation, as it permits triangulation. This study adopts a qualitative approach which provides a more detailed and interpretive account of the data. In addition, the quantitative approach to the analysis of the data in terms of percentages and frequency is also adopted, which gives a broad picture of the situation. Approaches used in this study include methods triangulation using multiple techniques for gathering information such as the interviews, questionnaires and data from the asynchronous online forum discussions; and sources triangulation involving the gathering of data using the same method from multiple sources such as the learners and facilitators' interviews, questionnaires and data from the asynchronous online forum discussion of the BEL100 e-PJJ.

3.7 Data analysis

Data analysis consisted of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative part of the analysis is when the researcher analyse the narrative data (interviews) of the learners and facilitators using *thematic analysis* and the quantitative numerical data of the

asynchronous online forum messages using *content analysis*-coding and counting the frequency and percentages of the categories of each domain involved.

The thematic analysis which was carried out on the interview data of both learners and facilitators were analysed using the technique of thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling 2001). The thematic networks were produced by following the procedure outlined below (Attride-Stirling 2001):

- Identifying the Basic Themes
- Grouping the basic themes into Organizing Themes
- Grouping the organizing themes into Global Themes

The above procedures and themes will be explained in-depth in Chapter 4. A thematic network, according to Attride-Stirling (2001), is demonstrated as a web-like structure so as to avoid any implication of ranking. This allows the *Basic Themes* to flow easily from one to another and to emphasise the links in the network (see also Figure 4.1). Attride-Stirling (2001) emphasises that the networks are only a tool in the analysis and not the analysis itself. The analysis however involves a process of constantly moving back and forth between the components of the entire data set, the coded parts of the data that are being analysed, and the analysis of the data that is being produced (Braun and Clarke 2006). The constructed thematic network acts as an organizing principle and an illustrative tool in interpreting the text, assisting the author to make something more evident and also for the reader to understand better.

The analytical framework for the content analysis of online discussion forum data in this study which will be explained in detail in Chapter 5 is adapted from Henri's (1992) model and additional elements taken from Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) model. Some use is also made of Hofstede's (1984) 4-D taxonomy of cultures (refer to Table 5.3 and

5.4). In a learning process, we know that face-to-face learners are able to see and work with each other besides getting to know each other better in classroom settings (Bauer, Chin and Chang 2000). According to Bauer, Chin and Chang (2000), the learning process for distance learners can be successful if it is well facilitated and this becomes even more crucial in culturally diverse learning environments. Hofstede (1986) stated that cultural differences among the people from different nations and societies have existed for a long time and are stable over the long term. For example, Aylward (2003) stressed in his study that the Chinese societies may be technologically advanced yet they are still heavily influenced by their Confucian tradition. Distance learning which is thriving and increasingly integrated in courses offered by Malaysian institutions (Abas 2009) will likely be rewarding if needs of the many types of learners in Malaysia be met. In regard to this study, Hofstede's 4-D taxonomy of cultures is used as a foundation to analyse if cultural factors have influence to the attitudes and behaviours of the distance learners. The four cultural differences are *Power Distance*, *Individualism and Collectivism*, *Masculinity and Femininity*, and *Uncertainty Avoidance*. This will be further analysed and discussed in Chapter 5.

Analysing the social dimension of the forum exchanges, the psychological and cognitive dimensions are the aims of this analysis procedure (Henri 1992), and the elements that are related to the shared knowledge and values of a society (Hofstede 1994). Only two of the dimensions from Henri's model, the Participative and Interaction dimensions were adopted. The researcher used the *Participation* dimension because it provides a simple means of calculating the level of participation among the participants in the form of usage statistics. In addition to that, the *Interaction* dimension is used since it provides information about the nature of the interaction among the participants and the patterns of interaction. Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) "Community of Inquiry" model is represented in the Social, Cognitive and Teacher Presence' categories with indicators (refer to Table 5.3 in Chapter 5).

The procedure used in the analysis of the transcripts, using the analytical framework in Table 5.3 is explained in detail in Chapter 5 point 5.2.

3.7.1 Analysis of interview data

In analysing the interview data, the technique of thematic analysis was employed (Attride-Stirling 2001). Thematic networks are web-like diagrams that summarize the main themes evident in the data. Thematic network analysis is “a robust and highly sensitive tool for the systematization and presentation of qualitative analyses” (Attride-Stirling 2001:385).

Thematic network analysis is based on a systematic ordering of themes in the data, using three categories of theme: Basic Themes, Organizing Themes and Global Themes (Attride-Stirling 2001:388). In this study, the interview data were coded starting from the Basic Themes and working inwards toward a Global Theme, that is, from more “simple premises characteristics of the data” towards a single conclusion or “super-ordinate theme” (Attride-Stirling 2001:389). Once all the Basic Themes have been identified, using the research questions as a starting point, then the Basic Themes were grouped in the more general categories of the Organizing Themes. The Organizing Themes are then reinterpreted with the support of the Basic Themes. These are all then brought together as a single super-ordinate category which is the Global Theme. Following Attride-Stirling’s (2001) procedures, thematic networks are represented graphically as web-like nets showing an easy flow of the themes and emphasizing the interconnectivity throughout the network. This method of analysis was used for the analysis of the interview data in this study. The results of the analysis are presented in Chapter 4.

3.7.2 Transcripts of online discussion forums of BEL 100 e-PJJ

Salmon (2004) states that for the analysis of on-line messages, the messages in the message corpus should be tagged with all relevant information so that the information can be accessed for subsequent analysis. On-line messages are in textual form but they are not the same as printed texts (the usual medium for content analysis) since they derive from a collaborative mode of working, and can be said, therefore to be joint constructions of the group (Salmon 2004). In the analysis of every contribution to the forum, each contribution is considered individually, although it is also necessary to investigate the patterns of interaction. Salmon (2004) emphasizes that messages on-line have many advantages over printed texts when it comes to content analysis. The software imposes a style which emphasises brevity of the expression and results in a direct, brief, but informative style in which the messages also jointly constitute a clear-cut structure of meanings connected by a joint purpose. As Mason (1991) indicates, the analysis of computer conferencing messages at that time had focused on the number of messages sent, and by whom, or on the frequency of logons, or on message maps showing the number of replies and message chains. It is therefore crucial in this study that the method of content analysis which is used for the analysis of the discussion forum messages should be capable of answering the research questions. The discussion forum is widely used for the exchange of social messages, and these contribute valid and reliable information regarding the students' attitudes and practices in their approach to learning (Ali, Hodson-Carlton & Ryan 2004).

3.7.2.1 Analysis of the online transcripts data

A number of models for the evaluation of computer conferencing data are available. The model used in this study is an adaptation of Henri's (1992) system of content analysis, supplemented with additions from Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) template. In

looking into the effect of the cultural preferences of learners in this study, Hofstede's (1984) model of cultural types was adapted; Power Distance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity and Uncertainty Avoidance. The categories used in the analysis represent a combination of the three models mentioned above, i.e. Henri (1992), Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2001) and Hofstede (1984). The analysis is presented and further explained in Chapter 5.

The first step in the analysis of the discussion forum data is to segment the messages into units of meaning. Each unit is then classified according to its content. The message content was analysed individually at three levels: what was said regarding the discussion content, how it was said, and what processes and strategies were employed to deal with the content. The first level concerns the results of learning, and the other two relate to the process that generated those results. Utilising the benefits of the studies mentioned above, this study applied both the quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse the content of the forum online messages and its interaction among the participants.

The corpus of messages used for the analysis of the discussion data was downloaded from the UiTM e-PJJ website in September 2005 with the permission from the Director of the InED, Universiti Teknologi MARA. This was the final month of the semester, after which the discussion forum was closed. Messages from seven different groups which were moderated by eight different facilitators were downloaded. A total of 211 online discussion forum files was downloaded. One file consisted of between two and three days of messages with an average of 15 topics per forum and 15 messages per topic. An example of a forum message that were downloaded and recorded can be found in Appendix 11. The messages are unedited, and therefore contain mistakes such as grammatical errors and code-switching of languages.

The research questions for this study were aimed to examine the attitudes and behaviours of learners of BEL 100 e-PJJ and whether those attitudes and behaviours are influenced by their prior educational experiences and whether cultural factors may also have influence in the attitudes and behaviours of these learners. In order to cross-validate the findings from a content analysis, interviews were carried out on the learners and facilitators of the course to determine the objective of the study which is then later summarised by the researcher in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

3.8 Ethical issues

Similar to all research approaches, ethical considerations were addressed to ensure the rights of the participants involved in this study were respected. The effects of the research on participants must be taken into account, an act in which to preserve the participants dignity as human beings. We may feel that being ethical will limit the choices we can make in the pursuit of truth in a research. According to Cavan (1977 p 810), ethics has been defined as “a matter of principal sensitivity to the rights of others. Ethics say that while the truth is good, respect for human dignity is better, even if in the extreme case, the respect of human nature leaves one ignorant of human nature”. Issues pertaining to privacy and anonymity, voluntary and informed consent, the protection of rights and interests of the participants, the good outweighing the bad, and the probability of knowledge being generated from the research, cover the overall ethical principles (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000).

The Director of InED (Distance Education) had to be initially approached by the researcher for permission to carry out this study. This is because the BEL 100 e-PJJ course that this research is focusing on is under the department of Distance Education and approval has to be obtained from the Director (refer to Appendix 13) to download the asynchronous forum discussion transcripts, to carry out any interviews, to distribute any questionnaires and

to implement other data collection pertaining to the study of the course. Following the approval from the Director of InED, interviewees consent forms (refer to Appendix 2) were also distributed to all facilitators and learners involved. Informed consent is absolutely essential of ethical research because it relates to the participant's rights to voluntarily choose to participate (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000). Informed consent was ensured in this research by adherence to the fundamental principles of the provision of full information, voluntarism, comprehension and competence (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000). The participants in this research were given a fair explanation of the study that is to be carried out with demographic questionnaires distributed and interviews carried out. Besides the subjects were also offered to post any queries to the researcher concerning the procedures and given instruction that the subject may withdraw consent at any point and discontinue participation without any prejudice. In addition to that, the participants were also informed that their choices to either participate or not in this study will not affect their academic results in any way.

Alongside the informed consent, a few other ethical issues that have to be addressed to ensure minimisation of harm included the rights to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the participants involved. Diener and Crandall (1978 in Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000 p 61) identify three different perspectives of privacy: the sensitivity of the information being given, the setting being observed, and the dissemination of information. The sensitivity of information refers to how personal the information that the researcher wants to collect. The setting of the research may be from private to public. In terms with this research investigation, the learning management system provided by Pointflex as mentioned in Chapter 1 in point 1.2.4 is a secure environment which can only be access by registered e-PJJ learners and authorised facilitators/administrators. However, because the asynchronous discussion forum transcripts are archived online data and was collected and downloaded, it

was important to ensure that sources of such information remained private. From an ethical position it was also important that to ensure that the privacy rights of all those involved were respected regardless of whether they were involved in the research study or not. In this case only the BEL 100 e-PJJ asynchronous discussion forum transcripts were downloaded since they were relevant for the purpose of this study and analysis.

Dissemination of information relates to personal information that is link to the research participants, and the researcher needs to be more concern about privacy (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000). Participants' confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms so that the identity of the individual participants could not be determined. All identifying material used in this study for the purpose of analysis were removed and deleted from the data and pseudonyms were used for the participants involved.

A participant is considered anonymous when “the researcher or another person cannot identify the participant from the information provided” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000). Where this situation holds, a participant filling in the questionnaire bears absolutely no names, addresses, coding symbols or anything that reveals the participant, anonymity is ensured completely. On the other hand, participants agreeing to a face-to-face interview and also discussion forum transcripts downloaded with names of participants on it can in no way expect anonymity. At most the researcher can only promise confidentiality by not using the participants' names or any personal means of identification to relate to the data used in analysis. Even if the researcher knows who has provided the information or is able to identify participants to the information provided, the researcher has given her word that she will not make any connection known publicly. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) stated, the “essence of the matter is the extent to which investigators keep faith with those who have helped them”. This is made clear to all the participants in this study at the access point where the researcher collected the data. The researcher was also being explicit regarding the

researcher's position as a postgraduate student carrying out a research for the good purpose of the course as stated in the objective earlier. The BEL 100 e-PJJ learner interviewees were first semester learners of UiTM. These learners were not informed and did not know of the researcher's past position (lecturer) in the organization at all. The researcher has left the organization in 2004 to further study as a postgraduate student when these learners registered themselves as first semester students of BEL 100 e-PJJ in July 2005. The researcher was never introduced to the learner participants as an insider within the authority structure of the institution (a previous lecturer of UiTM) but as a postgraduate research student carrying out a study. Obviously, the researcher must make every effort to avoid bias and ensure the reliability of the data too. In this case, the researcher ensured that the relationship between the researcher as the interviewer and the interviewee was of another fellow student to another so as to help the quality of the responses. The guarantees of confidentiality are carried out seriously with promises in spirit and letter.

3.9 Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted in June 2004 in which the purpose was to test the research methods and instruments and investigate the problems that had arisen in the existing BEL 100 e-PJJ course. The phases of data collection for the pilot study are laid out in the Table 3.6 below.

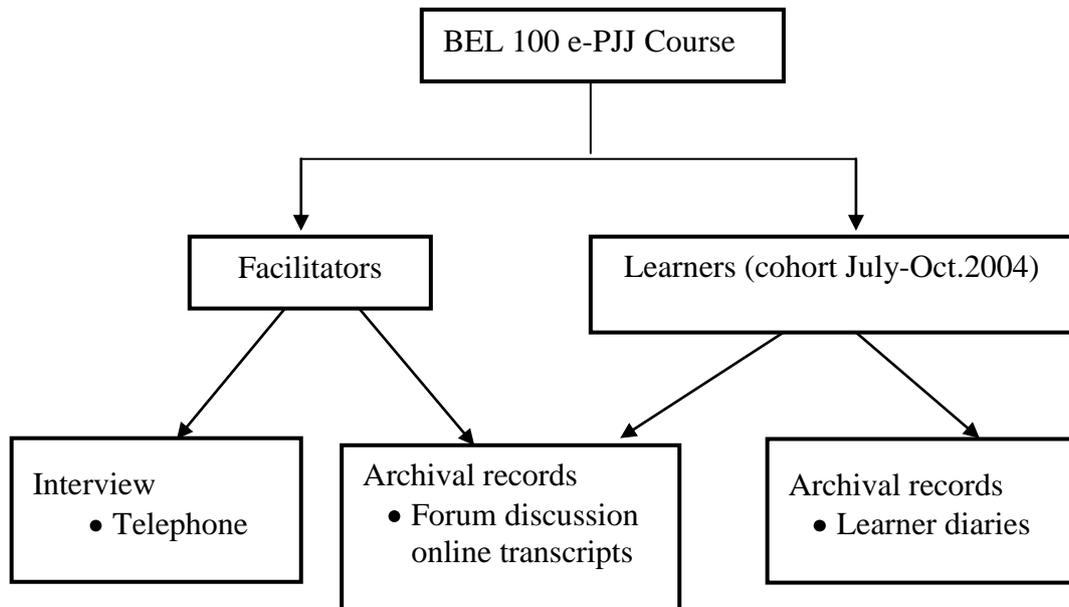
Table 3.6: Time line for the pilot study

Tasks	Time	Location
Identifying Respondents (Learners/Facilitators)	End of June 2004	Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia
Administer co-researcher (2 facilitators/1 clerical worker)	End of May - Early June 2004	Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia
Conduct telephone interviews with five facilitators (F1- F5)	F1: 14 th October 2004 F2: 14 th October 2004 F3: 22 nd October 2004 F4: 22 nd October 2004 F5: 22 nd October 2004	Researcher: Scotland Interviewees: Malaysia
Administer learner diary	July- September 2004	Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia
Downloading forum discussion transcripts from course website	July-October 2004	University of Stirling

With the study focusing on the BEL 100 e-PJJ preparatory English course, obviously the participants involved in this study are the learners and facilitators of the BEL 100 e-PJJ. The researcher had to appoint co-researchers in Malaysia to administer the data collection. Two volunteered facilitators of the BEL 100 e-PJJ and a clerical clerk were appointed. They were to distribute consent forms to the facilitators and learners involved in the study. They also set up interview dates and times for the researcher to call the facilitators during their break hours for the interviews. The two facilitators also volunteered to administer their 10 volunteered BEL 100 e-PJJ learners to keep a learner diary on a weekly basis for a total of 14 weeks. The downloading of the BEL 100 e-PJJ asynchronous discussion forum transcripts were downloaded by the researcher herself.

The following research techniques were adopted in the pilot study interviews, learner diaries and document analysis (discussion forum transcripts; see also Appendix 12). Figure 3.3 provides an overview of the instruments used in the pilot study.

Figure 3.3: An overview of the instruments used in the Pilot Study



There were difficulties that the researcher faced when administering the collection of the data using the techniques above. Following are a list of the problems that the researcher countered.

- Appointing co-researchers was not a problem. However, having them to carry out the administration of tasks given was difficult since co-researchers were volunteers and tasks will only be carried out during their spare time and this prolong the researcher's data collection time.
- Malaysia's time is eight hours ahead of the United Kingdom and this has caused difficulty in setting up interviews with the facilitators during the facilitators' breaks hours due to the time difference. A few interviews had to be rescheduled a few times.

- The collection of data from the learner diary was a failure due to improper administration of the learner diary at the beginning. Out of 10 learners who volunteered only 4 remained until the 14th week (a semester); even then, information gathered was very limited.

The difficulties of the pilot study data collection techniques and its analysis of results presentation have caused the researcher to change aspects of the main study. Nevertheless, the interview questions and the procedures for the administration of the telephone interviews for the pilot study (see Appendix 5) and the learners' diaries (see Appendix 6) did contribute to the design of the main study interview questions (see Appendix 8 and 9). The topics for the interview questions were selected in order to help answer the research questions and this was explained in much detail in point 3.5.3.1 in this chapter. Thus the researcher has taken the decision to carry out a face-to-face interview instead of a telephone interview, in which this required the researcher to travel home to Malaysia during the interview as scheduled in Table 3.5: interview schedule for the main study. By administering the face-to-face interview, problems such as setting up the interview dates and times were minimised. The interview data was analysed manually by the researcher using categories of themes; *facilitators-students' interactions, students' learning skills, facilitators' self-awareness and attitudes/roles towards the course, facilitators' evaluation of the course*. The interviews were only carried out on the facilitators of the course and no learners of the course were interviewed. The categories of themes were focused on facilitators and these were not feasible to be used entirely in the current study.

The learner diary, however, was not administered in the main study. This is because the researcher could not be physically present during the supervision period of the learner diary which was for 14 weeks.

Downloading the asynchronous discussion forum transcripts was not a problem since permission was granted to the researcher much earlier and access was given to the researcher for a period of a month. In analysing the asynchronous discussion forum transcripts, there were problems categorising the postings to the appropriate categories. There were many postings that have more than one function. The researcher manually assessed each posting by comparing each posting to the other to study the similarities, differences and connections. Postings were revised, amend and modify numerous times until they were placed into a category that fit so that no new category arises. During the process, four categories emerged; *social interactions, facilitators-students interactions, students learning skills, student self awareness*. The analysis technique used did not present reliable results as they were very broad and the researcher was aware of this during the analysis of the pilot study data as she was working to research on a dependable method at that point of time. The pilot study results brought about the change of the research questions, the methods used to develop and to analyse the rich data of the current study.

3.10 Summary of chapter

This chapter has explored the methodology underpinning the present study and the methods used to generate and analyse the data. The research questions were to examine the attitudes and behaviours of learners of BEL 100 e-PJJ offered at the Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia, and whether those attitudes and behaviours are influenced by their prior educational experiences and whether cultural factors may also have influence in the attitudes and behaviours of these learners were outlined. An exploratory research paradigm on which this study is based was discussed. A mixed method case study designed was adopted to examine the issue identified in the research questions. The mixed method case study methodology was used in which the researcher collects, analyses and mixes both the

quantitative and qualitative data in this single case study. The triangulation of methods using the multiple techniques and data from multiple sources helps the researcher to reach a detail understanding of the research questions of this study. The context of the study as explained in this study is crucial to the researcher and also the institution where the course is offered so as to find out if there is evidence of the learners' prior educational experiences or Malay culture that influence the attitudes and behaviours the learners in their learning process at a distance. Participants of the study; the facilitators and learners of BEL 100 E-PJJ, were interviewed and interview transcripts were analysed qualitatively where content analysis was performed. Also the transcripts of the forum discussions were analysed quantitatively and in addition, the researcher was the observer to the whole context of the study.

Then attention was turned to the methods used to select and collect the data, the research procedures involved and the data collection techniques used. The methods used to analyse the data was outlined. The equal mixed-method design approach generates numerical and narrative data which answer the research questions. The interview data which is the qualitative part of the analysis were analysed using the thematic analysis. The quantitative numerical data of the asynchronous online forum messages used the content analysis-coding and frequency counting and percentages of the categories of each domain involved. Both the quantitative and qualitative approaches were used about in this study equally. The overview of the phenomena would be demonstrated by the quantitative survey and the qualitative, exploratory, interviews would be used to examine what the issues mean to the actual participants in order to understand the phenomenon of the study (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998).

Consideration of the ethical issues associated with the current investigation was also clarified. Privacy and anonymity of the participants related to this study is all inclusive. Information provided by participants is in no way that will reveal any of their identity as this

study has labelled all participants with just an alphabet or a number. In addition the sources of the archived online data which was collected and downloaded remained private. Participants were also ensured to freely volunteer to take part or not in the interviews. In addition they were informed and guaranteed that any exposures to risks such as their academic results will not be affected. Finally a brief description of the pilot study highlighting the difficulties faced such as in the collection of data and results caused the researcher to change aspects of the current study was defined. The impracticability of the pilot study data collection techniques such as the telephone interview (Scotland-Malaysia) and learner diaries and their analysis brought about the change of the research questions, the methods used to develop and analysing the rich data of the current study. Having described the methodology underpinning the study, an in-depth research findings and discussions of the analysis of the interview data and asynchronous discussion forum transcripts data are presented in Chapter 4 and 5.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Interview Data

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the process of making sense of the data involves consolidating, reducing and interpreting what the interviewees have said and what the researcher has seen and read. The aim of this study is to examine the attitudes and behaviours of the learners and whether those attitudes and behaviours are influenced by their prior educational experiences and whether cultural factors may also have an influence on the attitudes and behaviours of these learners. The interview data for this study relates to the interviewees' attitudes, behaviours and prior educational experiences regarding the BEL 100 e-PJJ distance learning course, particularly the asynchronous online part of the course. The analysis consists of a process of moving back and forth between concrete pieces of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation. The insights obtained from the analysis constitute part of the findings of this study and they take the form of organized descriptive accounts, themes and categories that cut across the data. A rich thematic description of the interview data was carried out in order to allow the predominant themes to reflect accurately the content of the entire data set, that is, the entire interview data collected for this study.

4.2 Data Analysis

The interviews were carried out with seven facilitators and eight learners on the BEL 100 e-PJJ course. The respondents volunteered to be interviewed with signed consent forms. The interviews with the facilitators were carried out in English. Seven out of the eight interviews with learners were conducted in Malay, while the eighth was conducted in

English. The interview schedule was semi-structured. The interviews were conducted at the UiTM premises except for one which was carried out at a café. All interviewees gave their consent for the interview to be recorded. The duration of each interview ranged from forty minutes to one hour and fifteen minutes. Each interview was then transcribed verbatim, using English and Malay where appropriate. The Malay transcripts were also translated into English. The translation process was not without problems. There are words or phrases in Malay that do not have direct equivalents in English. When this matter arose, the researcher had to use paraphrase or circumlocution in English to convey the precise meaning of the Malay original. Copies of the transcripts were sent to both facilitators and learners by email for verification.

The interview data were analysed using the technique of thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling 2001). According to Braun and Clarke (2006 p.79) thematic analysis is a method for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data”. This kind of analysis seeks to uncover the themes that are salient in the data by organizing and describing the data set in detail. The emerging themes are also able to give a systematic and thorough account of various aspects of the research topic. The emergence of the themes when doing the analysis was rewarding for the researcher because the themes which emerged were validated through their repeated occurrence in the interview data. These themes, according to Ely, Vinz, Downing and Anzul (1997), can be misconstrued as themes that reside in the data. But if we look hard enough the themes actually reside in our heads. It is when we are thinking about our data and we are creating links for us to understand better that we focus on our objective of analysing the data for specific research questions.

What should be considered as a theme? According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a theme expresses something important regarding the data which relates to the research question, and makes up some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. As

the themes emerge during the analysis, a network is built in the form of a web-like structure which is principally organized to represent meanings that make explicit the procedures of going from text to interpretation. When doing the analysis the researcher has to bear in mind that finding more instances of a theme does not necessarily mean that that particular theme will eventually be important for the analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) caution that in such qualitative analysis, there is no 'hard-and-fast answer' to the question of what ratio of a data set is needed to display evidence of the theme in order for it to be considered a theme. An example might be to decide that if a theme was apparent in fifty per cent of the interview data, it would constitute evidence for a theme, whereas if a theme was apparent in forty-seven percent of the interview data, it would not be a theme. This is clearly an arbitrary decision. Similar problems arise when a theme is given considerable attention in some data items and little or none in others, or when it is present in relatively little of the data set. In other words, the researcher's judgement is very important in determining what constitutes a theme. In determining the themes for this study the researcher tried to find links between the 'central nature' of a potential theme and one or more of the research questions. Thematic analysis is very flexible as it permits the researcher to determine themes in a number of ways (Braun and Clarke 2006). What is important when determining the themes is that we should be consistent.

In this study the thematic networks were produced by following the procedure outlined below (Attride-Stirling 2001):

- a) Identify lowest-order statements evident in the text:

Basic Themes are simple statements that can be found in the data, if on their own they cannot represent the whole text or part of a phrase. In order for a *Basic Theme* to make sense beyond its immediate meaning it needs to be read within the context of other *Basic Themes*. Together, they represent an *Organizing Theme*.

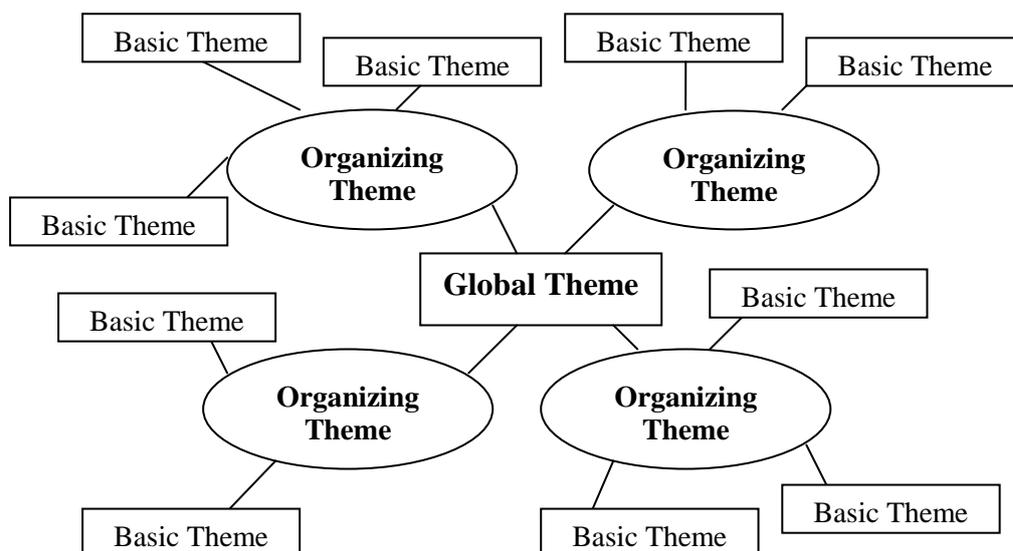
- b) Group *Basic Themes* together into more abstract principals called Organizing Themes: *Organizing Themes* are clusters of signification that summarize the principal assumptions of a group of *Basic Themes*. When the main ideas proposed by the *Basic Themes* have been grouped, then these groups of Basic Themes constitute an Organizing Theme. *Organizing Themes* will then represent larger shared issues that are especially significant in the texts as one whole story. The group of *Organizing Themes* then constitute a *Global Theme*.
- c) Group *Organizing Themes* into superordinate themes in a concise form to represent the final or concluding part which reveals an interpretation of the text as a whole: A *Global Theme* is like a claim in that it is a conclusion. What the *Global Theme* does is to summarize and make sense of clusters of lower-order themes (the *Organizing* and *Basic Themes*) abstracted from and supported by the data. Thus it tells us what the texts as a whole are about within the context of a given analysis. Importantly, there may very well be more than one *Global Theme* for a set of texts, depending on the complexity of the data and the analytic aims; however, they are fewer than the *Organizing* and *Basic Themes*. Each *Global Theme* is the kernel of a thematic network. It follows that an analysis may result in more than one thematic network.

Figure 4.1 illustrates the relationships between the three themes, the *Basic Theme*, *Organizing Theme* and *Global Theme*. The web-like map which represents the structure of the thematic network is developed by starting from the *Basic Theme* and flowing inwards towards the *Global Theme*. When all the *Basic Themes* have been collected into different clusters, they are then sorted out according to the underlying theme which they represent and this leads to the emergence of the *Organizing Themes*. *Organizing Themes* are then

reinterpreted in view of the *Basic Themes*. These themes are then all brought together to illustrate the final or concluding theme which becomes the *Global Theme*.

A thematic network, according to Attride-Stirling (2001), is represented in graphic form as a web-like structure so as to avoid any implication of ranking, allowing the *Basic Themes* to flow easily from one to another and to emphasise the links in the network (see also Figure 4.1). Attride-Stirling (2001) also stresses that the networks are only a tool in the analysis and not the analysis itself. The analysis involves a process of constantly moving back and forth between the components of the entire data set, the coded parts of the data that are being analysed, and the analysis of the data that is being produced (Braun and Clarke 2006). The constructed thematic network serves as an organizing principle and an illustrative tool in interpreting the text, helping the author to make something more evident and also for the reader to understand better.

Figure 4.1: Structure of thematic network (cited from Attride-Stirling 2001:388)



4.2.1 Thematic network analysis

The process of analysis as outlined by Attride-Stirling (2001) can be divided into three stages:

1. Stage A: “*the reduction or breakdown of the text*” which involves the coding of the material, identifying the themes, and constructing thematic networks;
2. Stage B: “*the exploration of the text*” which involves describing, exploring and summarizing the networks; and
3. Stage C: “*the integration of the exploration*” which involves interpreting the patterns and producing the report.

This three-stage process was adopted in this study. It should be remembered that the stages are guidelines and not rules. As Patton (2002) states “[when] following the basic precepts, [they] will need to be applied flexibly to fit the research questions and data”. The analysis is not a linear process; it is more of a recursive process, in which the analyst is required to move back and forth as needed throughout the phases.

Before going into the first step of the analysis which is the coding of the interview texts, the author completed the previous stages of the research. These include the design of the semi-structured interview questions, the collection of the data, interviewing the respondents, and transcribing the interview transcripts.

An experience that the researcher found very valuable before attempting to analyse the data was to get very familiar with the data. The data was collected by the researcher herself and this helped her to have some prior knowledge of the data, and the experience of collecting the data also prompted some analytical thoughts before analysing the data. The researcher went through a process of repeated reading of the data while searching for meanings, patterns and noting down ideas. The first step was to first read through the whole data set before starting the coding. This was done to get ideas and to identify possible patterns that could be shaped while reading. During this process the researcher took notes,

marked the transcripts with coloured pens and this helped the author to be very familiar with the data and made it easier to do the coding and to tackle the subsequent phases.

Transcribing the interviews is another way of familiarizing oneself with the data. This process should be seen as a “key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology” (Bird 2005:227), and accepted as an ‘interpretative act’, in which meanings are created, rather than simply a mechanical action of putting spoken language on paper (Braun and Clarke 2006). In transcribing the interview data, a verbatim account of all verbal and sometimes non-verbal utterances was made, including hesitations, coughing and other vocalisations. As Braun and Clarke (2006) state, it is important that the transcription be true to its original nature and that the transcription conventions are suited to the purpose of the analysis.

4.2.1.1 Stage A: Reduction and breakdown of interview texts

Step 1: Coding the interview texts

This first step requires the researcher to code the interview texts. Codes identify an attribute of the data, as Braun and Clarke (2006 p.88) stated “semantic content or latent” that may appear interesting to the researcher. According to Boyatzis (1998 p.63) in Braun and Clarke (2006 p.88), codes refer to “the most basic segment or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon”. According to Attride-Stirling (2001) and Lee and Fielding (1996), data reduction is an important strategy for qualitative researchers. Coding can be very helpful, though by no means unique or indispensable, which is one technique in qualitative analysis (Attride-Stirling 2001). In this study the researcher read through the data repeatedly to break down the text into manageable and meaningful text segments to which the coding framework could be applied. This was done on the basis of the theoretical notions guiding the research questions and striking issues

that arise in the text itself. The coding framework is based on recurrent issues in the text, specific words/phrase (guided by the research questions) as stated in Chapter 1. The research questions focus on the points listed below:

1. The attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners
2. The role of prior educational experiences on the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners
3. Evidence if cultural factors have an influence on the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners
4. The attitudes and behaviours that underpinned effective learner activity within this case study

The coding framework was based on the research questions and the interview questions which focus on specific topics and words, text that have repeated issues, again based on the list above. The process of coding in the present study is the first step of analysis of the interview data and at this stage the researcher organises the data into meaningful groups. The text (interview data) was dissected into a few segments. They can be phrases, words, or sentences. Using highlighters, coloured stick-ons to identify/label the segments and later extracting them and copying them down in tables. As Attride-Stirling(2001 p.391) stated, “this is a commonly used procedure and parallels are easily found in the literature” such as in “Bryman and Burgess 1994, Corbin and Strauss 1990, Miles and Hubberman 1994, and Ritchie and Spencer 1994.” After labelling the text segments then they are being coded with salient issues guided by the research questions. The codes have quite explicit boundaries so that they do not become redundant or interchangeable. They are limited in scope as they are guided and focus explicitly on the research questions. This is to avoid from coding every single sentence in the interview data. However, the coded data is different from the units of

analysis (themes) which are often broader. Once all interview data has been coded, themes are then abstracted from the coded text segments. This is done by going through the text segments in each code or maybe groups of related codes. The most significant themes in the coded text segments are being extracted. The text segments are reread within the context of the codes under which they have been classified from the full interview text. This step allows the researcher to reframe the reading of the text and enables the researcher to identify the underlying patterns and structures. Then the researcher goes through the selected themes and refines them further into themes that are non-repetitive and broad enough to cover a set of ideas contained in numerous text segments. What it does is, it reduces the data into a more manageable set of significant themes that is more concise and precise in summarizing the text data (Attride-Stirling 2001). According to Boyatzis (1998) in Braun and Clarke (2006 p. 88), themes are developed in the next step where the interpretative analysis of the data takes place, and in relation to which “arguments about the phenomenon being examined are made”. See below for an example of codes applied to a short segment of the data from a learner’s interview.

Data extract	Coded for (Step 1)	Issues discussed	Themes identified (Step 2)
<p>I am keen to do this diploma course, to learn public administration. I think this will help me realise my hope of becoming a diplomatic officer, to be able to travel all over the world. I take this course for self satisfaction also, for my future for my career advancement.</p>	<p>1. Coded for "DRIVE" 2. Coded for "NEEDS"</p>	<p>-experience -motivation -feelings</p>	<p>1.to seek knowledge 2.something better for future 3.career enhancement 4.self satisfaction</p>

Once themes are identified, they provide the source for the thematic networks.

1. The themes are arranged by assembling them into similar, coherent groupings. For example; themes about X, Y etc and these groupings are thematic networks. How the researcher groups the themes is made on the basis of the content. There may be times that the themes are few enough and about similar enough issues to fit under one network. If they are too many, or if quite distinct issues arise, then more than one grouping will be made. Each grouping will result in a distinct Global Theme, supported by discrete Organizing and Basic Themes. There is no ruling about how many themes should make a network but too many of them may be difficult to handle and too few may not do justice to the data.
2. Selecting Basic Themes: The themes that have been derived from the interview text, and which are now grouped, is now used as Basic Themes. It is basically just a simple renaming of the original set of themes, but it is helpful to present a conceptual division between the identification of themes, and the creation of thematic network (Attride-Stirling 2001).
3. Rearrange into Organizing Themes: The clusters of Basic Themes created which centred on larger, shared issues make an Organizing Theme. Identifying and naming the issues underlying them.
4. Summarizing Global Theme(s): Attride-Stirling (2001p.393) advised that in view of the Basic Themes, we need to summarize “the main claim, proposition, argument or assumption that the Organizing Themes are about”. Therefore, the claim is the Global Theme of the network, the core that covers the main point in the text. If there are more than one theme made when grouping them, the procedure will then need to be repeated for each grouping, to construct a distinct Global Theme for each set.
5. Illustrate thematic networks: Once all Basic Themes, Organizing Themes, and Global Themes are prepared, then the illustration of a web-like presentation can be done. Each Global theme will produce a thematic network.
6. Verifying and refining the network: Each text segment related to each Basic Theme will have to be worked on over again and to ensure that (i) Global Theme, Organizing Themes, and Basic Themes reflect the data, and (ii) the data support the Basic, Organizing and Global Themes. Necessary adjustments will be made at this stage.

We have to bear in mind that thematic networks are produced by working from the periphery Basic Themes, inwards to the Global Theme. The objective is “to summarize particular themes in order to create larger, unifying themes that condense the concepts and ideas mentioned at a lower level” (Attride-Stirling 2001 p.393).

In the present study, ten codes from the learners’ interview transcripts and five codes from the facilitators’ interview transcripts were identified and coded. The 10 codes from the learners’ interview transcripts were as follows (see also Appendix 14):

1. drive
2. needs
3. attitude
4. positives
5. negatives
6. learning
7. situations
8. conditions
9. environment
10. time

The 5 codes from the facilitators’ interview transcripts were (see also Appendix 15):

1. course in general
2. colleagues
3. support
4. technology provided
5. learners

These codes were derived from the issues discussed during the interviews with both the learners and the facilitators steering towards the research questions. The researcher

derived the codes from recurrent and meaningful phrases or words that are related to the issues of learners' attitudes, learners perceptions of the course, learners' preferences of the different aspects of the instructional and delivery approaches, prior educational experiences and cultural factors that influence the learners' attitudes, preferences and behaviours which emerged during the process of dissecting the text into text segments. The text segments are extracts from the interview data. Coding was carried out manually and the researcher coded the data by writing notes on the texts that were being analysed, using highlighters to indicate potential patterns, and post-it notes to identify segments of data. The process of coding was carried out in a cyclical fashion. When all the data have been initially coded and collated, there is a long list of the different codes that the researcher has identified. At this phase, the codes are then matched with data extracts that represent that code and also making sure that all actual data extracts are coded, and then collated together within each code. What is involved here is copying extracts of the data from the interview transcripts and collating each code together in separate filing columns. Next is the sorting of different codes into potential "themes", and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified "themes". As mentioned earlier that this process can be cyclical, the researcher has coded individual extracts of data in as many different "themes" as they fit into. Therefore, an extract of data maybe uncoded, coded once, or coded many times as relevant. Essentially what the researcher had to do was starting to analyse the codes and consider how different codes may combine to form an overall "theme" such as the *Basic Themes*. The temptation to derive as many codes as possible for rich passages was high, but as Braun and Clarke (2006:83) stress, what is crucial is that the "themes" identified, coded and analysed should be "an accurate reflection of the content" of the majority of the data set. Cutting back on what to include was predominantly decided by reference to the research questions and this took discipline since

manual systems should aim for as few categories as possible so as to make the analysis more manageable (Merriam 2002).

Step 2: Identifying themes

In Step 2 (refer to Appendix 14 & 15), where the “themes” were identified, the 10 learner codes were grouped into 5 clusters which is group of issues that were discussed in the interviews and each text in each cluster was re-read. A similar process was carried out for the facilitators’ codes. The 5 facilitators’ codes were grouped into 5 clusters. There were 5 cluster issues discussed as per the interview questions (Appendix 9) and each text in each cluster was re-read (refer to Appendix 15). As this was done, a record was also kept of (i) the various issues that were being dealt with; (ii) the “themes” that were emerging; (iii) cross-references to the texts that were contained in each “theme”; and (iv) the number of quotations that contained the “theme”.

The 10 learners’ codes identified earlier in Step 1 and over 1000 text segments/phrases/words were combined to form 91 *Basic Themes* (Appendix 14). As for the 5 facilitators’ codes, over 800 text segments were combined to form 44 *Basic Themes* (Appendix 15). Text segments/phrases/words were identified from recurrent words or phrases related to the issues discussed extracted from the interview data. This process actually reduces the data into a more achievable set of significant “themes” that precisely summarizes the text. The 91 *Basic Themes* from the learners’ data and the 44 *Basic Themes* from the facilitators’ data totally cover the whole data set. As they emerged, they were formed and worked through to accommodate new text segments as well as the old ones.

During the process of refining the “themes”, the researcher encountered “themes” that did not fit into the *Basic Themes*. These “themes” were put into a collection of prospective “themes” and “sub-themes” to ensure that all the text extracts were coded. The researcher

looked through all the “themes” repeatedly so as to combine them, refine and separate or just discard them. During this process it became evident that some of the “themes” were not suitable as there was not enough data to support them or the texts coded within the “theme” were not sufficiently similar. So there are cases where a few “themes” needed to be broken down into separate “themes”. As Braun and Clarke (2006) clearly state, data within “themes” should stick together meaningfully, and at the same time there should be clear and distinct differentiation between “themes”.

For every reviewing and refining process that was carried out, a trial and error thematic map was drawn sketchily until all the “themes” had adequately captured the forms of the coded data and the entire data set. In finding the most satisfactory thematic map for the “themes”, the author had to be cautious not to have to go through endless re-coding. It is possible to go on re-coding without stopping to fine-tune a frame which is perfectly adequate for the analysis. Taking the advice from Attride-Stirling (2001), one should just be assured that one has a fairly good idea of the different “themes”, how they fit together, and ensure that the “themes” provide a comprehensive coverage of the whole data.

Step 3: Constructing the thematic networks

In Step 3 (refer to Appendix 16 & 17), the 91 *Basic Themes* identified in the learners’ data set and the 44 *Basic Themes* identified in the facilitators’ data set were the sources for moving inwards to form the thematic networks. They are the first link of the web that will connect and form the *Organizing Themes* and, through further refinement, lead to the *Global Theme*.

Figure 4.2: Step 3 of learners’ transcripts for Global Theme “Motivation”

<i>Basic Themes</i>	<i>Organizing Themes</i>	<i>Global Theme</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to gain knowledge in language skills 2. to upgrade oneself 3. to seek knowledge 4. to improve language skills 5. to improve communication skills 6. self-satisfaction 7. personal development 8. personal reasons 	<p>Intrinsic motivation</p>	<p>Motivation</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. some thing better for future 10. to be competitive 11. career enhancement 12. promotion 	<p>Extrinsic motivation</p>	

As an example of the process which was followed in Step 3, consider the “themes” that are listed as numbers 1 to 8 as seen in Figure 4.2 (can also be seen in Appendix 16). These “themes” are grouped under one network, *Intrinsic Motivation* (under the *Organizing Theme* column). Themes 9 to 12 (Figure 4.2) are grouped under another network, *Extrinsic Motivation*, and so on. As seen in Appendix 14, more than one grouping of *Basic Themes* emerged derived from *the codes* (Step 1) “Drive and Needs”. From these groupings or clusters of *Basic Themes* emerge the *Organizing Themes* that the researcher interprets as *Intrinsic Motivation* and *Extrinsic Motivation*. These terms will be extensively defined later in this chapter under the heading of *Organizing Themes*. These *Organizing Themes* then led to one distinct *Global Theme* which the researcher has labelled “Motivation”. The *Global Theme* which is the core of this network is derived from the main assertions and arguments

apparent in the *Organizing Themes*. Appendix 16 and 17 show the rest of the groupings of the *Basic Themes* and *Organizing Themes* that support the *Global Theme*.

Once the 91 *Basic Themes* from the learners' data set and the 44 *Basic Themes* from the facilitators' data set had been identified, further refinement and grouping the themes led to the emergence of the 26 learners' *Organizing Themes* and 14 facilitators' *Organizing Themes*. In addition to that, all the themes contribute to the construction of the core of the network in which 9 learners' *Global Themes* and 5 facilitators' *Global Themes* were identified. The thematic networks of all the themes and how they are linked and are unified will be illustrated under the heading of Section 4.2.1.2 Stage B, below.

4.2.1.2 Stage B: Exploration of interview texts

Step 4: Describe and explore thematic networks

Step 4 describes and explores the thematic networks. This part is basically the first part of Stage B, in which a further level of abstraction is accomplished in the analytical process. As stated earlier in this chapter, the thematic networks are the analytical tools, not the analysis itself, taking the researcher "deeper into the meaning of the texts, the themes that emerged now have to be explored, identifying the patterns that underlie them." (Attride-Stirling 2001:393). The researcher will now describe the network according to the contents. The researcher will provide the description with text segments and examples from the data to support the analysis. Following that will be an exploration and explanation of the underlying patterns that appears in the networks.

▪ **Global Theme: Motivation**

The example to be used here in the data analysis is based on the first *Global Theme* from the learners' transcripts in Figure 4.2: "Motivation". This constitutes one thematic network comprising two *Organizing Themes*:

1. intrinsic motivation
2. extrinsic motivation

and twelve *Basic Themes*:

1. to upgrade oneself
2. to gain knowledge in language skills
3. to seek knowledge
4. to improve language skills
5. to improve communication skills
6. personal development
7. self-satisfaction
8. personal reasons
9. promotion
10. career enhancement
11. to be competitive
12. something better for future

This network represents an exploration of the participants' conceptualization of engaging in the BEL 100 e-PJJ course in the context of the broader discussion on motivation. Recall that the network itself is only a tool. This step represents a considerable analytic leap, in which the process of interpretation takes on a higher level of abstraction. Here the network is explored and described in detail, enabling patterns in the texts to emerge.

The researcher has identified two different types of motivation as the *Organizing Themes* from the *Basic Themes* related to motivation. *Intrinsic* motivation in this study refers to learners who are motivated because learning and succeeding in the course carries its own reward. *Extrinsic* motivation refers to learners who work hard because they believe that by participating in the course actively they will receive praise or notice from the facilitator; they will get better grades, be awarded their diploma, be promoted at work or otherwise derive benefit for their future career enhancement.

- **Organizing Theme: Intrinsic Motivation**

The *Organizing Theme* “Intrinsic Motivation” pertains to the goal orientation of the learner, or, in other words, to the learner’s perception of the reasons why he or she is engaged with the course. According to Miltiadou and Savenye (2003), intrinsic motivation originates from factors that are related to interests or curiosity. The motivation for taking the course in the case of this study is the pleasure that the learners derived from carrying out the tasks required and the satisfaction in completing or even working on the tasks required in the course. For example, an intrinsically motivated learner on this course will work on a grammar exercise because it is enjoyable or challenging or because they experience a sense of achievement when learning new grammatical rules. The learner does not expect to receive a reward or a prize after completing the grammatical exercise successfully. It is the knowledge gain and the self-satisfaction experienced that makes the learner motivated to learn the grammatical rules.

Intrinsic motivation does not mean that an individual will not seek rewards. The crucial point is that external rewards such as getting good grades, money or prizes are not enough to keep the individual motivated. Getting good grades on a quiz or test for intrinsically motivated learners is not the main aim if the activities or assignments given to

them do not interest them at all. The possibility of a good grade is not enough to maintain the learner's motivation to put any effort into completing certain tasks or assignment. Learners' prior educational experiences may also be the cause of needing to improve or polish their language skills. Having an intrinsic goal orientation towards joining the course indicates that the learner's active participation and learning regarding what is taught in the course successfully fulfills the learner's need for satisfaction. Example 4.1 shows four extracts which illustrate the concept of intrinsic motivation:

Example 4.1:

<i>Learner 2</i>	It is for my personal development at the office as the part of conversation and other things are all in English. This way I can polish my English.
<i>Learner 4</i>	The reason so I want to further my study because I just aa... This is for myself.. For myself, for myself.
<i>Learner 5</i>	Knowledge is important. For personal satisfaction as well as family challenge. (<i>translated from Malay</i>)
<i>Learner 6</i>	Because I want the knowledge. Not that much for promotion and what not, but to improve my own knowledge. It fulfils my self-satisfaction too. (<i>translated from Malay</i>)

▪ **Organizing Theme: Extrinsic Motivation**

The *Organizing Theme* “Extrinsic Motivation” deals with motivation that has an external origin. When a learner has a high level of extrinsic motivation, he/she has a high level of goal orientation, so that the BEL 100 e-PJJ course is a means to an end. Miltiadou and Savenye (2003) state that extrinsically motivated learners tend to work on tasks because they believe that participating actively in the tasks will result in desirable outcomes such as

grades, a diploma, teacher praise or avoidance of punishment. Van Lier (1996:101) describes extrinsic motivation as ‘borrowed money’, an investment which may finally pay off. It is just like money that we borrow from our parents to fund our education but in the form of “extrinsic stimuli and coercion” (Van Lier 1996).

Extrinsically motivated individuals will work on the tasks or activities assigned to them even when they have little interest in them because of the rewards they anticipate from finishing the course. The reward can be something as small as praise or something more significant such as promotion at work. For example, a learner may not like studying English grammar rules but he works hard to complete the tasks assigned because of the reward that he wants for completing them. In this case, the reward would be a good grade on the task, assignment or test in the course. By passing the course the learner will have no difficulty proceeding to the next level of the course, thus getting him closer to completing his diploma and receiving the promotion promised by his employer when he was requested to further his studies.

Extrinsic motivation does not mean that a person will not get any satisfaction from completing the tasks assigned on the course. What it means is that the pleasure they expected from outside reward will continue to be a motivator even though the task or assignment given to them holds little or no interest. It is the possibility of getting the reward in the end - a good grade, some praise, a promotion - that will keep them motivated and putting forth the effort to do well. Example 4.2 shows examples of text segments from the learners’ transcripts in this study that portray extrinsic motivation:

Example 4.2

- Learner 1* For better career enhancement. Yes, it's for career enhancement. That's the only reason I can see. (translated from Malay)
- Learner 3* To continue working in the hotel would take me nowhere, especially being a woman. I need this as I don't think I will stay long in the hotel line. I want to be in public administration. I do not see myself working with the government. The private sectors employ quite a large number of DPA students. (translated from Malay)
- Learner 7* For my future and perhaps, for my career advancement and promotion. (translated from Malay)
- Learner 8* I need better future for myself and my family

The discussion of motivation with the reasons why the learners engage with the BEL 100 e-PJJ course concludes the analysis of this particular network. Each of the *Organizing Themes* leads ultimately to the *Global Theme* “Motivation”.

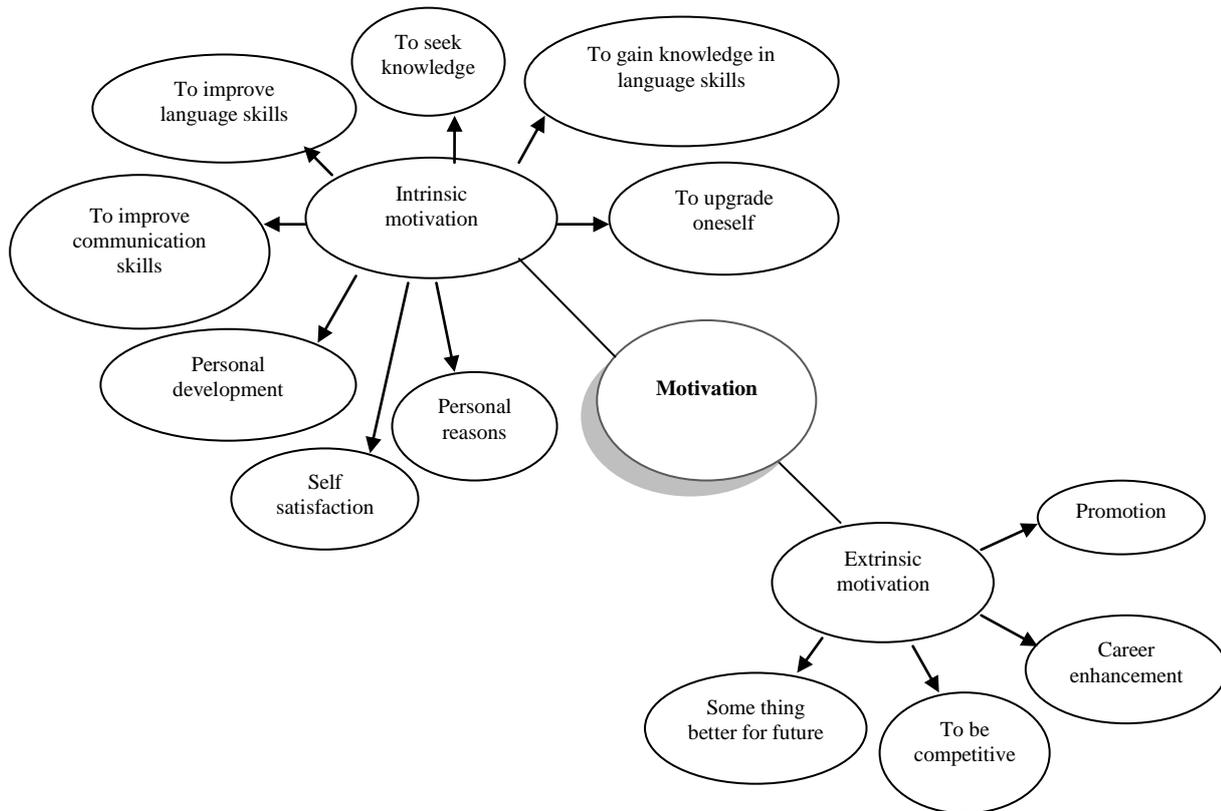
Step 5: Summarize thematic network

This step is best illustrated with the structured thematic network. In summarizing the network for *Global Theme* “Motivation” see Figure 4.3. The thematic network (Figure 4.3) illustrates concisely the key themes on which motivation was anchored: *intrinsic and extrinsic motivation*. This step gives a clearer picture of the principal themes that emerge in the description of the network as the *Basic Themes* work inwards towards the core of the structure that is the *Global Theme*. What is central in the conceptualization of taking up the course BEL 100 e-PJJ is the motivation that leads to the interest in learning. From the

illustration, one will be able to see how these themes (the different kinds of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic) make a learner engaged in learning.

The drive of wanting to gain knowledge, to improve and upgrade oneself, and derive personal satisfaction may be considered as reasons for pursuing the course, in addition to being competitive and wanting to have a better life or working conditions in the future. In addition to that at work some learners would need to attain a paper qualification to be promoted to a certain position and the ability of having satisfactory language skills, these are also reasons for the learners to be involved in this course. Some of the learners mentioned they neither have the interest nor time to get fully engaged in the course under study. They are taking the course because it is a prerequisite to go onto the next level of study or because of the convenience deriving from the flexibility of the course. The rest of the chapter will examine the other thematic networks following the same pattern of discussion as has been adopted for the 'motivation theme'.

Figure 4.3: Thematic network for "Motivation"



4.2.1.3 Stage C: Integration of exploration

Step 6: Interpret Patterns

At this stage, the codes and the themes that seem contradictory but could possibly be part of the network will be resolved by appreciating the full context of the analysis (Step 6), which brings together all the thematic networks in an extensive exploration of the research questions. It is not possible to present the empirical example of Step 6 without presenting the remaining networks of the full analysis. This will be presented in detail in the *Findings* section.

4.3 Findings

In this study, the findings of the analysis of the interview transcripts are categorized into two sections; first the findings from the 8 transcripts of the learners and next the findings from the 7 transcripts of the facilitators. The findings are reported accordingly through the following stages:

1. Analysis Stage B: “Exploration of Text”

This is the stage where each network constructed from the learners’ and the facilitators’ data are being described with text segments from the transcripts and explored in which underlying patterns begin to emerge.

2. Analysis Stage C: “Summarize Thematic Network”

This is the stage where each network will be presented with a summary of the main themes and patterns characterized by illustrating them in a structured thematic network.

4.3.1 Exploration of learners’ interviews

The 9 *Global Themes* from the learner transcripts and the 26 *Organizing Themes* are listed below in Figure 4.4. The first *Global Theme* (“Motivation”) has been described and explored earlier in the Data Analysis section (Figure 4.2). The remaining *Global Themes* derived from the learner transcripts are as follows:

- Attitude
- Attributes
- Effectiveness
- Activities
- Support

- Conditions
- Inadequacy
- Situation

These themes are described and explored in the rest of this section. Figure 4.4 lists all the *Organizing Themes* that supported the *Global Themes* of the learners' interview text.

Figure 4.4: Global and Organizing Themes of the learners' interview texts

<i>Organizing Themes</i>	<i>Global Themes</i>
1. intrinsic motivation 2. extrinsic motivation	Motivation
3. teacher superior 4. inability to impart ideas	Attitude
5. lack of trust in seeking help 6. seeking help	Attributes
7. skillful in language 8. course adaptable	Effectiveness
9. online component a satisfactory contribution 10. desirable activities and references	Activities
11. facilitator support 12. peer support	Support

13. course a burden	Conditions
14. lack of communication	
15. content too basic	
16. lack of response	
17. lack of assistance	Inadequacy
18. misuse of communication mode	
19. lack of training	
20. usefulness of materials and resources	
21. lack of creativity in providing activities	
22. technology support	
23. learning venues	Situation
24. learning time	
25. log in time	
26. time demands	

- **Global theme: Attitude**

The second *Global Theme* in Figure 4.4 is “Attitude”. This constitutes one thematic network comprising of two *Organizing Themes*:

1. teacher superior
2. inability to impart ideas

and eight *Basic Themes*:

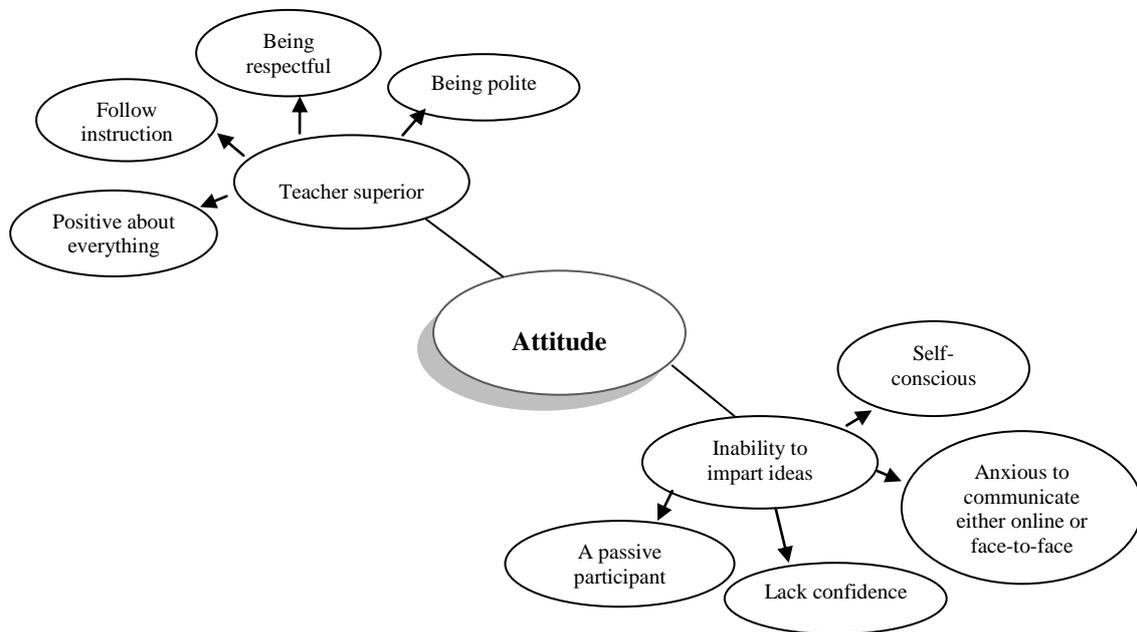
1. positive about everything
2. follow instructions

3. being respectful
4. being polite
5. a passive participant online
6. lack of confidence
7. anxious to communicate either online or face-to-face
8. self-conscious

The author defines “attitude” here as the way the learner thinks, does or react and feel towards the facilitator, his peers or the overall course. Arnold, Cooper and Robertson (1998:191) define *attitudes* as “a person’s predisposition to think, feel or behave in certain ways towards certain defined targets.” These feelings and attitudes are adopted in response to what we think or believe, and also affect how we behave.

During the interview, when the learners were asked to share their feelings about the course overall, their reactions and responses were visible to the researcher. As expected the learners were very polite and answered the questions only when asked. The learners may have had other attitudes which were not clearly articulated or not articulated at all. However, the researcher tried to make the learners feel at ease by carrying out casual conversation before going into the interview questions. There is a possibility of bias in the interviews but these attitudes clarify the key themes on which they were grounded as politeness and passiveness. Figure 4.5 illustrates the themes that supported the core of the thematic network: “Attitude”.

Figure 4.5: Thematic network for "Attitude"



- **Organizing theme: Teacher superior**

. Venter (2003) in her study found out that South-East Asian learners (i.e. learners from Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia) perceive the teacher as ‘the transmitter of knowledge’. When one teaches it is considered as an instructive activity; for example, the teachers will tell the learners what to learn. Thus the learners are heavily reliant on the direction of the teacher. Due to their prior educational experiences, this attitude is still prevalent among the UiTM distance learners, who are Malays and *Bumiputeras*, even though they have been reminded to be responsible for their own learning during the course induction. They may also be afraid to give out their thoughts regarding the activities, tasks or assignments rendered to them. There are extracts of the interview in which the term “teacher superior” that encompass to some learners’ the tendency to be almost always positive about everything and anything in the course, to carefully follow any instructions given to them, to be respectful and polite towards their superiors (i.e. the facilitators) and to avoid explicit

disagreement with the facilitators. Mastor, Jin and Cooper (2000) in their study on Malay culture and personality stated that the “Malays have a strong sense of community spirit, and they place great emphasis on manners or *adab*”. Being helpful, polite, considerate and courteous are among those manners that are typical among the traditional Malays especially to superiors in the educational environment. They are taught not to hurt others’ feelings or to criticize others openly in public, especially those who are older or higher in position (Mastor, Jin, and Cooper 2000).

Having said that, it is evident that the characteristic of “teacher superior” may be an obstacle to achieve effective learner activity. At one point in the interview the learners were asked to comment on their participation in the asynchronous part of the course. The following examples of text segments of the learners’ interview transcripts are evidence that “teacher superior” may deter productive learner activity.

Example 4.3:

<i>Learner 1</i>	She is a lecturer. She should know better. Don't expect me to say such thing to her. It is not polite. <i>(translated from Malay)</i>
<i>Learner 2</i>	No, not scared. I mean I respect the lecturer. I can't simply question what could be a guideline. It's not proper to do that. <i>(translated from Malay)</i>
<i>Learner 3</i>	I am used to doing things in my office under direction. People ask me to do a job. I just do and finish it just my lecturer ask me to do, I do. <i>(translated from Malay)</i>

- **Organizing theme: Inability to impart ideas**

The Confucian tradition which has had a very strong influence in the Chinese education system has also penetrated into other South-East Asian education systems.

Learners are assumed to be passive, to make widespread use of memorization and rote learning and to be very dependent on the teacher due to their prior educational experiences (Aylward 2002). However, an increasing body of research suggests that in many contexts this stereotype of the Asian learner may be a myth rather than a reality (Venter 2003). In this study some of the responses from the learners, when being interviewed about their participation during the course, suggest that they were unable to impart ideas and to participate actively. The evidence of the interviews suggests that the learners' perception of themselves tends to conform to the stereotype of the Asian learner. They see themselves as having poor language ability and as being self-conscious about posting queries to the discussion forum.

Example 4.4:

Learner 6 As for me, it is always difficult because I don't have much idea. I can't seem to be able to see things, interpret things, and get ideas from something that could be obvious. We are told to think of something, to talk about it in English and to give ideas as well. That bothered me so much so that I couldn't open my mouth. (*translated from Malay*)

Learner5 Sometimes we refrain from asking questions lest our classmates will laugh at us. (*translated from Malay*)

Learner 7 I do participate but very minimal. My sentences are not as good as theirs. If you look at what I write, there is not much point in it. There's nothing much in it. Not many of us participate because I think most of them are like me, not that good in our English. (*translated from Malay*)

• **Global theme: Attributes**

The third Global Theme in Figure 4.4 is “Attributes”. It is one thematic network that comprises two *Organizing Themes*:

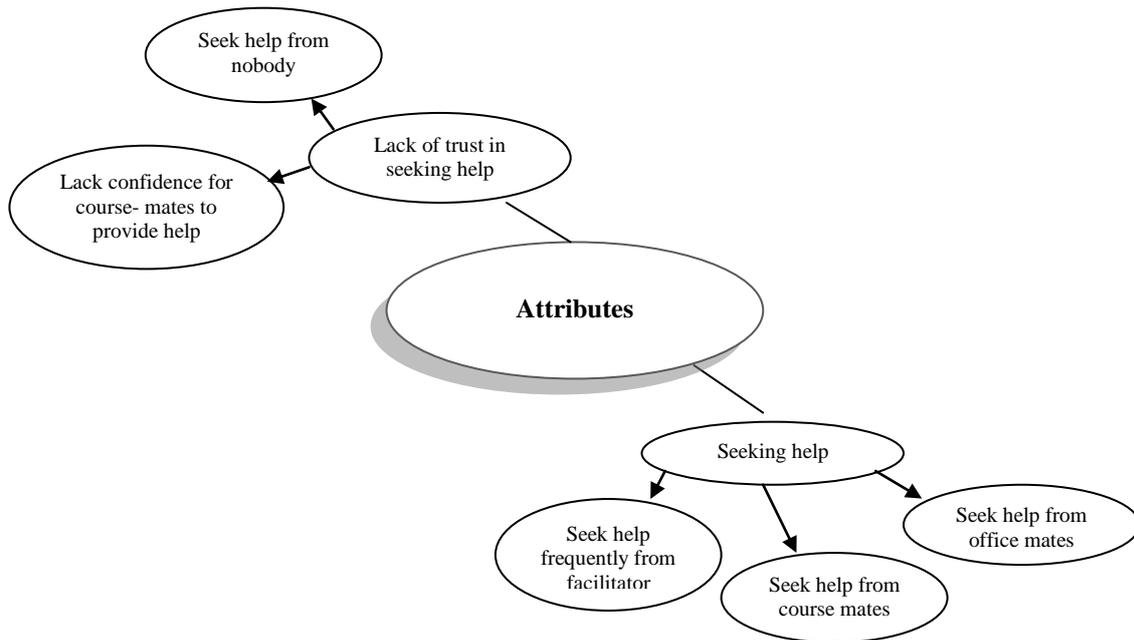
1. lack of trust in seeking help
2. seeking help

and five *Basic Themes*:

1. lack of confidence for course mates to provide help
2. seek help from nobody
3. seek help frequently from facilitator
4. seek help from course mates
5. seek help from office mates.

Why is the third *Global Theme* worded “Attributes”? It is well-known that good language learners do not necessarily have the same characteristics in learning. In this study, for example, one learner may seek help from his facilitator online when he is stuck doing his assignment, while another may prefer just to observe the communication of others discussing the assignment online; he will prefer not to seek help but will manage to complete the assignment even though he may have encountered problems at the beginning. According to Stern (1992), learners learn either consciously or unconsciously when processing new information and performing their learning tasks. Richards and Platt (1992) state that in learning, the learners’ behaviours and thoughts can be intentional, this is to help the learners better understand, learn or remember new information. It is therefore important that this study takes into account the attributes that the learners use in learning. Figure 4.6 illustrates the key themes that were found to be supporting the core of the network structure “Attributes”.

Figure 4.6: Thematic network for "Attributes"



- **Organizing theme: Lack of trust in seeking help**

This *Organizing Theme* pertains to the lack of trust in seeking help, as reported by a few learners. In this context, the learners' lack of trust is towards their own peers. According to this *Organizing Theme*, the learners do not have the confidence to seek help from anyone who is taking the course or from other learners who may have knowledge of the course. Again, it is the cultural factor of trusting and respecting the superior when seeking help. The interview data show that three out of eight learners felt that none of their peers would be able to help them improve their learning, as we see from the extracts in Example 4.5.

Example 4.5

Learner 6 We have to adjust ourselves. No one can help, really.

Learner 3 Moreover, no one seems to be interested in helping. Sometimes when I study alone and meet with words that I don't understand the meanings, I use a dictionary. I

have tried everything. I am going to see the lecturer for the first time today, after class. I didn't know the lecturer is based here. If I knew the lecturer was here, I would have done that sooner.

Learner 2 Maybe I don't like to discuss with them because I have no confidence in them. Most of them are still learning like me.

- **Organizing theme: Seeking help**

This *Organizing Theme* relates to how learners seek help when they are learning. The evidence shows that the learners ask for assistance frequently from the facilitator, their peers and at times from their workmates. Among the eight learners interviewed, five of them said that they asked for help because they thought that this would help them improve their language skills. Learner 8 in Example 4.6, for example, believes that she needs to help others in her class to improve their language skills because she wants her friends to improve their skills just like her or better than her. She believes that by helping each other out, they can improve their skills in English.

Example 4.6:

Learner 8 Yes, my friend help out, I help some other people too. I need to help them because I think, I want my friend be improve as me or better than me in English. I need to help them because mostly they are Malay, they got this problem so I think Malay student should face this problem.

- **Global theme: Effectiveness**

The fourth *Global Theme* in Figure 4.4 is “Effectiveness”. The thematic network comprises two *Organizing Themes*:

1. skillful in language
2. course adaptable

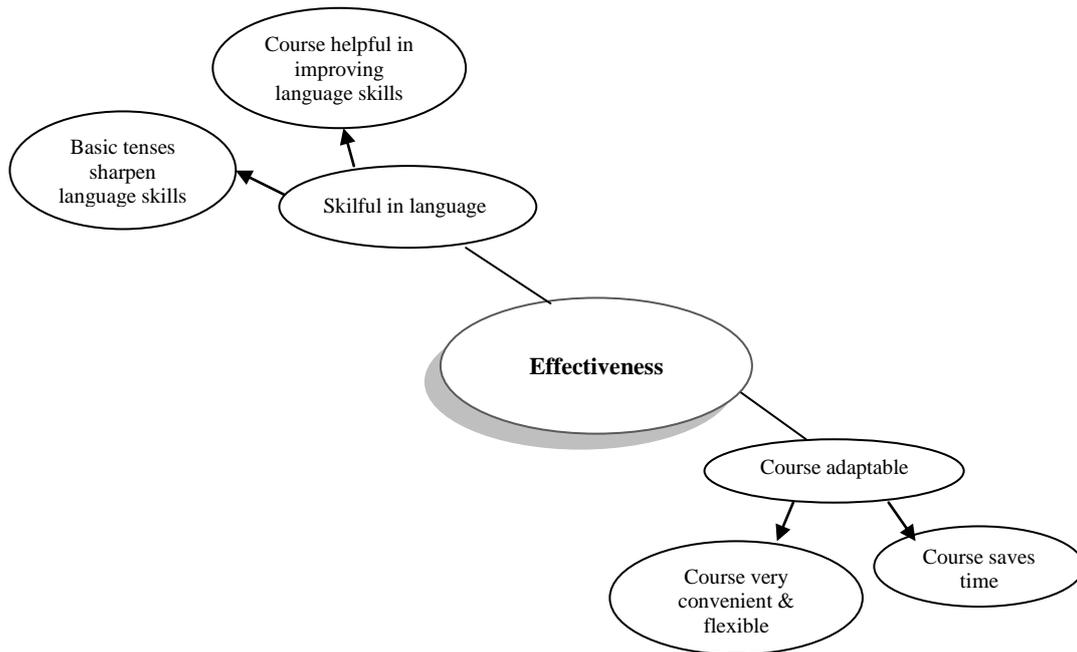
and four *Basic Themes*:

1. basic tenses sharpen language skills
2. course helpful in improving language skills
3. course very convenient and flexible
4. course saves time

Flexibility in distance learning allows the learners who are mostly adult working people to continue working and access their lessons via cyberspace (Cheng 2000). The effective skills that they use can be acquired from resources presented to them by their facilitators, through the course site or any other related resources available in the world outside the course.

In the interview a question was included that related to the mode of learning (face-to-face and online) and the effective skills they acquire through these modes of learning. The learners' responses mostly touched on the issues of how they adapt themselves as distance learners and the language skills that they learned. Their prior educational experience was the traditional face-to-face learning. They found that adapting to the flexible and effective way of learning and being autonomous was difficult at the beginning of the course since they had very little time to be online as most of them work all day. By the time they returned home they were too tired to carry out activities online and also too tired to work through any printed resources required by their facilitators. As they became more experienced in using the course facilities, however, they found that the fact that they were able to access information and master effective skills at any time convenient, make it easier for them to carry out their responsibilities as adult working learners. The thematic network in Figure 4.7 and the description of each *Organizing Theme* that supported the core structure of the thematic network clarifies the key theme effectiveness that surfaced from this analysis.

Figure 4.7: Thematic network for “Effectiveness”



- **Organizing theme: Skillful in language**

Mastering the language skills is the aim of almost every language learner. It is the skills of understanding the language that they are able to demonstrate that will strengthen their interest in learning the language. The interview data suggest that seven out of eight learners felt that what was taught in the course helped them to sharpen their skills in the language and to master topics that are offered in the course. In contrast to the views of the majority, the eighth learner interviewed (Learner 1) stated very firmly that he was not improving because the skills were not taught to him and he had lost interest in learning (see Example 4.7).

Example 4.7:

Learner 1 You can speak fluently. But, when you write, it's a problem. We cannot communicate the message because we don't understand it! The lecturer should be responsible for our exercise, to help improve our writing. As it is, this is not happening. I don't feel like going to class with all these. I'll just do whatever I want to do. I have lost my interest! (*translated from Malay*)

Learner 8 I love English so much. So I think it will help me, to make me better and my friends also.

Learner 2 For me, it's good. The basic grammar is effective. It is good in the sense that improves my English because at times we don't know which article to use when constructing sentences, when carrying out conversation. I have been looking for good courses in English, and I also have attended several of them. But I was still poor in the subject. (*translated from Malay*)

Learner 3 The exercises is so useful, like it is a continuation of what I learned in school. Things that I thought I didn't know, but these are things that I used to know. I can really improve my English. Like, sometimes the lecturers told us how the sentences used in the book could be applied in many situations. I learn bit by bit so that I may use them during conversation. (*translated from Malay*)

Learner 4 The book, the exercises...aaa..a lot of aaa...information there aa..about grammar, reading and aaa...tenses also. Its aaa...helpful for me.

- **Organizing theme: Course adaptable**

The learners of this study are all working adults. Having to complete their tasks or assignments on time can be daunting. Enrolling themselves in the BEL 100 e-Pjj course is probably ideal. Completion of the tasks or assignments given to them is part of the course requirement and is based on their schedule, which makes the course more adaptable to varying work schedules and family matters. Having met all requirements, these learners will earn a degree from a reputable institution similar to attending a face-to-face course at the same institution. The only set-back is that it takes a longer time to earn a degree compared to a full-time student. The flexibility offered by the course gives the learners the opportunity to further their studies and improve in their skills besides generating interest in learning. The following extracts from the interview transcripts provide evidence in relation to the learners' perception of the convenience of the course to the learners.

Example 4.8:

Learner 6 For me, since we don't have time to go to normal classes, this programme is good. Because PLK is really not suitable in terms of time. It starts at six o'clock and finishes at ten. I cannot reach UiTM by six, and will also be late to reach home. With the children and the things I have to do when I reach home, plus the studying I have to do, e-PJJ has to be my option. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 2 Actually it's because I'm working. That is the main reason. This course saves my time. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 4 ...easy for me to study because I'm working then emmmm.. *(hesitation sound)* this is e-PJJ so just I

open computer then I can see the information and easy to study with my friend because we communicate with the messenger aa.... (*hesitation sound*) so easy for communication and no need to see at the library or..and also we can get the information and for the ***bahan rujukan** from the library. Its easy for us la emm (*hesitation sound*)...and ****jimat** our time la. (*translated from Malay*)

Learner 8 I enrolled because I got no time to be a full time student so I think this program is convenience for me cause I no need to go to class frequently. Just go for the seminar once a month and just go to the forum anytime I am free.

*bahan rujukan= references, **jimat=save

- **Global theme: Activities**

The fifth *Global Theme* in Figure 4.4 is “Activities”. This constitutes one thematic network comprising of two *Organizing Themes*:

1. online component a satisfactory contribution
2. desirable activities and references

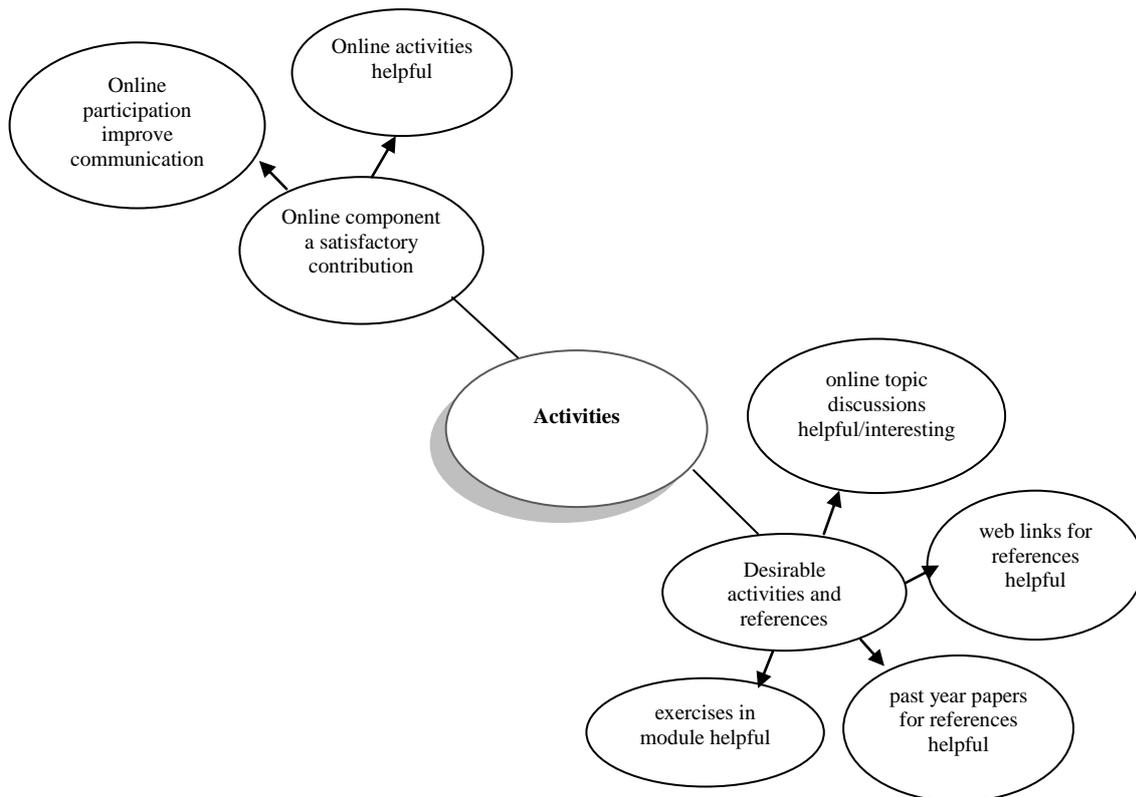
and six *Basic Themes*:

1. helpful online activities
2. online participation improve communication
3. exercises in module
4. past year papers for references
5. web links for references

6. online topic discussions.

Activities such as the inclusion of real-world and critical thinking problems that complement the learning content encourage interaction among the learners. From the interviews carried out with the learners, they have mentioned that activities that involve decision making, problem solving activities and peer discussion are perceived to lead to a more effective learning. The discussion of activities makes it more visible that the thematic network (Figure 4.8) anchored around activities contributes to effective learning. This is stressed in Koohang and Durante's study (2003) that the inclusion of activities and assignments that are interactive promotes learning. The activities or assignments that are designed must meet the learners' needs which include active learning, collaboration and cooperation (Koohang and Durante, 2003).

Figure 4.8: Thematic network for "Activities"



- **Organizing theme: Online component a satisfactory contribution**

The first *Organizing Theme*, “online component a satisfactory contribution”, that support the *Global Theme* “enjoyable activities and tasks” refers to the opinions of the learners on the online activities and tasks that contribute to their learning. The learners acknowledge that the online component contributes many activities and tasks. Peer discussions that were helpful with numerous activities and topics which are familiar to them are being discussed (refer to Example 4.9). These activities, as Koohang and Durante (2003) mention in their study, are interactive activities that promote discussion and critical thinking. It is reasonable to suppose that online participation will have the effect of improving the learners’ communication skills in terms of generating ideas, suggestions, giving comments or complements that learners themselves believe would help them improve their language skills

and usage of the language in every day life. The following excerpts from the interviews with learners provide evidence to support these generalisations.

Example 4.9:

Learner 6 Good, the discussion is good. On the online we can chat with friends directly. It's the information. There are questions asked by others which are similar with what we have in mind. (*translated from Malay*)

Learner 4 All of the activities. Ya, its good. Then I will see the aa...the what aa...I can see all my friend also. The result then I can...I can what...learn aa (*hesitation sound*)...respond the grammar and the tenses all that la.

Learner 7 I'll give an example of positive thing. I like the discussion and I think other students do like it, too. They give opinion that's new to me. That's interesting to me. I learn a lot from it. (*translated from Malay*)

- **Organizing theme: Desirable activities and references**

This *Organizing Theme* “desirable activities and references” refers to activities and references that were presented to the learners either online or offline and which were perceived as worthwhile and helpful to the learners. These activities were found interesting, manageable and useful in helping them improve their learning abilities in this course. The resources suggested to them by the facilitators such as past year papers and related web-links associated to the course were instrumental to their learning the course. Their prior educational

experiences, the activities carried out in the course were a revision and they were familiar with the activities. These activities, for example the basic grammatical terms, are what they used to learn from their school days and these have helped them refresh their language skills.

Example 4.10:

Learner 3 Like it is a continuation of what I learned in school. Things that I sometimes thought I didn't know, but these are things that I used to know. With the self-instruction manual, I would be able to revise them. (translated from Malay)

Learner 6 I like certain topics. For example, that day she asked our opinion on *AF3. What was our opinion? Who will win? It's quite interesting to give opinion on those things. (translated from Malay)

Learner 7 I can improve my English by doing these exercises. You see, I do little writing, little communication in English. So whenever I do the exercises, it helps me put words, like pronouns, in the correct places. So I like these exercises. Basically, if you can do the exercises, you can use it in your communication. (translated from Malay)

*AF3: Academy Fantasia 3; a musical programme on Malaysian TV.

- **Global theme: Support**

The sixth *Global Theme* in Figure 4.4 is “Support”. This constitutes one thematic network comprising two *Organizing Themes*:

1. facilitator support
2. peer support

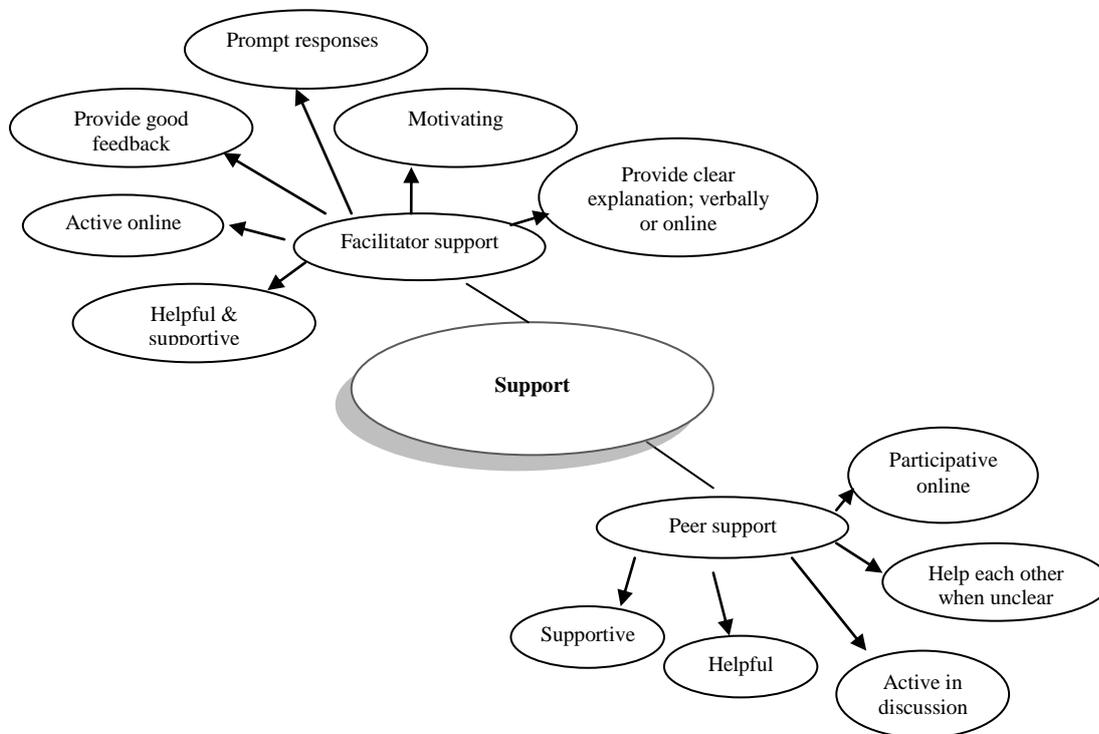
and eleven *Basic Themes*:

1. helpful and supportive
2. active online
3. provide good feedback
4. prompt responses
5. motivating
6. provide clear explanation verbally or online
7. peer supportive
8. peer helpful
9. active in discussion
10. help each other when unclear
11. participative online.

A study of Malaysian distance learners’ perceptions carried out by Thang (2005) demonstrated that support and guidance given by the facilitators is very helpful in improving the learner’s English. According to Bolliger and Martindale (2004), the distance learner’s instructor plays a crucial role in course satisfaction. This is also stressed by Moore and Kearsley (1996), who suggest that the instructor must be available whenever the learners have questions and the instructors must be flexible too as they are not only the facilitators of learning but also a motivator for the learners. In addition to the facilitators, Moore and

Kearsley (1996) also stated that the learners’ peers encouraged effective learning. As Bolliger and Martindale (2004) state, active interaction, the act of helping each other in learning and active participation among the learners creates meaningful, active learning experiences. Learners are more motivated to learn effectively with the existence of support from both their facilitator and their peers. The discussion of support makes it more visible than the thematic network. Figure 4.9 clarifies the key themes such as support from facilitators and support from peers.

Figure 4.9: Thematic network for “Support”



- **Organizing theme: Facilitator support**

This *Organizing Theme* specifically relates to the support that the learners of this course required from their facilitators. The learners stated that support from facilitators such as being helpful, being active online, providing good feedback, offering prompt feedback online, motivating, providing clear explanations and giving good guidance when learners are

attempting assigned tasks are factors that led to effective learner activity. Hara and King (2000) testify that consistent communication and interaction between the facilitator and learners and, in addition, prompt feedback from the facilitator, lessen the learners' frustration. It is the experience of waiting for feedback from the facilitator and interaction with the facilitator that encourages effective learning among the learners. The extracts from the interview transcripts below provide evidence of the learners' perceptions regarding the support received from the facilitator.

Example 4.11:

Learner 2 Her response is good although she said she is not computer savvy, but at least she manages to do it. I say her response is good. If I send a question today, I would get the reply the next day. I am comfortable with her. I am improving. She helps to improve my English. I have read a lot of books on grammar, but this is only self-learning. In this course, I learn better because of the verbal explanation by the lecturer. (*translated from Malay*)

Learner 5 She gives some exercises and tells how to do it. For example, when she assigns an essay, she gives the topic as well as the scenario related to the topic. It's something like that. She keeps reminding me to pay attention to my grammar when writing. (*translated from Malay*)

Learner 3 My lecturer is rather quick to tell us what the

problems are. Every week there is a new assignment from the book. Then there are students who told the lecturer that they cannot improve their English by learning alone. For this, the lecturer would usually give encouragement, as well as tell the students how to revise effectively and suggest that students form study groups and all that. (*translated from Malay*)

- **Organizing theme: Peer support**

Peer support is the *Organizing Theme* that pertains to the support learners received from their own friends and course mates and the act of how learners help each other in their learning (Hara and King 2000). The active support of their peers, giving opinions and ideas when discussing online, helping each other when the facilitator was not available to answer their queries creates a positive and effective learning environment (refer to Example 4.12). The following excerpts from the learner interview transcripts indicate that peer support contributes to active and effective learning experiences.

Example 4.12:

Learner 3 So we can discuss our English problems with our group members. We help each other and also suggest some solutions. Discussion groups can be very interesting. I for once like it very much...(*translated from Malay*)

Learner 4 My friends? Ok, good. Very active and they are all

very helpful. We support each other and they are very kind. When one student, they are don't know about this and many give the answer online, give the opportunity to them, when we don't know where to get the resources ok, and someone give the...you can find from here, you can find from here, so its good.

Learner 5 Yes, they do give support. We discuss on the phone and remind each other about the assignment. Do any of us have such and such problems , but..we talk in Malay. (*translated from Malay*)

Learner 8 It was good, they really appreciate it, my help to them. They will say thank you for responding to them, sometimes I need help also I can ask from them. The positive part of the forum room is mostly about helping each other, asking for help. I like it.

- **Global theme: Conditions**

The seventh *Global Theme* in Figure 4.4 is “Conditions” referring to the learning conditions. This constitutes one thematic network comprising four *Organizing Themes*:

1. course a burden
2. lack of communication
3. content too basic
4. lack of response

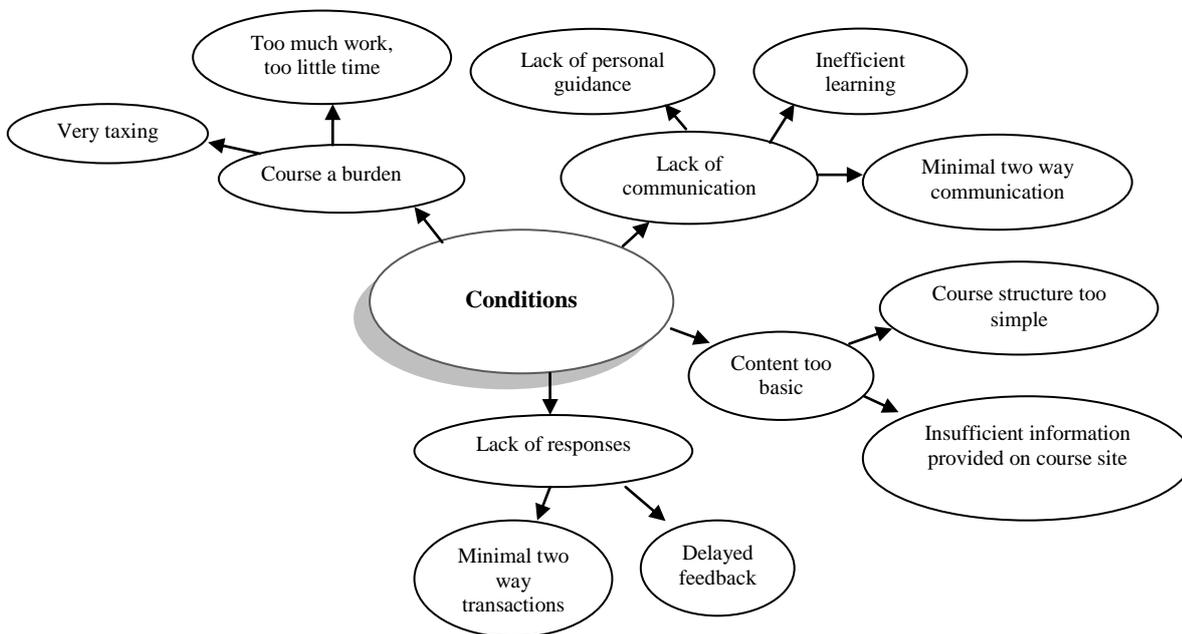
and nine *Basic Themes*:

1. too much work too little time
2. very taxing
3. lack of personal guidance
4. inefficient learning
5. minimal two-way communication

6. course structure too simple
7. insufficient information provided on course site
8. delayed feedback
9. minimal two-way transactions

In a study carried out by Ali, Hodson-Carlton and Ryan (2004), it is mentioned that the constructivist theory which evolved from psychology and philosophy and reflects constructive or discovery learning, has important implications for teaching online. One of the implications derived from the theory is creating conditions for learning online. Learning conditions that encourage the learners to be engaged in activities and provide interactive learner activity without stress will develop learners who are more confident and who can eventually become autonomous learners (Ali, Hodson-Carlton and Ryan 2004). Online learning conditions that are convenient, flexible, provide easy access to resources, interactive, engaging and well supported will unquestionably lead to more learners being committed to learning and being more independent. On the other hand, having stressful and ineffective learning conditions as illustrated with themes in Figure 4.10 has a negative effect on learning and does not help to stimulate the online learning processes.

Figure 4.10: Thematic network for “Conditions”



- **Organizing theme: Course a burden**

The *Organizing Theme* “course a burden” clarifies the perception of the learners towards the course. Some of the learners felt that the course was a burden to them because there was too much work and too little time for them to be effective in their learning of the course. The learners also mentioned that the course was too taxing, with many tasks, assignments and activities which led to stressful conditions not conducive to learning. With too many assignments and exercises to be done, the learners felt that the course was becoming a burden instead of it being very flexible in nature, which is what distance learning is all about. As Thang (2005) discovered, a heavy workload is a serious problem for distance learners and learners with too heavy a workload are unable to apply positive strategies and approaches to study. Some of the examples from the interview text verify the above statement.

Example 4.13:

Learner 1 I am working and I still have another assignment. At the same time I have to do sales. In sales we are not talking about nine to five. Whenever I get back to my study, I feel disappointed. I am lost and I have to ask people. Just too much, too much to do. (*translated from Malay*)

Learner 6 I am not always certain that I can arrive here in time. And then class finishes at ten. Upon reaching home, I have a lot of chores waiting. Oh, I can't take it anymore. I know it is tiring you know being a student, a mother, wife and also working full-time..too challenging. I don't know if I can last. (*translated from Malay*)

Learner 5 At our age, reading is taxing. Yes, it's taxing and at my age it gets a little bit slow. When I log on, every body in the class is there. I began to lose interest because there are just too many of us. Moreover it is the same person who answers the questions. Other people have no chance to answer. (*translated from Malay*)

Learner 3 At times I feel like giving up. I have a friend who is taking PLK, and is also tired of going to classes after work. At least he gets to see the lecturer directly and discuss the problem there and then. (*translated from Malay*)

Learner 7 She gives us assignment every week, good, but, at times we can't finish the assignment. The deadline is within one week. Then comes another assignment, and we haven't finished the last one. Yes, there are backlogs at time. (*translated from Malay*)

- **Organizing theme: Lack of communication**

The *Organizing Theme* “lack of communication” refers to the lack of communication that took place in the course either among their peers or with their facilitator. As mentioned by Moore and Kearsley (1996), “the three important types of interaction in distance learning courses are learner-content, learner-instructor and learner-learner”. Including all the above interaction in the course whenever necessary is very crucial. A deficiency in one of these forms of communication will lead to learners experiencing isolation, frustration and anxiety (Bolliger and Martindale 2004). Learners found it stressful and learning conditions became ineffective with the absence of the two-way communication (refer to Example 4.14).

Bolliger and Martindale, in their (2004) study of student satisfaction in online courses, stress that learners of distance courses should be clearly told about the goals and objectives of the course at the very beginning. In addition, facilitators should encourage learner participation, provide the learners with updated information and supervise the learners’ progress. Below are some extracts from the learner interviews that related to the *Organizing Theme* “lack of communication”.

Example 4.14:

Learner 1 I have to say it. I have lost interest. She went to explain how to respond. I just don’t understand a thing she say. What would a sentence, the words the memo be. So if she gives example, I would be able to

do what is required. (*translated from Malay*)

Learner 2 We do these things on our own and so we don’t know what to ask. If you know what to do, go ahead and do it, and if you don’t understand, then ask other people. But, in my case, I don’t ask even if I

don't know how to do the questions because I don't know what question to put up. Because it's e-PJJ, everything must be on e-PJJ. We don't have to go physically to ITM. To me, the most important thing is the response in communication. I mean the communication between students and lecturers, it must be in two-way traffic. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 5 There are just too many of us. We should separate the students into smaller groups and have separate forum discussions so that all of us have the chance to communicate and be heard. The lecturer could give more focus and students can communicate better. *(translated from Malay)*

- **Organizing theme: Content too basic**

The *Organizing Theme* “content too basic” pertains to the content of the course, the topics covered, activities, reading materials and the information provided at the course website. In many studies, learners have been asked to give their perceptions regarding the content’s quality, relevance and also the structure which is presented on the course website. Laurillard (1993) argues that learners need to know the ways the content can be understood, the ways in which it can be misunderstood and how the learners experience the course itself. The content of the course cannot just be presented to the learner in a very simple manner and still the learners have difficulty in comprehending. There should be a balance between simplicity of presentation and precision. In this study, the content of the course was found to be too simple and basic in structure and the information provided in the course website was told to the researcher by the learners to be insufficient in content. The learners felt that it is just a repeat of what they have learned during high school (refer to Example 4.15). Learners

were made to understand that the content would be of a standard high enough for their level as diploma students but in vain. This in fact was a contribution to the stressful and ineffective learner activity.

Example 4.15:

Learner 1 Its grammatical content such as sentences, nouns, pronouns and the rest like past tense, present tense are just like what I learned in form five. Only that I feel something is lacking. This is like school work! (*translated from Malay*)

Learner 2 We did have discussion, but that was confined more to what is in the chapter. (*translated from Malay*)

Learner 8 This program one thing I'm not really comfortable is the way the lecturer give the assignment. Mostly we need go through the SIM only mostly, she just give us the exercise. May be one in a while we give us assignment to pass up to email to her but mostly base on an SIM itself. So most of the students not most some of us, they not very good in English, the just go to the SIM and see the answer at the back..We don't make use of the website it is just so...So... I think it not enough for us to improve our English.

- **Organizing theme: Lack of responses**

The *Organizing Theme* “lack of responses” focuses on the feedback experienced by the learners either online or offline from their peers and their facilitators. Kenny (2003) concludes that learners are more positive about distance courses which are designed to provide prompt feedback and enable contact with lecturers and other learners. The

importance of the facilitator or learner's social presence, in the form of interaction and feedback is highlighted as an important factor in learners' satisfaction with their online experience (Kenny 2003).

The interview indicates clearly that the learners' experience delayed feedback both from their peers and facilitators and the minimal two way transactions caused stressful and ineffective learner activity for the course.

Example 4.16:

Learner 1 I started in July, and now it is already September. During the forum I requested for some assistance, but none came. I don't feel like going to class with all these. I'll just do whatever you want me to do. If you want assignment, I give you my assignment. I'll send it to you, but don't expect me to come to your class. That's it. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 5 It is delayed... the response would be delayed. Yes. We get answers to our question a day, or may be a week later...or may be never... *(translated from Malay)*

Global theme: Inadequacy

The eighth *Global Theme* in Figure 4.4 is “Inadequacy” referring to the inadequate support received. This constitutes one thematic network comprising six *Organizing Themes*:

1. lack of assistance
2. misuse of communication mode
3. lack of training
4. usefulness of materials/resources

5. lack of creativity in providing activities
6. technology support

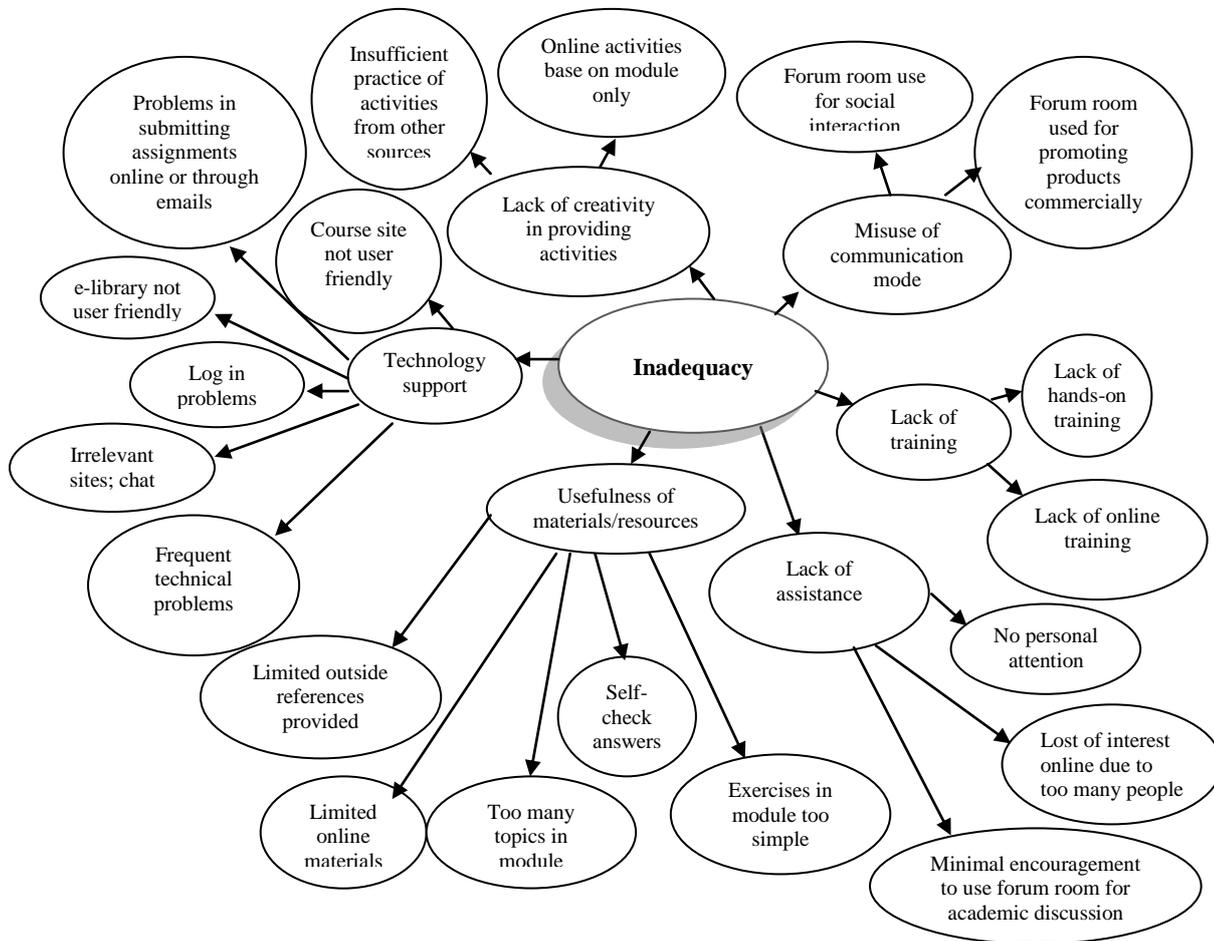
and twenty *Basic Themes*:

1. loss of interest online due to too many people
2. no personal attention
3. minimal encouragement to use forum room for academic discussion.
4. forum room use for social interaction
5. forum room use for promoting products commercially
6. lack of hands-on training
7. lack of online training
8. exercises in module too simple
9. self-check answers provided
10. too many topics in module
11. limited online materials
12. limited outside references provided
13. online activities base on module only
14. insufficient practice of activities from other sources
15. course site not user friendly
16. problems in submitting assignments online or through emails
17. e-library not user friendly
18. log in problems
19. irrelevant sites; chat room
20. frequent technical problems.

Thang (2005) reports that the distance learners in her study would have preferred more support and guidance, rather than what they had claimed earlier, namely that they wanted more freedom. As the researcher sees it, the learners are adults and it is obvious that

they would want to appear to be independent. However, having gone through the course they noticed that insufficient guidance would lead to ineffective learner activity. The thematic network in Figure 4.11 clarifies the key themes which the learners felt contribute to ineffective learner activity.

Figure 4.11: Thematic network for “Inadequacy”



- **Organizing theme: Lack of assistance**

The *Organizing Theme* “lack of assistance” pertains to the aid that the learners received from their facilitators and their peers. This *Organizing Theme* specifically focuses on the assistance such as attention and encouragement that the learners received while learning. The learners felt that when there are too many participants involved in a discussion, especially the online discussion, there was a lack of personal attention and minimal use of encouraging words in the messages written by their facilitators or their peers. This had a demotivating effect. Example 4.17 testifies the explanation on this theme.

Example 4.17:

Learner 1 What's the use of having e-PJJ if students cannot communicate with the lecturer?. The lecturer should tell us why we got C and things like that. We want to know why so that we can understand and be more prepared in the next seminar. And, for the next assignment we already know our mistakes. So, my point is that if there is no more interest and no more support, it is better to do away with this programme. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 5 So, it is difficult for you to attend the online activities because there are too many people. I actually enjoy discussing the topics given by my lecturer, but, as I have said, the problem is there are too many of us. We should make the group smaller so that we can pay more attention. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 7 No, she doesn't encourage. She just gives the topic and we discuss it. It's mostly that. *(translated from Malay)*

- **Organizing theme: Misuse of communication mode**

The *Organizing Theme* “misuse of communication mode” refers to the improper use of the forum discussion room that is provided in this course. Some students complained in the interviews about the use by some course participants of the discussion forum for the promotion of commercial products, and there were also concerns expressed about the excessive use of the forum for purely social communication. Example 4.18 testifies the explanation on this theme.

Example 4.18:

Learner 5 Sometime forum discussion sometime wrong topic they are...they put that wrong, wrong topic that means nothing to do with what we learn. I did see in the forum promotion cake. They sell cake. (*translated from Malay*)

Learner 6 From what I gather by listening here and there, they are talking like 'how are you', 'thank you' and that kind of talk, jive talking that's what they do in the forum room. I also know what's happening, but I don't like going online. Some people go online to say thank you to the lecturer. I will not go online for those things, except if I have something worthwhile. (*translated from Malay*)

- **Organizing theme: Lack of training**

The Organizing Theme “lack of training” focuses on the availability of support given to the learners in the form of training. The evidence shows that the learners lacked hands-on training. Hands-on training in the use of the technology is particularly important for new learners on distance learning programmes and because some learners with very minimal knowledge of working with computers are required to go online. This conclusion is supported by Belanger and Jordan (2000), Chong (1998) and Hara and King (2000) who show that distance learners must be familiar with the technology used in the course in order to be successful and also that if learners experience frustration with technology on the course this will lead to lower satisfaction levels. Example 4.19 provides evidence of the learners’ responses on the need of training.

Example 4.19:

Learner 1 Ok, I give you one example. Let say, you are talking on a topic, a car. Now, I told you to go to such and such website. But, when you get to the website, you don't know where to go, how to look for the information. Ok, then I ask you to click on such and such. Then you will go direct to the link. There is no need to search here and there and waste time. For e-PJJ students, time is very important. If it takes half an hour to search on website, and I only have five minutes to read, that's a waste of time. It dampens my desire to read. I am not saying we should be provided with everything. At least tell us the reference whenever you discuss something, train us to use the website correctly. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 3 I think it should. The other day there was a seminar, but it was too short and there were too many students attending, may be more that one hundred. having a workshop should be better. Smaller group, more effective. I think it should be hands-on. It is easier to follow the explanation. The speaker was in front and the ones at the back can always search online later. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 8 The induction is more to how we access the forum our website all that. But that day is quite confusing because the lady cannot explain to us very well so after the induction, most of them got face problem going to the website. Yes of course we need training, because not all of us can really understand about the computer.

- **Organizing theme: Usefulness of materials/resources**

The *Organizing Theme* “usefulness of materials/resources” in this study refers to the materials and resources that were available to the learners. Having good and helpful materials and resources in the process of learning is very important. According to Belanger and Jordan (2000), online materials and outside references such as external hyperlinks must be easy to access and have relevant information so as not to confuse the learners or learners will experience frustrations. This is further stressed in Koochang and Durante’s (2003) study, that materials and resources for distance learning should be designed according to appropriate learning principles and theories that meet the specifics of the learners’ needs to promote learning among the learners. The interview data show that some of the learners felt that some of the materials, especially the exercises in the Self Instructional Module, were too simple and basic. The exercises are review of their prior educational experiences in high school. There were also too many topics in the module and the availability of the self-check answers at the back of the manual did not help the learners to learn effectively. This *Organizing Theme* also covers the fact that there were very few online materials and outside references provided for the learners apart from the course materials and those that were provided were not effective in assisting the learners to improve their learning. The following text segments in Example 4.20 provide the evidence of the above statements.

Example 4.20:

Learner 1 The self-instruction manual is not so helpful, some answers are provided at the back of the book. With that book, we can learn by ourselves. But, if we can learn by ourselves, why do we have to come to class? Why do we need lecturers at all? We just read the books that are suitable. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 2 Except the exercise book. My style is I don't like the inclusion of answers at the back of the book. Our tendency is to look at the answers at the back, then what do we learn? *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 8 Activities online mostly from the study material, from the note itself, I think should be more than that.

- **Organizing theme: Lack of creativity in providing activities**

The *Organizing Theme* “lack of creativity in providing activities” relates to the lack of creativity by the facilitators in the provision of activities, exercises, tasks or assignments to the learners, especially online. The activities that the facilitators provided online tended to strictly follow the module/text of the course. There was insufficient practice material and too much repetition, and this led to a loss of interest among the learners. The following text segments in example 4.21 provide the evidence for this conclusion.

Example 4.21:

Learner 1 She asked us to read, for example page eighty-eight, eighty-nine and do the exercises on page ninety. I say, might as well don't give us anything at all. I can read myself and do the exercise and check for the answers at the back. So, I just do on my own, no explanation. If there is nothing else, I suggest do away with classes. It just wastes my time.
(translated from Malay)

Learner 2 So far, most of the discussions revolves around exercises in the self-instructional Manual. Apart from that as far as I know, there is none. I would like to have discussions on other topics.
(translated from Malay)

Learner 3 She'll just tell such and such exercises for this week or that week together with the deadline. First, we thought she would give some exercises from the book, and later from other sources. We know the book is just for revision. Later, she continues to give us exercises from the book, some with the deadlines, and nothing else. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 8 I realize she only give me one website to go through and then she need from she need the feedback from us about the website. She also often gives the one that she always gives from the SIM.

- **Organizing theme: Technology support**

The Organizing Theme “Technology support” describes the technological provision of the course and its efficiency. A study conducted by Cardoso and Bidarra (2007) shows

that, technology in open and distance learning can be both a solution and a problem. The widespread adoption of a technology learning system which is dependable and trustworthy will make distance learning more convenient. It is also important for distance learners who are dependent on the system to feel at ease when they are online. The system has to be user-friendly and easily accessible for the learners to have a favourable learning experience in pursuing distance learning courses.

In this study many of the learners interviewed were in agreement that the course website was not user-friendly and lacked sufficient information. The high frequency of technical problems that occurred also caused the learners some frustration and lessened their interest in learning. Several learners experienced difficulties in submitting their assignments via emails using the course website e-mail facility. The e-library facility was also reported to be not user-friendly. Example 4.22 verifies that the technology support the learners received and experienced caused a lot of problems.

Example 4.22:

<p><i>Learner 1</i> There is no problem to access, but there is insufficient information. There are many names there. it's not up-to-date. You see the FLP website. I might as well click to Yahoo website. <i>(translated from Malay)</i></p>
<p><i>Learner 2</i> The explanation was not clear. Do we enter the group, or do we enter the course?.This is where I am confused. There is some problem here. I just click here and click there, coming out and going in from time to time until I hit the right thing. I asked those who are responsible. Then I have to wait for</p>

the reply but it didn't come. Later I found it was collaborate. Sigh....*(translated from Malay)*

Learner 3 Sometimes we don't know how to use the functions in the website. We need technical support. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 4 Technical problem? Yes I experience it, I had to wait for more than two weeks, only then was I able to log into the website. I asked for help from the technical department but it takes too long, so I ask my friends, they say it is the problem of the website. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 5 Only recently we open the website. But what am I doing, like when I am submitting assignment all that, I use my own e-mail, Yahoo or Hotmail. The Uitm's website is plagued with problems every now and then. I don't know, sometimes it is very slow and that's annoying. You know for beginners, going in can be quite a daunting effort. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 6 I have problems sometime...technical problems and it's rather annoying. *(translated from Malay)*

- **Global theme: Situations**

The ninth *Global Theme* in Figure 4.4 is "Situations" referring to the learning situations. This constitutes one thematic network comprising four *Organizing Themes*:

1. learning venues
2. learning time
3. log in time

4. time demand

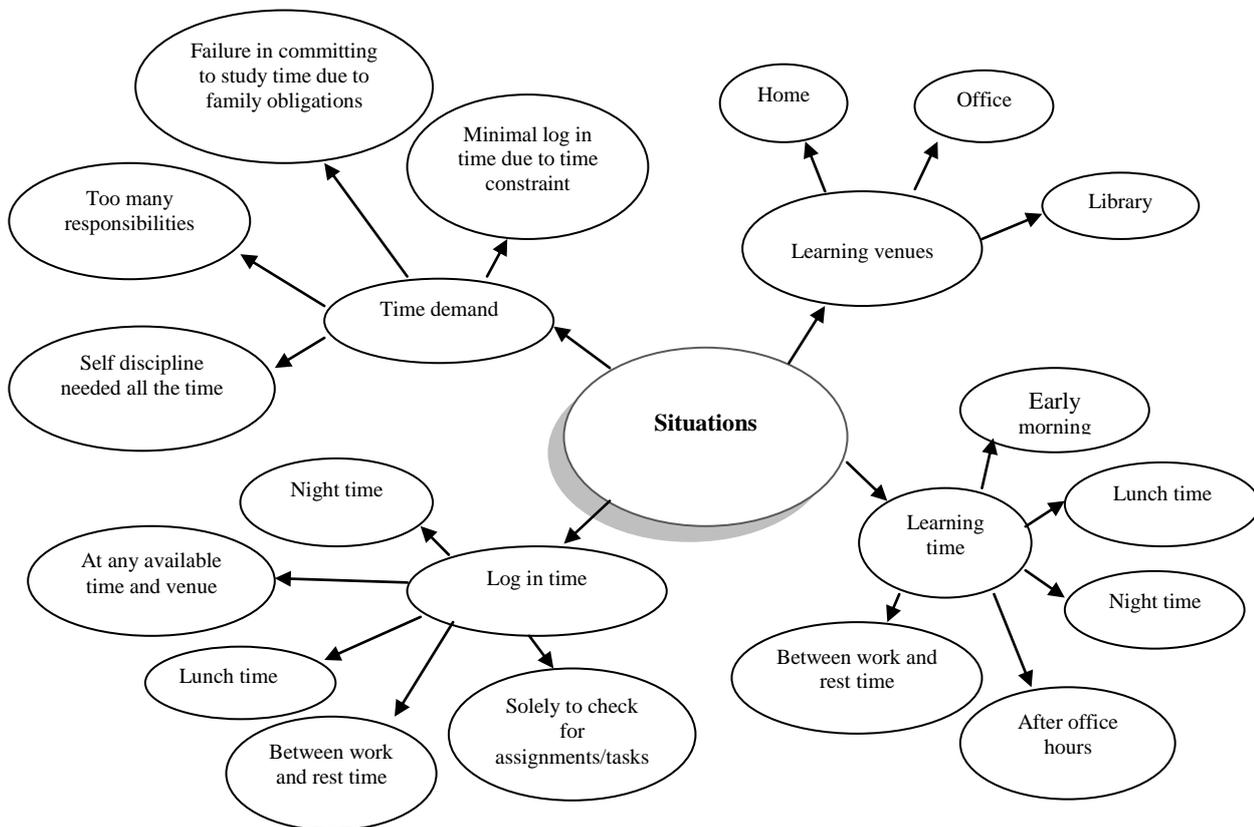
and seventeen *Basic Themes*:

1. home
2. office
3. library
4. night time (for *Organizing Theme*: learning time)
5. after office hours
6. lunch time (for *Organizing Theme*: learning time)
7. between work and rest time (for *Organizing Theme*: learning time)
8. early morning
9. at any available time and venue
10. solely to check for assignments and tasks
11. self-discipline needed all the time
12. too many responsibilities
13. failure in committing to study time due to family obligations
14. minimal log in time due to time constraint.
15. night time (for *Organizing Theme*: log in time)
16. lunch time (for *Organizing Theme*: log in time)
17. between work and rest time (for *Organizing Theme*: log in time)

Distance learners should be aware of the importance of time management and the flexibility of the course which means that learners are able to work where and when they want at their own pace (Bolliger and Martindale 2004). This of course requires discipline, active learning and also initiative to achieve success. The evidence from the interviews regarding the learning “situations” experienced by the BEL 100 learners is set out in the

thematic network in Figure 4.12. This figure represents the perceptions of the BEL 100 learners regarding their learning “situations”.

Figure 4.12: Thematic network for “Situations”



- **Organizing theme: Learning venues**

Distance learning is a medium of teaching and learning using modern technology so that teachers and learners do not have to be at the same place at the same time. The *Organizing Theme* “learning venues” relates to the physical location in which the learners carried out their learning. Most learners studied at home, while a few studies at the office or in a library. The main factors determining the location of study were comfort and convenience. According to Belanger and Jordan (2000), distance learning provides learners who would otherwise be excluded from participation in the learning process with the opportunity to pursue lifelong learning regardless of their lifestyles and location. The learners

preferred learning situations with the flexibility in learning is crucial in making their learning a success. A few extracts from the learners' interview data in Example 4.23 indicate the learners' preferred learning venues.

Example 4.23:

Learner 1 I'm a senior staff. So I have a tight schedule. I have appointments with people all the time who want to take cash loan. Whenever I have free time, even while in the car, I mean while driving, I will read. I also read during lunch hours at the office or anywhere, and later after my wife has gone to bed at home..
(translated from Malay)

Learner 2 Whenever I have time, I do it. My work sometimes starts at seven a.m. and sometimes I'll be home only by eleven p.m. So, the moment I have some time, I'd immediately do it. That's why I always bring my book to the office. In between tasks. After completing one task and before starting a new one. But, I have to be careful because my boss is just next to me. I do all sort of 'undercover' things just to get some time to do my school work.*(translated from Malay)*

Learner 7 I do the exercises from the book at home. There is little time in the office.*(translated from Malay)*

Learner 6 Yes, at the office I do my revision too, during lunch time, or in the morning when I reach office a bit earlier. I see what I can do. At night I'd do some at home.*(translated from Malay)*

- **Organizing theme: Learning time**

Time is one of the main reasons most adult learners commit themselves to distance learning. As Belanger and Jordan (2000) testified, it is the every day demand of the responsibilities to career and families that keep the distance learners from taking traditional courses at a higher education and the flexibility of any time any where system of learning increases literacy. The Organizing Theme, learning time, in this study pertains to the learners' preferred or available time of performing their studies. The time learners carry out doing their revision of the course, exercises, and assignments given by their facilitators were during night time, after office hours, during lunch time at work, in between work and rest time or early in the morning before the learners start their daily chores. The learners learning time can be very crucial in determining a learning situation that is conducive and successful.

Example 4.24:

Learner 1 At home, I have to struggle a little bit. Read for one or two hours. There is no disturbance from people in those hours. The telephone doesn't ring. A complete silence. I am used to studying in the middle of the night. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 6 With the children and all, normally I do my learning it after mid-night, for half an hour. At twelve thirty I get sleepy and cannot read anymore. Have to wake up early the next day. I'd have a headache if I sleep late. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 8 I do most of my learning at home, in my bedroom and at night that's where and when I feel comfortable.

- **Organizing theme: Log time**

The Organizing Theme of “log time” is particularly focused on the log in time of the learners when they are studying online. The evidence from the interview transcripts shows that the learners tended to log in at night, during their lunch breaks at work and between rest and work time.

Example 4.25:

Learner 2 Normally I look for updates. That’s what I do in the morning, during lunch time, and after office. I can safely say it is about ten minutes per session. That is, if I don’t response. As I said it is before office starts, after lunch, after office when I have finished my work, and while waiting for my husband to pick me up. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 3 During office hours I may do checking on the study website. At home, I have to share the facility with my sibling. If I go to my mother’s house somewhere near here, there is no online facility. there is internet facility in my house at Bangsar. Once a week I go home to log online. Yes at my workplace I do log on to the forum because I only go back to Bangsar once a week to access to the internet. Sometimes I sit for as long as two to three hours. Sometimes I check for new assignment, read what they give me, and ask questions. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 5 I can only enter the forum at night... Sometimes two or three times a week. When I enter the forum, say at eleven or twelve, most of those students in the forum have left. That’s why I use the Yahoo messenger with my friends. *(translated from Malay)*

- **Organizing theme: Time demand**

As said by O'Lawrence (2007), time management can be one of the biggest difficulties for some adult distance learners. They may lack the self-discipline which is required to manage their learning time. This *Organizing Theme* refers to the stress which learners experienced as a result of difficulties in time management. The learners complained about having too many responsibilities, resulting in a failure to commit themselves to study time and to logging into the course online. The learners acknowledged that self-discipline was needed when pursuing the course (refer to Example 4.26).

Example 4.26:

Learner 3 I kind of feel it's a bit difficult because you don't see your classmates. Sometimes when you ask for explanation, you don't get the right thing. I wish there's opportunity to have class every day but as mentioned earlier I am a distance learner now...it's just impossible. Work and busy schedule just tight me down. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 6 I am already married and so it's a bit difficult to find time, to find time for study and for the children. But I have to do it, anyway. *(translated from Malay)*

Learner 8 Except for the assignment we got a lot assignment to do so I need to fit my time, it can be a burden but I try to manage...with my baby and all.

4.3.2 Exploration of facilitators' interview texts

We turn now to the analysis of the facilitator interviews. The five *Global Themes* from the facilitator transcripts and the fourteen *Organizing Themes* are listed below in Figure 4.13. In this section each *Organizing Theme* is described and explored and later each theme is connected to the *Global Theme* that has been identified earlier. At the end of the chapter the analysis of the facilitator and learner interview data will be integrated.

Figure 4.13: Global and Organizing Themes of the Facilitators' Interview Texts

<i>Organizing Themes</i>	<i>Global Themes</i>
1. lack modification 2. component overlooked 3. time consuming content structure	Course Structure
4. materials/resources too elementary 5. adequacy of online activities	Resources
6. lack training as facilitators 7. lack training as distance learners	Training
8. time constraint 9. lack of interest and creativity 10. lack of support from others	Support
11. teacher-dependent 12. passive learners 13. uninterested learners 14. grades-oriented learners	Habits

- **Global theme: Course structure**

The first *Global Theme* of the facilitators' transcripts in Figure 4.13 is "Course structure". This constitutes one thematic network which comprises three *Organizing Themes*:

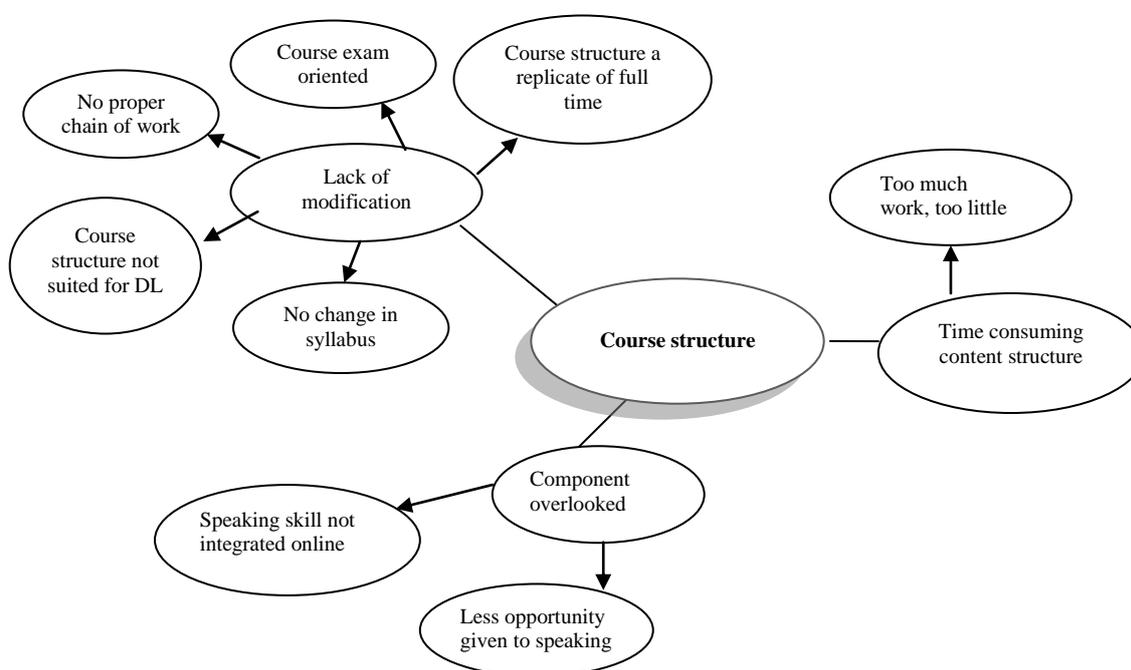
1. lack of modification
2. component overlooked
3. time consuming content structure

and eight *Basic Themes*:

1. no change in syllabus
2. course structure not suited for distance learning
3. no proper chain of work
4. course exam oriented
5. course structure a replicate of full-time curriculum
6. less opportunity given to speaking
7. speaking skill not integrated online
8. too much work too little time.

Every institution that delivers a flexible course such as a distance learning course is expected to assure effective learning and high passing rates to its learners. As mentioned by Mandell and Herman (2003), it is the responsibility of the designers and experts of the course to know about the appropriateness of training imparted in tune with the values that vary with culture, time, status, interests and abilities of the learners. The structure of the course influences what the learners will learn and how they will learn. An authoritarian course structure suppresses learners' interest in learning. The structure of the course should invite the learners to turn "their curiosities into inquiries that work and last" (Mason 2000). The problem of poor course design is highlighted in the thematic network in Figure 4.14.

Figure 4.14: Thematic network for “Course structure”



- **Organizing theme: Lack of modification**

The Organizing Theme “lack of modification” pertains to the unchanged course syllabus that is being utilized semester after semester in the course presentation of this study. The theme of “lack of modification” highlights the fact that the course structure is not applicable to distance learners since the components are merely a replication of the full time syllabus. The assessment given and the approach used, except for the online part of the course, were similar to what is provided for the full time learners of the course. This problem, particularly the exam-oriented nature of the course which is similar to learners’ prior educational experiences, is apparent in the interview data (see Example 4.27).

Example 4.27:

Facilitator 2 Actually some of my students, they actually asked, so are we still learning "is", "are", "was", "were", you know? Because they see the word simple tenses and you know these are the basic tenses they have to do, so at the end of the day I had to answer yes because of exam orientation because you need to pass the exam like this way. The thing that I don't like or probably I think, needs to be improved, I wouldn't say that I don't like but I think, areas need to be improved will be the assessment, there should be a change of assessment in terms of evaluating the fulltime as well as the adult learners who are doing the e-PJJ because these people have vast experience in working so we don't want to fallback in that forty sixty or seventy thirty assessment and these adult learners at the end of the day they want something that is or be outcome based education, they want to know the outcome of that particular course, so there has to be some form of projects probably or assessments for participation online.

Facilitator 4 Some of the exercises, I would look through...of course some of the materials in the SIM are outdated but I will go for more recent materials when I give them supplementary exercises, not all my exercises will come from

the SIM. The bad point is that I'm not really happy with the module, with this mode of learning. Because it does not cover...because teaching full time students whereby you meet them six times a week is definitely not the same teaching the same code with e-learning method.

Facilitator 6 We say that this BEL 100, the level is like the PMR level, so it would be better that we upgrade it a little bit, though it's proficiency like paper. It would be better if we upgrade just a little bit. Slightly make it difficult a little bit.

Facilitator 7 BEL 100 that was sometime ago. Was 2 or 3 years ago, and it is significant because things are still the same, now and then. Number one we still have the same component in the syllabus. Number two we still do not have a proper chain of work.

- **Organizing theme: Component overlooked**

The component referred to in the *Organizing Theme* “component overlooked” is the Speaking component. The Speaking component in this course plays a crucial role in the content of the course. This is because most of the BEL 100 learners who are working adults need the speaking skills in the application of their work. However, there is no emphasis given to the component even though it is tested (refer to Example 4.28). Learners have very little opportunity to carry out the speaking tasks either offline or online. In addition, their prior

educational experiences did not encourage learners to carry out speaking tasks. Due to the neglect of this component, the aim of having knowledge of all the four skills of learning a language will probably not be achieved. The findings of Gaba and Dash's (2004) study show that distance education courses can be made more effective by updating the components of a course with the latest information and providing a balanced emphasis on all skills. Example 4.28 provides evidence concerning the perceptions of the facilitators regarding the neglect of the speaking component.

Example 4.28:

Facilitator 1 I think they need to do lot of speaking you know, exercises practice, it's just that they are only meeting 4 times for the whole semester and not much time given to them to focus on speaking activity.

Facilitator 2 I'm quite satisfied with the assessment, except for the speaking assessment. I think the speaking assessment question should be pitched at what adult learners can talk about rather than talking about holiday or a story book that you have read or you heard that your friend is quitting from UiTM, what do you want to suggest, so I think for speaking practice there should be a different set of situation for adult learners so you don't feel sorry for them, when you administer the test for them. Oh my god, you're sitting in front of a man who is probably 45 years old and talking about how to give advice.

Facilitator 5 They need.. one is speaking, another one is

	listening because I think they need practice. BEL 100, speaking and I am so worried about the speaking component and I'm not sure I can really give them enough, give them before...But still...
<i>Facilitator 7</i>	Evaluation? We have a speaking component but there is nothing that prepares them for this evaluation.

- **Organizing theme: Time consuming content structure**

The Organizing Theme “time consuming content structure” relates to the time required to cover all the topics in the course within the time given. From the perception of the facilitators there is just too much work and too little time to cover the many components and topics. The time consuming content contributes to the ineffectiveness of learning since in-depth teaching of certain topics is impossible. This is verified by the facilitators in Example 4.29. In a study carried out by Samuel and Abu Bakar (2006) looking into the obstacles faced by English language teachers in Malaysia, the most revealing finding concerned the obstacles the teachers faced in integrating lessons in their online teaching in which time to plan and implement the lessons is a burden besides having the fear of not being able to complete the very demanding syllabus. It was strongly recommended by Samuel and Abu Bakar (2006) that providing teachers of online learning with adequate resources would provide “a learning climate and environment rich in authentic interaction”.

Example 4.29:

<i>Facilitator 2</i>	I suppose we teach, so we teach like what we do with the fulltime students, so to me it's very stressful because we try to cover everything in four seminars in which we know that whether you get it or not, I'm so sorry you just have to listen to me, you know that kind of thing and then at the end of the day you'll be doing an eight hour lecture of one semester's work, you see. So it's quiet stressful. I suppose the e-PJJ gives me a lot of burden more than the full time, although it's minimal weightage in terms of meeting session and then it's what that makes it worse because you have very limited time but a lot to cover.
<i>Facilitator 3</i>	I don't like, sometimes I'm obliged to log on to the forum and check on their comments, sometimes I'm tied up with my work and totally forget about this forum and there's just too much work.
<i>Facilitator 4</i>	If you ask me, I think the course is good, but then there are too many components...being taught at during one semester. I prefer if they like, placed it into, maybe grammar and speaking, and then the writing and reading later. I don't know but there are too many things that we have to teach within this one semester. I feel that there are too many things that I need to tell my students face to face. But I cannot do it, and it's difficult to relate all these online.

- **Global theme: Resources**

The second Global Theme in Figure 4.13 is “Resources” referring to the learning materials and resources provided. This thematic network comprises two *Organizing Themes*:

1. materials/resources too elementary
2. online activities inadequate

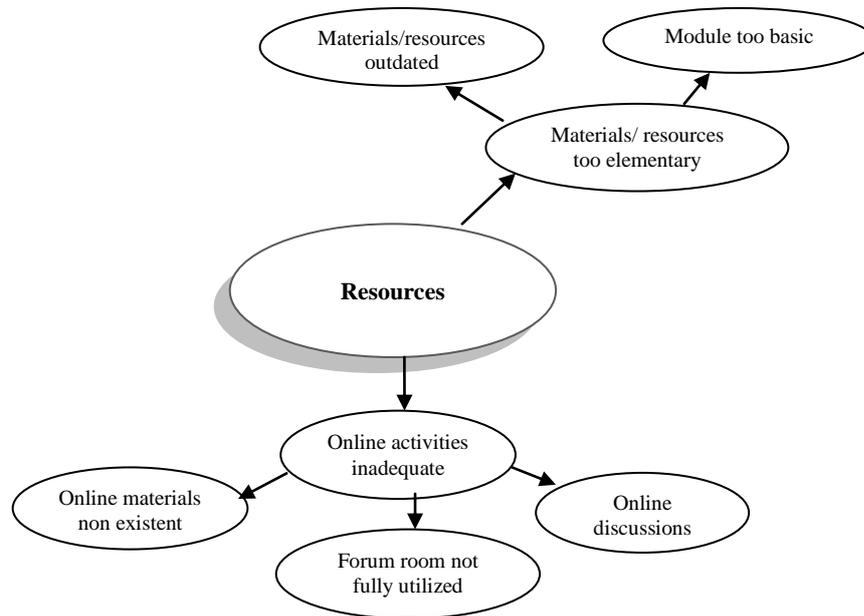
and five *Basic Themes*:

1. materials/resources outdated
2. module too basic
3. online materials non existent
4. forum room not fully utilized
5. online discussions mostly used for social encounters.

It is important that distance learners are supported with good and quality resources to overcome issues that may impede the quality of the distance course. As Garrison and Anderson (2003) suggest, the resources for the course need to focus on the content such as “remedial activities for some and enrichment for others” and to monitor the technology used for delivery of the content of the course. Garrison and Anderson (2003) also stress that a good learning experience in an e-learning course is to have a balanced set of learning activities, nothing too demanding or too basic depending on the type of learners, so that the learners can “work individually and together to stimulate engagement, discourse and higher-order learning within the community”. With the evolution of the technology there are so many resources that can be used to produce quality materials that create interaction in either synchronous or asynchronous mode. The facilitators who are the professionals in this matter should be guiding, devising, testing and sharing the learning activities to avoid ineffective learning (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000).

The thematic network relating to the provision of learning materials is presented in Figure 4.15.

Figure 4.15: Thematic network for “Resources”



- **Organizing theme: Materials/resources too elementary**

Facilitators found the Organizing Theme “Materials and resources too elementary” to be one of the causes of unsuccessful learning. The materials and resources were too elementary. The activities given were outdated. The evidence for these perceptions is shown in Example 4.30. The facilitators believe that inappropriateness of the materials and resources may impede successful learning situations among the learners.

Example 4.30:

Facilitator 6 I must say that the module is not quite satisfying...yes...because I taught BEL 100 to my fulltime students, so I rely on my own materials.. so at that time the module was very long, and then, the fonts of the material was very small, let say, I cannot, I don't really like to use that module. Because I don't really like the book actually, the content. The content... to tell you about the content, because like the simple present tense, simple past tense, they jump from one chapter to another chapter that, but in kind of, I don't really like the way ..the structure of...The structure of the books, and also the sentences, the examples are very simple.

Facilitator 7 Materials also are outdate. Content wise, it's not directed towards adult students on textually. In some parts simplistic mean other parts...ooo...because it's half seminar well not half, four seminar and the rest online, so there should be actually some work provided for the online task, which is not given.

Facilitator 2 It is too simple because we have basic sentences like, this is a blue car. I don't think adult learners want that anymore, alright. I think they should have a separate SIM or the self instruction module that teach

at adult need rather than putting them at the same level as a full time diploma student. I think that they get very frustrated because when they open the SIM, examples of words, sentences will be like, a book, an apple, the country, in which I think that they don't want this vocabulary anymore, they want something either more specific to their work place or something that is of a higher level, something that they did not do when the were in primary and secondary, they want more than that.

- **Organizing theme: Adequacy of online activities**

The *Organizing Theme* “Adequacy of online activities” focuses on the presentation of the online activities implemented in this course. Learners need access to high quality online activities, with strategies and guidance from the facilitators to enable them to become successful independent learners in a system such as distance education (Johnson and Barrett 2003). In this study, the facilitators acknowledge that the attention given to the delivery of the online activities is limited (see Facilitators 1 and 2 in Example 4.31). There are not many resources available for the facilitators to make use of and the minimal utilisation of the forum room to deliver activities meant that the forum tended to be use for social purposes instead. The facilitators tended to replicate exercises from the course module for the online activities as indicated by Facilitators 1 and 4 in Example 4.31.

Example 4.31:

Facilitator 1 Online, I depend a lot on the book itself because I think that what the students also have as a reference. I put the materials online. And then I see how they response. Most of the time they would re-do the exercise and send it back to me. So, I check online like that, like I will just comment. I will not say or I will just..ya, it is quite difficult to give the answers online but I will just say, 'ok, so enter your number one, number two, number three is wrong. Please retry,' like that. I don't know if the exercises are effective.

Facilitator 2 Emm.. to see that technology can work, learning language especially English you know.. because they also, but for pjj they don't have the pronunciation practices yet. So.. it could be useful, like I see the third languages they have softwares on how to pronounce word, vocabulary, you know that. So, you like..would want to include the use of software in your teaching, it would be effective for the learners. But we don't get it in this course, we'd have to come up with our own and I don't have time for that.

Facilitator 4 I use more of the offline materials because the students are provided with the books, the module. Every time I log on to the forum and ask them to read the book, ask them to do the exercises in the book and discuss the answers in the forum.

Facilitator 7 I felt that there wasn't enough learning happening for them, because we only met them four times. So the rest of the time if we don't ask them to do anything they are just hanging. Some, usually the same people would come in, that is the common feature but even if you get some, that is better than nothing. Well I think in the present state, because it is not conducted according to online principles, it is not as demanding as it would be I think, if it is properly conducted, because the task have not really been designed. So everybody does it's own thing, the facilitators.

- **Global theme: Training**

The third *Global Theme* in Figure 4.13 is “Training”. This constitutes one thematic network comprising two *Organizing Themes*:

1. lack of training as facilitators
2. lack of training as distance learners

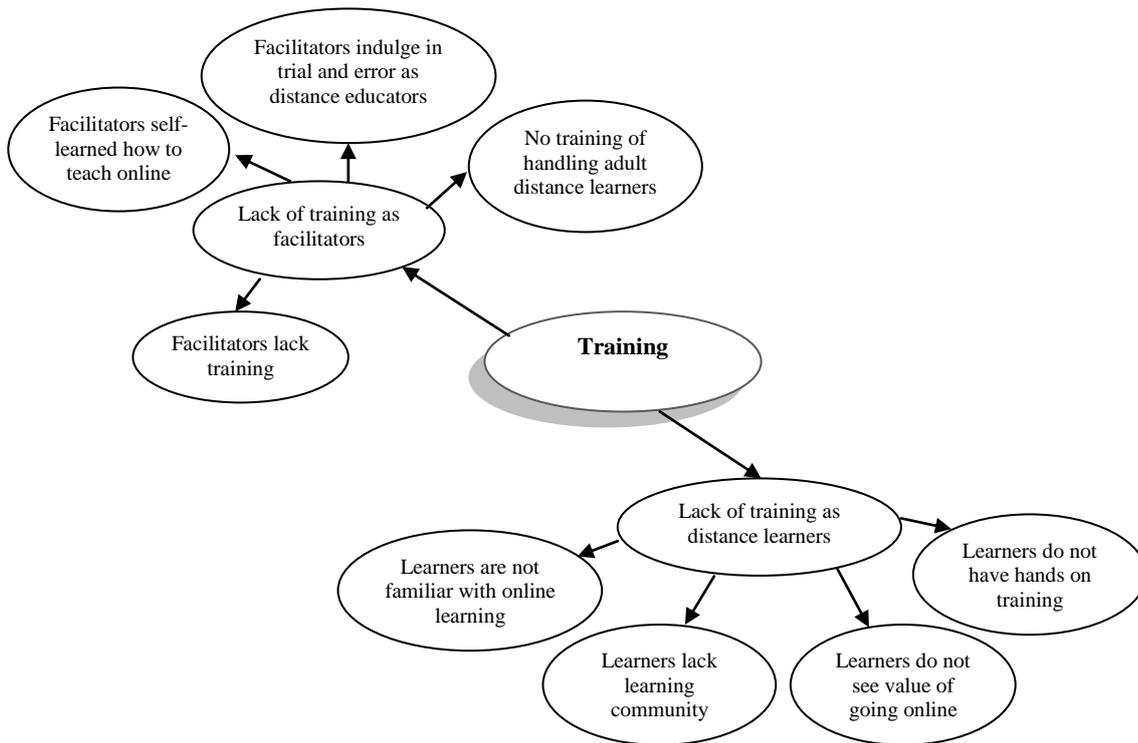
and eight Basic Themes:

1. facilitators lack training
2. facilitators self-learned how to teach online
3. facilitators indulge in trial and error as distance educators
4. no training of handling adult distance learners
5. learners are not familiar with online learning
6. learners lack learning community
7. learners do not see value of going online
8. learners do not have hands on training.

Arbaugh and Duray (2002) in their findings relating to learner satisfaction with web-based courses indicate that more experienced and better-trained online learners are more satisfied with their course delivery. In another study of learner satisfaction with technology-enhanced learning carried out by Bloom and Hough (2003), it was found that trained online faculty who have the expertise of creating and selecting quality online activities have a major influence on student satisfaction. Both findings testify to the importance of having trained facilitators and distance learners in order to overcome problems in distance learning. It may be a challenge to provide technology training for both the facilitators and learners of a distance course. It is important for the distance learners to become comfortable and fairly well-versed with the technology. More time may be needed to train these people but according to Garrison and Anderson (2003) greatest success in learning is achieved where new training is applied immediately.

The perceptions of the facilitators regarding the need for training are the subject of the thematic network in Figure 4.16.

Figure 4.16: Thematic network for “Training”



- **Organizing theme: Lack of training as facilitator**

The Organizing Theme “lack of training as facilitator” relates to the training that the facilitators received before embarking on the teaching of a distance learning course specifically the BEL 100 e-PJJ. The facilitators indicate that they feel inadequately prepared as distance learning educators. The facilitators are not given any formal training and they have to fall back on trial and error strategies as distance educators. The facilitators are used to face-to-face teaching. Most of them are not trained to handle adult and online learners. The facilitators of this course did attend a one day workshop before they started teaching, but the workshop was not sufficient and complaints regarding what was presented during the workshop can be seen in Example 4.32 (extracts from Facilitator 4 and Facilitator 1). Ricketts, Wolfe, Norvelle and Carpenter (2000) stress that the roles of the distance learning facilitator are to support and to guide the learners through their learning. Facilitators who are

well-trained and experienced in employing technology in their teaching environment can influence the nature of teaching and learning. It is important that these facilitators are comfortable and functional in the environment that they are teaching.

Example 4.32:

Facilitator 6 No, nothing. No exercise or training. Yeah, we were given the scheme of work, we were given with the syllabus. We just go about doing it. Indeed, I would prefer there is a training. How to standardize thing. Yeah, like a... if I'm not mistaken, like Seminar four we carry out mid-term exam, not all students can.. .don't really carry out exams at the same time. We should standardize, carry out the exams at the same time because it is a test. It is required.

Facilitator 7 I was told that we will be using almost the same thing as the full timers and the first thing that harp me was, people were doing this program but nobody seem to have gone on a course for the program. I think it's not really pedagogically branded learning, because we are using the same thing and the same approach as the full timers

Facilitator 4 Normally every semester the people who are in charge of the e-PJJ, they will conduct a one day seminar, but to me that is not enough especially for those who are teaching it for the first time. They don't really show us, like we do not get access during the seminar we are only looking at one PC. there's no hands on, but mostly I learn

from my friends when I first started up teaching e-PJJ, I learn through myself.

Facilitator 5 How I wish I have something that can help me to make them...More effective.. Not because, I guess I don't know how to teach. It's just that I don't know how to do it, how to deliver what I have for my distance students.

Facilitator 1 Because the workshop training only involves the surface, you know, how do you go about using that website, but it doesn't tell us how, you know, the kind of materials that we can use, what kind of website that we can visit, that are using for... not really more training, sharing session would be very useful because I think I gain more through my colleagues rather than the workshop.

- **Organizing theme: Lack of training as distance learners**

The *Organizing Theme* “lack of training as distance learners” focuses on the training received by the learners. The facilitators discovered that the learners were mostly not prepared to become distance learners. Some learners did not own a computer, and some learners were not familiar with online learning because they were not given any training. During the interview, Facilitator 1 mentioned that this causes the learners to overlook the value of going online and building an online community. This is also due to the learners prior educational experiences of traditional face-to-face learning and guidance from their teachers. From an educational perspective, a critical community of learners is composed of the learners and the facilitators interacting with the purpose of “facilitating, constructing, and validating understanding, and developing capabilities that will lead to further learning” (Garrison and

Anderson 2003). It is the training that is crucial in making the course a successful one and encouraging the learners to become active and effective group of distance learners.

Example 4.33:

Facilitator 1 They did not have enough preparation, especially the speaking. Adult learners, because they have not been trained to be online learners or blended program learners. They should all come into this forum, this social forum and introduce themselves, so they know all their classmates because in the seminar there is no time. Because I think we have to establish learning communities among these people. So when they start getting to know each other then they can decide, they can form study groups and so on, if they don't know maybe the facilitator can help with this grouping. Students and staff need hands on and also a workshop to train them to be.

Facilitator 2 The first semester students, when they come in they have no idea of how to access and at the end of the day your first seminar is full of actually is planning to them this is how you get into my forum and things like that. And I think it is not the duty of the facilitator, they should already have this exposure before they come in for the first seminar.

- **Global theme: Support**

The fourth Global Theme in Figure 4.13 is “Support” referring to the availability of support. This constitutes one thematic network comprising three *Organizing Themes*:

1. time constraint
2. lack of interest and creativity
3. lack support from others

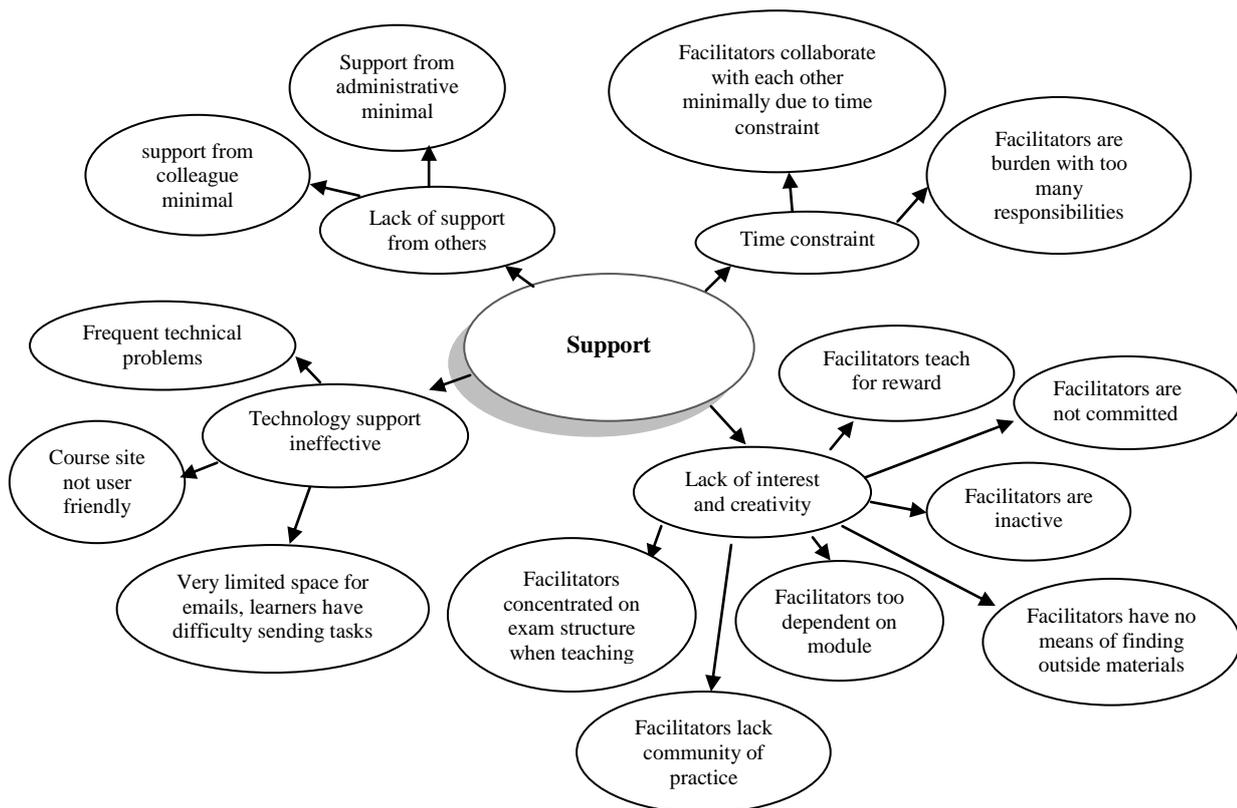
and fourteen *Basic Themes*:

1. facilitators collaborating with each other minimally due to time constraint
2. facilitators are burdened with too many responsibilities
3. facilitators teach for reward
4. facilitators are not committed
5. facilitators are inactive
6. facilitators have no means of finding outside materials
7. facilitators are too dependent on module
8. facilitators lack community of practice
9. facilitators concentrated on exam structure when teaching
10. minimal support from administrative staff
11. support from colleague minimal
12. frequent technical problems
13. course site not user friendly
14. very limited space for emails/learners face difficulties sending tasks online.

Corry and Lelliott (2003) in their study on supporting the masses in open and distance learning mentioned that with the rise of the technology, the availability of learning support such as software tools, feedback on performance, technical, administrative, facilitator supervision and community interaction have resulted in learners making considerable use of

the learning support to achieve successful learning. Figure 4.17 shows the thematic network which emerges from the analysis of the facilitator interviews relating to the availability of support.

Figure 4.17: Thematic network for “Support”



- **Organizing theme: Time constraint**

The *Organizing Theme* “time constraint” pertains to the time given to the facilitators to implement their tasks as distance educators successfully. Some of the facilitators commented that the role of distance facilitator was very burdensome (see Example 4.34; F5, F2 and F3). Besides teaching the full time students, they also have to commit themselves to a full time commitment of going online with the learners of the BEL 100 e-PJJ. The lack of and also the minimal collaboration with other facilitators limits the effectiveness of the facilitators

as distance educators. They feel that they have not been given adequate support by the administrators to become effective facilitators. As Cuellar (2002) stated in her study on transition from classroom to online teaching, the concerns of many faculty regarding the online classes has hindered the progression in teaching online. Questions that linger around the faculty are mostly concerning workload, including time to develop the materials and teaching online (Cuellar 2002). A study carried out by Samuel and Abu Bakar (2006) on the integration of ICT tools in English teaching in Malaysia provided responses from the teachers regarding this issue. The most revealing finding came from teachers complaining about being burdened by administrative work besides their teaching load. The administrative burdens impeded the implementation of ICT in their teaching and learning of the students. According to Samuel and Abu Bakar (2006) this problem needs to be seriously addressed if the benefits of the course are to be fully realized.

Example 4.34:

Facilitator 1 Before it was a burden, but now because they gave me a computer and I can go online in my room. A matter of access it or not. Yes, it requires me a lot of time, but the students who really couldn't care less, I couldn't care less about them too.

Facilitator 2 To me online is more difficult than face-to-face teaching because face-to-face teaching you see them and you get the response from them verbally, so you will response to them there and then. But online they have one question for you, you answer and then you have to wait maybe a day before they response to it again...whether they understand or not..and you have to work harder and you have to create opportunities for students to interact

with you...

Facilitator 5 I don't know, but there are too many things that we have to teach within this one semester. For the full time I think really it's not that difficult because they have six hours per... but for the online I think, I don't know... Teaching in terms of a... making sure that my students understand I think on-line is a burden. Because I don't think they have enough from me. Of course in terms of 'ATA' (Actual Teaching Hours), I think having six hours of fulltime, too many... I don't know. Because I can do it, I guess, within maybe four hours per week, I can finish off all the topics for one semester. But in terms of responsibilities I think... Online I think..is a burden.

Facilitator 3 Firstly, I was trying to see how teaching English, teaching language could be done by aa...internet. But I feel that on my part I did not contribute much because I feel the online more open than what I'm doing now. Then, maybe the course will be effective but emm... to juggle the full time classes as well with the going online, not an easy job.

- **Organizing theme: Lack of interest and creativity**

The *Organizing Theme* “lack of interest and creativity” focuses on the lack of interest and creativity among the facilitators in delivering the course. It is difficult for the facilitators

to exercise creativity in delivering the course because most of them are part-timers and they are paid for the job done. Some of the facilitators interviewed demonstrated a low level of commitment to identifying materials that are appropriate for distance learning; these facilitators tended to rely on the materials to hand (see Example 4.35; F2). Most of the facilitators concentrated on preparation for the exam in their delivery of the course content. If the facilitators are not fully committed to the delivery of the materials in the most effective way for distance learning, one cannot expect the BEL 100 e-PJJ course to be entirely successful.

Example 4.35:

Facilitator 2 I do this because I need the money and I am doing this as part time. In terms of materials, I use more of the offline materials, I refer to the module every time I log on to the forum and ask them to read the book.

Facilitator 6 More on... for the mid semester paper and also final paper because due to the time constrain, so we don't really have time actually, so we stress more on the past year papers.. I based everything on the past years paper. So, like the assignment, for mid term more on paragraph writing and for the final more on essay writing and then, the grammar, the close passage is in class. They answer it in class then I go through the answer in class and also the reading section.

Facilitator 7 Well I tried having a workshop once, but I don't think the staff were very interested in it...Because I think for one thing, the facilitators, they are doing this as a part time

job, so the commitment is different as far as spending time with the learners, there it goes. I guess because they are part timers, so, whatever they do does not count towards their contribution to the department, unlike, you know if you belong to the department. So you are steady, everything will be look at, whereas in e-PJJ you know, they don't look to see how you conduct your part time work. So it doesn't count. So, it's very easy to just forget about it.

- **Organizing theme: Lack of support**

The *Organizing Theme* “lack of support” covers the support required from the administrators and fellow facilitators to make the course a success. Most facilitators are frustrated in their teaching due to the minimal support they receive from the administrators. The interview data show that facilitators believed that the administrators did not see the importance of the facilitators collaborating with each other and having formal sharing sessions of their views and ideas regarding the delivery of the course (see Example 4.36). A few of the facilitators carried out their own sharing session with their colleagues when necessary. The facilitators believe that the administrators of the program do not see the importance of this issue in order to create a more fulfilling and successful learning and teaching environment. As Dewey (1933) suggests, “we may do much of our thinking alone; but it is in the discussion with others that we hear what we really think and see others’ reactions”.

In a keynote speech regarding the role of the teacher in ICT based learning environment, Wheeler (2006) says that teachers need the “working space and resources,

better access to information, the promotion of collaborative learning and radical new ways of teaching and learning”. Having all the skills and responsibilities with the support from important quarters of the programme will enhance and prepare those involved for a successful learning and teaching environment (Wheeler 2006).

Support from the technical side when delivering a distance learning course is very much in demand too. A lot has been said regarding technical support which is essential for successful teaching and learning in distance learning programs (Kenworthy 2003). Frequent technical problems and difficulty in accessing the course site limits the effectiveness of online learning programs (Garrison and Anderson 2003). The facilitators interviewed in this study complained about the technology support that they received in delivering their lessons online. They felt that the effectiveness of the course was compromised due to the unattractiveness of the web design and the lack of user-friendliness of the course website (see Facilitators 7 and 3 in Example 4.36). Attempting to access the course site and sending mails through the email site of the course were further examples of technical problems (see Facilitators 5, 6 and 7 in Example 4.36).

Example 4.36:

Facilitator 7 When we wanted to do the bengkel (workshop) there was support, but after that nothing came of it and because the facilitators are part-timers it was difficult to get their time.

Facilitator 1 No, we don't get support from the administrator but from my peers, yes, because I learn a lot from those who are experienced in this. Those who have done this for the past two, three years.

Facilitator 3 No, we don't have that kind of discussion, because (laugh) really at the administration, we know, doesn't look into this sharing session, doesn't think that it's important for us meaning support from administrators, lack of support I would say.

Facilitator 6 The negative thing is whenever they send me via email, so I will have to print out. Some they have this virus, you know... yaaa! It's affecting virus. So that is the problem. This is via the email. So, that is the one of the problem because we have to print out the student's work. Because it is quite difficult to access via the web, you know... the best thing is to print it out and see their work and comment it.

Facilitator 7 The webpage is a little bit old-fashioned. It has not changed ever since... don't know when. For example, I think we should have the papers on the homepage, you know, all the courses that are offered, for easy access. Sometimes it takes a

long time, sometimes if you get them to send your e-mail, it takes a long time to recover and then I think somebody did mention that the space is too small. In the e-mail. They are not able to send certain number of assignment. It's full so it cannot come in.

Facilitator 5 It's just that maybe, the only thing maybe from what I got from all the students, they say it's quite difficult to get access to the system.

- **Global theme: Habits**

The final *Global Theme* that emerges from the facilitator interviews (Figure 4.13) is “Habits” that may possibly be connected to their culture. The thematic network comprised four *Organizing Themes*:

1. teacher-dependent learners
2. passive learners
3. uninterested learners
4. grade oriented learners

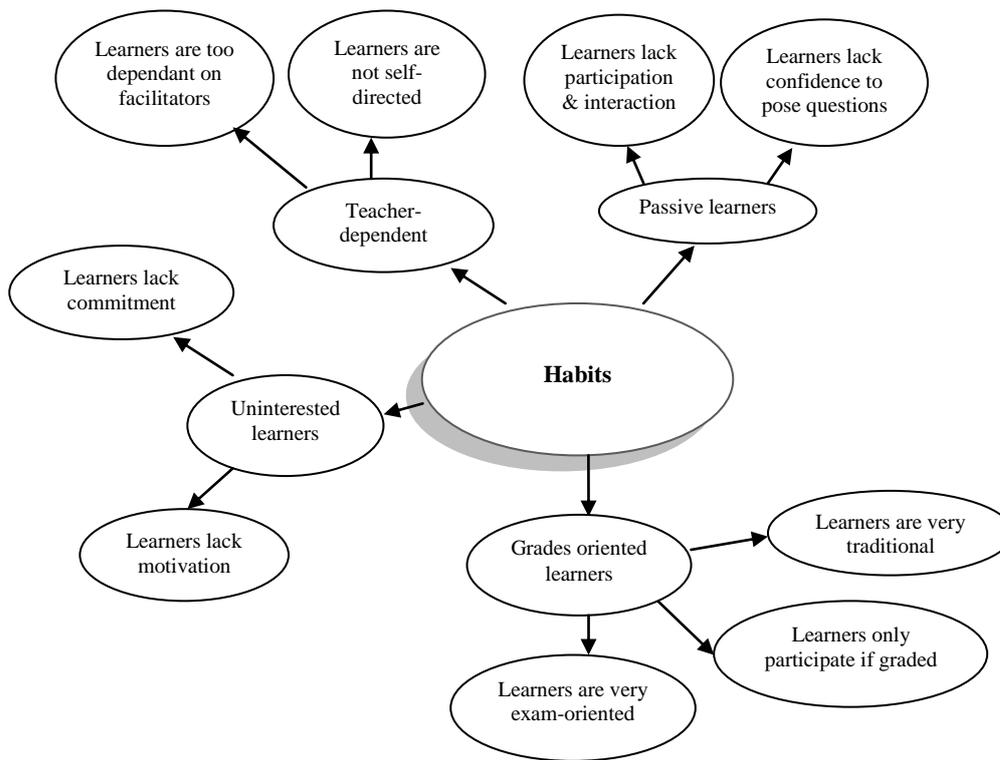
and nine *Basic Themes*:

1. learners are too dependant on facilitators
2. learners are not self-directed
3. learners lack participation & interaction
4. learners lack confidence to pose questions
5. learners lack commitment
6. learners lack motivation
7. learners are very exam-oriented

8. learners only participate if graded
9. learners are very traditional.

With increasing globalisation the need to consider cultural variations in teaching and studying successfully in online learning systems is important. According to Venter (2003) the degree to which learning is “student-centred” or “teacher-centred” is subject to cultural variations. Venter (2003) has proposed a “surrogate-teacher” model, where learners are dependent on the teacher, as being characteristic of many Asian cultures (for example Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia). Malaysian learners who are familiar with being directed by teachers at school have difficulties in distance learning programs where they are expected to be responsible for their own learning. The learners, however, lacked enthusiasm to do things by themselves online. It is their prior experiences from early schooling that lead to demonstrate attitudes of being dependent and to carry the responsibility in the way school teachers expect them to do. This will be discussed and described thoroughly in each *Organizing Theme* that supported the core of the problem which is the cultural habits that deter them from learning successfully. The thematic network (Figure 4.18) presents the key themes on which the cultural habits of the learners were grounded: passive and dependent learners.

Figure 4.18: Thematic network for “Habits”



- **Organizing theme: Teacher dependent**

The *Organizing Theme* “teacher-dependent” refers to the learners who are very much dependent on their facilitators. From the interviews with the facilitators, it appears that many of the BEL 100 E-PJJ learners are not self-directed and expect personal attention from the facilitators. These attributes of the learners are a consequence of prior educational experiences learning preferences and cultural factors. Hofstede (1984) has classified Malaysia as one of the countries that might be expected to display an emphasis on student conformity and teacher-dependent education, in which students expect the teacher to initiate communication and to outline the route that they should follow. The facilitators encountered cases of learners demanding for one-to-one assistance and for reassurance as they progressed which possibly suggests that the learners were very dependent (refer to Example 4.37). The facilitators are the ones who are expected to be more central in terms of providing guidance

and instructions to the learners. Examples 4.37 are extracts of text from the facilitators' interview regarding the issue of teacher-dependence.

Example 4.37:

Facilitator 1 These students can sometime tie you down. They are doing self learning on their own, they should make it a point to not look yet at the answers behind. They are either too dependent on the answers behind the book or to us teachers. But, not so good would be, the course didn't have a teacher to guide them all the time only once a month. Those who wouldn't want to ask questions, in the class would lose out and these students are there.

Facilitator 2 They will just sit in the class and give me a blank face and I cannot afford to entertain on an individual basis because sometimes we do have serious learners and you just need to proceed. These learners who wait for you are so dependent..I can't afford that.

- **Organizing theme: Passive learners**

“Passive learners” is the *Organizing Theme* that describes the learners who are not active and responsive. These are learners who prefer to practise the attitude of waiting in which they wait for other learners to respond to a certain discussion and see if there is any need for them to take part in the discussion (see Example 4.38). These learners are traditional in their outlook and chose to not participate in any situation that requires them to interact. The facilitator felt that these habits are partly because of prior educational experiences in which learners are only to do when they are asked to. The responsibility of being a learner that listens to instruction has been embedded in these learners since childhood.

Contrary to the claims made by the facilitators in the present study, Strickland (2007), in a study of the characteristics of successful adult learners, found that passive learners who are quiet, with introverted personalities, are more likely to feel comfortable with online learning courses. Shy learners have a tendency to be uninvolved in the typical classroom setting. Online courses allow them to complete work on their own with a degree of anonymity. These passive learners absorb information by reading, listening and seeing. While it is true that good students who are comfortable learning in a passive manner can do well, it is clear that passive engaged learners are also more likely to thrive. According to educationalist Petty (2004), active learning is better remembered, enjoyed and understood as such methods require students to develop their own formulations of what they are learning. Additionally, says Petty, active teaching methods help build positive attitudes among the learners by developing their skills of analysis, problem solving, and evaluation, and helping learners to use their learning in realistic and useful ways. These are the attitudes that the facilitators of the BEL 100 hope to have in their learners. Attitudes that are driven by their cultural habits which do not lead the learners to “wait and see” what is going to happen next.

Example 4.38:

<i>Facilitator 7</i>	They just wait. So it's very traditional, because when you see how they are in a the seminar or online, you can tell that people have not been trained. Because it's not enough, for example, I think really, every semester or so we will get, the head will say you know, this is what he expects and people will sit politely and listen.
<i>Facilitator 2</i>	We're supposed to sit down and wait for them to throw us questions but it doesn't happen. I will

ask them many times, do you have any problems in SIM? They will just look at you, do you have any critical questions that you want to ask me and they will just look at you and then when you lecture they are just happy aa...that kind of thing.

Facilitator 4 They are quite shy, either they don't have the confidence, they don't have their confidence in their English to write the questions.

- **Organizing theme: Uninterested learners**

The *Organizing Theme* “uninterested learners” refers to learners who are not committed to seeking knowledge from the course. These learners lack motivation and they are reluctant to participate in the course activities and tasks given to them by their facilitators. Evidence for the existence of such learners can be seen in Example 4.39. It is likely that these learners are only taking the course because it is a requirement for them to pursue the next level of the programme.

Example 4.39:

Facilitator 6 Negative... those did not access the web and don't know what is going on. And so, when they did not hand in their assignment, so they come in with several excuses.

Facilitator 7 There are other issues like e-learners have to have access and I think maybe 60 percent they don't have access, computers, and yet they are e-learners, they are in the program. They are just

not interested.

Facilitator 2 And to make it even worst, they don't even have computers, no internet access at home or at work. So, when I emm...progressively ask them, "so how do you communicate online?" they say they will try to spend at least one or two hours at cyber cafes. But, at the end of the day.. very poor respond, especially in the forums and also the chat.

Facilitator 1 The bad point is that most of them are not really committed when they enrolled in this course they don't log on the forum, so if they are not logged on they will not, you know they won't know what's going on some they log on but they don't, drop free lines or they don't do the exercises given.

- **Organizing theme: Grades oriented learners**

The "grades-oriented learners" is the *Organizing Theme* that describes the learners who are only interested in the grades that they would receive at the end of the course. Similar to Johnson's (2003) definition of "grade-conscious learner", this type of learner is performance-oriented and is driven by external sign of success such as grades in class. Although the learner is interested in gaining knowledge, the learner places a great value on the grade that he achieves. The facilitators in this study observed that the tendency to be concerned only with "just passing the course" is frequent among the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners. These learners participated in activities (online or face-to-face) if their participation contributed to their overall grade. The learners, according to the facilitators, are very traditional due to their prior educational experiences. To the learners, grades determine their

success; they are not concerned with the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake. Example 4.40 provides the relevant evidence.

Example 4.40:

Facilitator 2 Probably because there's no marks allocated when the students go online, the students don't get marks for it, and that is why they don't see the value why they have to actually go online and on top of that they already have the self-instruction module and they think it's adequate for them. Very typical of these students. And at the end of the day, actually the learners, they just want to pass the paper.

Facilitator 4 I feel that...with the students I had so far for the past four semesters, every time when I said ok I will grade this, I just say it out, then I will get more response and they will also ask me how to go about doing assignments and all that. But if I don't say that there'll be a grade given to it, I mean they will not be graded, then no response.

Facilitator 1 So, they always have a purpose... I guess if you really tell them that this one has mark, this is not, so they will definitely do those with mark. They need the grade to... In order to pass... to go on to the next level.

4.3.3 Interpreting patterns of the learners' and facilitators' interview texts

It is the aim now to look at the summaries of each thematic network and focus on the key conceptual findings and establish a connection with the original research questions. As stated earlier, the purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes and behaviours of the learners and whether those attitudes and behaviours are influenced by their prior educational experiences and whether cultural factors may also have an influence on the attitudes and

behaviours of these learners. The thematic networks generated from the analysis of the learner and facilitator interviews can be summarised as follows:

2. Motivation
3. Attitudes
4. Attributes
5. Effectiveness
6. Activities
7. Support (facilitators, peers, training, administrators, technology)
8. Situations (learning)
9. Resources
10. Habits

4.4 Summary of chapter

The principal themes (Organizing Themes and Global Themes) and patterns that emerged in the analysis of the learner and facilitator interviews can be summarized by means of the following observations. Motivationally orientated learners can develop effective learning attitudes and behaviours. In the interviews with the facilitators, in general the facilitators expressed their frustration on learners not being self-directed and expecting personal attention from the facilitators during their online sessions. In addition, facilitators also mentioned that some learners are inactive asynchronously as in Examples 4.37 to 4.40. Hofstede (1984) and Venter (2003) have classified Malaysia as one of the countries that is expected to display an emphasis on student conformity and teacher-dependent education. From the data it shows that due to the learners' prior educational experiences and cultural factors, the attitude and behaviour of the learners are still prevalent. However, effective attitudes and behaviours of learners can be developed and may lead to effective learner activity. This is if learners are motivated extrinsically or intrinsically by their facilitators, peers and the environment around them. In the data (p.106), it is mentioned that prior

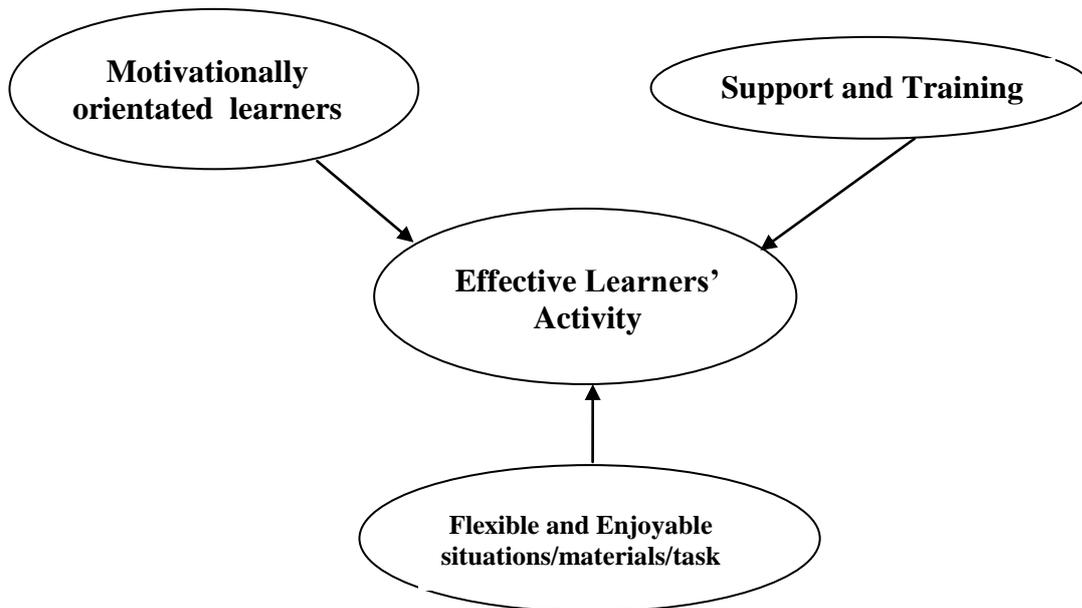
educational experiences may also be the cause of learners being motivationally inspired to improve their language skills. The learners want to polish the skills of the language that they have learned since the average age of 6 (p.9). The facilitators' data also indicated that learners are passive, unable to impart ideas, lack confidence in seeking help from their own peers. Prior educational experiences and cultural factors were mentioned as the cause of these learners being conform to being very dependent, the need to be guided by their teachers and not their peers (p.190-195). Dzakiria and Walker (2003) stressed, how these learners were taught to learn and if they are motivated extrinsically to further their studies (i.e. economic pressures, job prospects, importance of qualifications) are most likely to raise the educational quality of a certain culture. The tasks and activities prepared have to be of interests or familiar to them to accommodate the diversity in classes. As Lanham and Zhou (2003) stated in order to ensure that all learners are motivated to participate online, the educational content and materials provided to learners will have to be understood by them. Facilitators' intervention and encouragement when collaborating online will also motivate effective attitudes and behaviours of learners which may then lead to effective learner activity.

Flexible, adequate and enjoyable learning situations, materials, resources and activities based on learners' prior experiences may contribute to more effective learner attitudes and behaviours. From the results of the learners' and facilitators' interviews, flexibility of the course that allows the learners to master skills at anytime convenient, inclusion of interactive activities, assignments, online communications, good structuring of the course with positive learning conditions and situation may lead to favourable learner attitudes and behaviours. The flexibility of the course has allowed the learners opportunities to pursue their academic aspirations and improve their language skills besides generating interest in learning as shown in Examples 4.7 to 4.8. According to Lanham and Zhou (2003), it is the flexibility in distance learning that allows the distance learners to continue working

and develop effective skills. The distance learners who come from many different backgrounds are able to carry on their every day tasks besides acquiring helpful learning skills from resources presented to them online, through the course site or any other related resources available in the world outside the course suggested by their facilitators. In addition, the interviewees also mentioned that the activities and tasks that contributed to their learning and provided by their facilitator, such as peer discussions, past year papers, related web-links associated to the course (refer to Example 4.9 to 4.10) either online or offline were perceived as worthwhile and helpful in improving their learning abilities in this course. The learners also believe that the activities and tasks would help them improve their language skills and usage of the language in every day life. As Koochang and Durante stressed in their study (2003), interactive activities and assignments will promote learning and the design of the activities must meet the learners' needs (Lanham and Zhou 2003). The online participation of the learners which include active learning, collaboration and cooperation will help improve the learners' communication skills in terms of generating ideas, suggestions, giving comments or complements. The facilitators also stressed as in Examples 4.27 to 4.29 that having a good course structure will influence the learners' interest in learning. The BEL 100 e-PJJ course is a replicate of the full time course. There were cases of facilitators complaining about the very demanding syllabus as in Example 4.29. Facilitators have very limited time to plan and implement the lessons required by the course as their teaching and administrative responsibilities are of great demand too. It is therefore important that administrators should look into this matter which may not be applicable to both the facilitators and distance learners. Mason (2000), Lanham and Zhou (2003), and Dzakiria and Walker (2003) said that the learners' curiosities can be turned into inquiries that work and last if the structure of the distance course is flexible and meet the learners' needs.

Support and training (among the administrators, distance educators, distance learners and the technology provider) need to be addressed to develop attitudes and behaviours of learners that will lead to an effective learning and teaching of the course. From the results of the learners' and facilitators' interviews, support and assistance received from facilitators, peers, administrators, and technology provider are of importance. Training for both learners and facilitators in the correct use of online facilities provided with good time management may lead to favourable learners' attitudes and behaviours. Both the learners and facilitators interviewed agreed that support of any kind from facilitators, peers, administrative and management involved in the distance learning is very much needed to create a positive learning community. Evidence can be seen in Examples 4.11 to 4.12, 4.34 and 4.36. Without this support learners' attitudes and behaviours will be full of negativities as seen in Examples 4.14 and 4.16 to 4.19. As Moore and Kearsley (1996) stressed that the instructors are not only the facilitators of learning but also a motivator for the learners. In addition to the facilitators, the learners' peers also can encourage effective learner activity. The active interaction and helping each other in learning among the learners creates meaningful, active learning experiences (Dzakiria and Walker 2003). In terms of training, Arbaugh and Duray (2002), Bloom and Hough (2003) and Garrison and Anderson (2003) studies emphasized that with trained online learners and facilitators will lead to successful learning environment and learners' satisfaction. When the learners are satisfied with their learning environment with good support and training, their attitudes and behaviours will possibly be effective immediately.

Figure 4.19: Thematic network for Effective Learners' Activity



In this chapter the data obtained from the 8 learners and 7 facilitators presents partly the view of the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners. What have been presented in this research through a qualitative approach are constructions of reality of the learners' attitudes and behaviours as distance learners when pursuing the BEL 100 e-PJJ course. They are from the learners' interview data, from the actions of the learners themselves portrayed in the responses of the interview data and from the perspective of the facilitators. The attitudes and behaviours discussed here are not the features that concern the identity of the learners. These are the attitudes and behaviours that the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners possessed when pursuing the course.

Learners' prior educational experiences and cultural factors that may have influenced their attitudes and behaviours need to be considered too. Learners who have been learning the language since the average age of 6 in a traditional face-to-face setting need to be motivationally supported. The learners need time to progress towards a more flexible and autonomous mode of learning in order to become effective distance learners. The great change of being distance learners as indicated in the data can be effectively developed if

learners are positively motivated in flexible and enjoyable situations. The learners indicated in the data as dependent on their facilitators because they need reassurance. They also seek for advice from their facilitators on how to structure their learning. In addition, materials and tasks provided need to meet the learners need and also of a standard high enough for the learners level as diploma students. There is also a need to emphasize on the support and training for both learners and facilitators when carrying out the course in order to develop effective learners' activity as seen in Figure 4.19. According to Valenta, Therriault, Dieter and Mrtek (2001), acknowledging the learners' attitudes and behaviours in learning can help the facilitators and administrators of the course in reaching their learners and increasing the effectiveness of learner's activity itself. Motschnig-Pitrik and Mallich (2004) and Dzakiria and Walker (2003) show that learners' reactions and most significant motives for participating in a distance course are strongly related to their competency, experience in a positive learning condition, interactions with teachers and peers and interest in the subject matter. The themes arise from this study should be helpful in increasing the awareness of the educators and administrators of the course. This is agreed in Venter's (2003) study that educators need to be aware of variations in learners' experiences and support these learners to gain the confidence necessary to become a self-directed distance learner. In addition by understanding the learners' attitudes and behaviours better a community of effective distance learners and an effective distance learning course can be established.

Chapter 5: Analysis of Discussion Forum Data

5.1 Introduction

“Computer-mediated conferencing is proving to be a gold mine of information concerning the psycho-social dynamics at work among students, the learning strategies adopted, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills.” (Henri 1992:118)

As mentioned by Henri (1992) the computer-conferencing messages are rich with information that is unavailable in other learning situations. This chapter will investigate the messages posted to the asynchronous discussion forum by the learners and facilitators of BEL 100 e-PJJ. The chapter will commence with a preview of the purpose and aims of the analysis and a description of the forum’s user interface. This is followed by an explanation of the method of content analysis which is used. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to step-by-step account of the analysis of the data.

5.1.1 Asynchronous discussion forum

The asynchronous discussion forum is a part of the virtual learning environment provided to the distance learners at the UiTM. The forum is predominantly used by the learners to communicate with their peers or their facilitators and to submit assignments, to make announcements, to take part in group discussions and to retrieve simple grammatical and writing exercise material deposited by the facilitator. Each group is managed by one facilitator who is also the group’s face-to-face seminar lecturer. In order to enter the forum for their group and to participate in the activities of the forum, the learner needs a unique ID which is assigned to them at the beginning of every semester. Messages in the forum are displayed as “threads” which are organized according to “Topic” and this allows the account

of the online conversation to be easily followed according to entry dates. Figure 5.1 is a copy of posted threads in the forum topic page room.

Figure 5.1: Forum Thread Page

Forum		
Forum Name: BEL 100 – (lf10b1_bel100)		
<u>Topic</u>	<u>Messages</u>	<u>Date Last Posted</u>
2nd seminar	1	13-Sep-2005
Assignment 1 (Exercise E)	33	08-Sep-2005
Assignment 1 (Exercise E)	3	08-Sep-2005
attendance 4 seminar	1	11-Sep-2005
Azimawati Bt Ismail	2	08-Sep-2005
Mid-sem exam	1	20-Sep-2005
New assignment	12	30-Sep-2005
S-V-O	2	08-Sep-2005

Source: Analysis of online transcripts data

The threads are listed under “Topic” (the first column in Figure 5.1). In order to start a new thread the user clicks the “Add New Topic” button. The column “Messages” shows the total number of messages in each thread. The final column in Figure 5.1 is the “Date last posted”. In this column, the date of the latest message posted in each thread is given. In the example given, it will be observed that the dates are not in sequence of messages last posted. The threads are listed in chronological order of the first message in the thread, but the “Date last posted” refers to the last message posted under each thread, and of course threads may

overlap in time, so this is why the dates in the “Date last posted” column are not in chronological order.

The “Forum Topic Page” is the first step for the learner to participate in a discussion. In order to enter a thread, the user clicks on the thread titles and this takes the user to the thread page (see Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2: Discussion forum user interface

Forum

Forum Name: BEL 100 –(lf10b1_bel100)

Topic Name: 2nd seminar

Subject	From	Date Posted
sorry	K T	13-Sep-2005

Subject: sorry [Top](#)

From: K T

Date: 13-Sep-2005 01:46 PM

akum puan ,

on 2nd seminar i can't come because have personnel matter (auntie passed away). so can i send the assignment on 3rd seminar.

Forum - Reply to Topic

Forum Name: **BEL 100 – (lf10b1_bel100)**

Topic Name: 2nd seminar

Subject:

From:

Message:

Source: Analysis of online transcripts data

The thread shown in Figure 5.2 has only one message. A user can reply to this message by typing in the message box under the *Forum-Reply to Topic* column, and then clicking the “Submit Message” button. The reply will then be included in the thread. For an example of a forum posted message see Example 5.1.

Example 5.1: An example of a Posted Message

```

Forum Name : BEL 100 (1f2b1_bel100)
Topic Name : ADJECTIVES & ADVERBS
-----
Subject    : Readings & Exercises
From      : (1f2b1_bel100)
Date      : 11-Aug-2005 11:53 AM sent)

Dear all,
Please read pg 73 (Adjectives) of your book and do exercises on page 74-75.
Read also pg 96-98 (Adverbs) and do exercise A (pg 98-99).
We will discuss the answers this Sunday.

```

The messages which provide the data for this study were compiled from the archive of the online forums for the eight different groups of BEL 100 E-PJJ learners for the July-October 2005 semester cohort. The groups are referred to in this chapter as Groups 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8. Each group had different facilitators. The complete transcripts from all the eight groups were compiled and entered into a text database for the purpose of the analysis.

5.1.2 Analysing the asynchronous discussion forum

Despite the richness of the data that is available in asynchronous discussion forums, not many researchers have attempted an in-depth analysis of this kind of data (Gunawardena, Lowe and Anderson 1998). The reluctance to carry out this kind of analysis is mainly due to the labour-intensive nature of such an undertaking. As an example, Hiltz ([1990:161], cited in Henri 1992:122) reports that the coding of the content of an online transcript proved to be extremely time-consuming and, in the event, not very relevant to Hiltz's purpose, which was to show that technology-mediated education is as efficient as face-to-face education. Another reason for the relative scarcity of content analyses of online discussion data is that there are not many accepted conceptual frameworks available for the analysis. This study aims to examine the attitudes and behaviours of the learners and whether those attitudes and behaviours are influenced by their prior educational experiences and whether cultural factors may also have an influence on the attitudes and behaviours of these learners. Given these aims, the framework of analysis used is adapted from Henri's (1992) model, with additional elements taken from Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) model. Some use is also made of Hofstede's (1984) taxonomy of cultures. The aims of the analysis are: to analyse the social dimension of the forum exchanges, the psychological and cognitive dimensions (Henri 1992), three interdependent elements from the Community of Inquiry theoretical framework - social, cognitive and teaching presence (Garrison, Anderson and Archer's 2000) and the elements that are associated with the shared knowledge and values of a society (Hofstede 1994).

The four dimensions used for the analysis of online discussion data in Henri's (1992) model are presented in Table 5.1. The definitions and indicators given in the table are from Henri (1992:125).

Table 5.1: The Analytical framework (adapted from Henri 1992:125)

Dimension	Definition	Indicators
Participative	Compilation of the number of messages or statements transmitted by one person or group	Number of messages and statements posted by learners and facilitators
Social	Statement or part of statement not related to formal content of subject matter	Self-introduction Verbal support
Interactive	Chain of connected messages	Direct/indirect response or commentary to previous posted messages
Cognitive	Statement exhibiting knowledge and skills related to the learning process	Asking questions Making inferences Formulating hypotheses

Source: Henri 1992:125

Henri's approach is not adopted in its entirety in this study since Henri's analysis of CMC interactions focuses primarily on links between messages (Gunawardena, Lowe and Anderson 1998) and does not reflect the form or pattern of the entire online discussion. As Howell-Richardson and Mellor (1996) suggest, although Henri's model is interesting and insightful, it lacks reliability as a coding instrument. The coding criteria are imprecise, and the unit of analysis not well defined. This study makes use of only two of the dimensions from Henri's model, the Participative and Interaction dimensions. The Participation dimension is used because it provides a simple means of calculating the level of participation among the participants in the form of usage statistics. The Interaction dimension is used because it provides information about the nature of the interaction among the participants and the patterns of interaction. The Social, Cognitive and Metacognitive dimensions of Henri's

model are replaced by the dimensions Social and Cognitive Presence in Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) "Community of Inquiry" model.

The Social and Cognitive Presence categories of Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000) model are used because Henri's identification of the social dimension is limited to the "statement or part of statement not related to formal content of subject matter" such as self-introduction or verbal support (Henri 1992:126). Henri (1992) states that the frequency of socially-oriented statements in her transcripts can provide various interpretations if used in combination with other data.

Henri's analysis does not reflect several features of the social dimension which are represented in Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) model and which are prominent in the data from the current study. Some of these features are listed below, with examples from the researcher's data:

Example 5.2: *humour*

Learner: "Pls don't look at me while I'm reading my text...ehee... thanks!"

Example 5.3: *self-disclosure*

Learner: "I feel a bit sad and down because of my speaking test last weekend. I didn't give all my best during my oral."

Example 5.4: *statements that respectfully attend to the comments and contributions of others*

Facilitator: "Thank you for the question, Wiwi. You only need to write one sentence per question. Please use English for our forum. It'll help you improve your English."

Example 5.5: appreciation

Facilitator: "Thank you for being so concerned about my health. I appreciate it."

Example 5.6: agreement

Learner: "I agree with Ms. I think for a start, any communication in the BEL100 forum we do it in English even if it has to be broken English.)"

Example 5.7: empathy

Learner: "As all friend said, they no confidence to speak or wrote in English. I have the same problem...."

There are many other examples of these kinds of statements in the data for this study, as well as the usual social statements such as *greetings*, *salutations*, *compliments* and *encouragements*. For an example of the latter, see Example 5.8:

Example 5.8: encouragement

Learner: "Assalamualaikum to everyone, dear everyone, I am glad that we have such a wonderful lecturer who can make our class more interesting & fun. Good Luck to everyone!!"

Henri (1992:131) declared that in her model for the analysis of the cognitive dimension, the results of the analysis "do not comprise an exhaustive description of learners' cognitive activity" since the analysis only identifies the skills linked to critical reasoning and the metacognitive dimension, especially in relation to the learner's use of task evaluation and strategy planning. Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000) model is more appropriate for the analysis of the cognitive dimension evident in the data from the current study. In particular, their model allows the capture of evidence relating to the application of critical thinking to

teaching and learning processes. The examples below provide illustrations of the cognitive dimension represented in the data from the current study:

Example 5.9: *critical thinking*

Facilitator: "The haze these days has caused some serious impacts to the children. What are the serious impacts and what evidences can you find to support your points?"

Example 5.10: *questioning*

Learner: "So you're saying our grammar/writing skills cannot be in a short modern chat like language like 'Im' for 'I'm' or 'u' for you?"

Example 5.11: *challenging of assumptions*

Facilitator: "Why are more women admitted to the higher level institutions. Is it because women are more focused that they outnumber men in the higher learning institutions?"

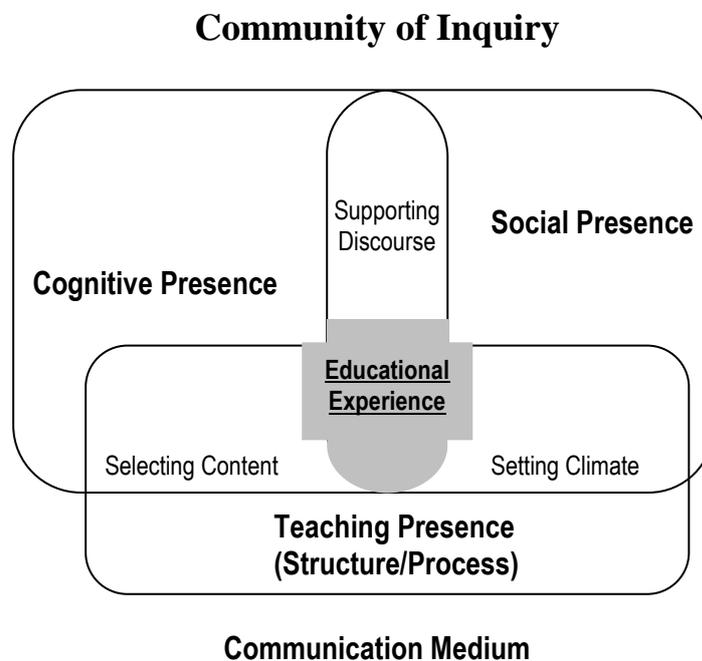
Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000) model focuses on critical thinking as an interactive process taking place within the group. This emphasis on the group context of critical thinking reflects Garrison, Anderson and Archer's interest in the social context of online education, as reflected in the title they give to their "Community of Inquiry" model. This is pertinent since the current study has taken up the goal of examining evidence of critical thinking in the online community as a whole as well as being a process in which the individual can participate.

The final core element in Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) model is Teaching Presence. This element examines the variable that is most directly under the control of the teachers: the responsibility of the teacher to create and sustain a "teaching presence" in the online forum discussion, and the responsibility that may be shared both by the facilitators and other participants in facilitating the educational experience. This dimension is not covered in

Henri's (1992) model. The Teaching Presence dimension is defined as "the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes" for the purpose of recognizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison and Archer 2001). The concept of Teaching Presence has the potential to enhance the value of the educational experience of taking part in online discussion in higher education. As stated by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000), the teaching element is 'a means to an end'; its role in the educational experience is to support and enhance the social and cognitive presence for the purpose of substantiating the educational outcomes.

Figure 5.3 below shows how the elements of educational experience occur within the Community of Inquiry model. The figure shows how the three core elements of Cognitive Presence, Social Presence and Teaching Presence complement each other and interact.

Figure 5.2: Elements of Educational Experience (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000:88)



Source: Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000:88

5.1.3 Community of Inquiry

As stated by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000), the Community of Inquiry model applies to all educational experiences. The word ‘community’ in Figure 5.3 expresses the assumption that there is social interaction among the members of a group which is involved in learning. These participants of the online forum maintain their ‘social presence’ by projecting their personalities and characteristics through their participation in the forum discussion. Learning occurs within the community of learners through the interaction that takes place in the forum discussion. In terms of educational experiences, Figure 5.3 implies that an individual, some individuals or representatives are fulfilling the planning and structuring function that the figure refers to as ‘teaching presence’. It should be noted here that the role of an individual referred to as ‘teacher’ in the Community of Inquiry model is to guide the participants and facilitate the communication and collaboration among the participants either socially or cognitively (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison and Archer 2001).

5.1.3.1 Cognitive Presence

Anderson, Rourke, Garrison and Archer (2001) refer to ‘cognitive presence’ as the extent to which learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained communication. Cognitive Presence, in a higher education setting, should then result in the occurrence of various levels of critical thinking. The phrase ‘Communication Medium’ at the bottom of Figure 5.3 refers to the written language (the messages posted by participants) not supplemented by any non-verbal or paralinguistic communication as in a face-to-face classroom.

In a study of computer conferences used for educational purposes, Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) looked for evidence of the three elements in their model: Cognitive, Social and Teaching Presence. Cognitive Presence means the ability of the

participants to construct meaning critically through sustained communication; this is basic to success in higher education. However essential cognitive presence is in an educational transaction, the participants in this learning environment must also feel comfortable in relating to each other. Cognitive Presence by itself is not sufficient to maintain a critical community of learners. It follows that a high level of social presence with an accompanying high degree of commitment and participation among the participants are essential for the development of high-order thinking skills and collaborative work in online education.

5.1.3.2 Social Presence

The second element in the model (Social Presence) refers to the ability of the participants to communicate their personal characteristics by presenting themselves to others in the online community as real people. According to Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000), the primary importance of this element is its function as a support for cognitive presence, indirectly helping the process of critical thinking that is carried on by the community of learners. The presence of the social element in the collaboration among the participants in an online forum discussion room marks the difference between a group of learners collaborating in search of knowledge and a simple process of transferring information. The difference according to Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) is the quality of the message: “in a true community of inquiry, the tone of the message is questioning but engaging, expressive but responsive, sceptical but respectful, and challenging but supportive.” This is when social presence is enhanced and when combined appropriately with teaching presence, the result can be a high level of cognitive presence leading to profitable critical inquiry.

5.1.3.3 Teaching Presence

The final binding element in creating a community of inquiry for a successful learning experience is Teaching Presence. The course consists of the three components: face-to-face seminars, online discussion forum, and the Self Instructional Manual (SIM). To bind these components together, the establishment of a critical community of inquiry with high levels of educational experiences is dependent upon the presence of a teacher figure. When a programme with a distance learning element fails, it is usually because there has not been a responsible Teaching Presence and appropriate leadership and guidance imparted to the learners (Gunawardena 1991). As argued by Anderson, Rourke, Garrison and Archer (2001) it is only with the presence and active intervention of a teacher that a powerful communications tool such as an online discussion forum can become a useful instructional and learning resource. It is therefore vital to identify and quantify the types of Teaching Presence interventions in this study so that better support tools for a successful online forum discussion can be developed. It is the relationship among the three elements: the Cognitive, Social and Teaching Presences, that enables the realization of the educational outcomes of a distance learning programme.

For this study, two dimensions (Participative and Interaction) from Henri's (1992) framework, and three elements (Cognitive, Social and Teaching Presence) from Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) model were adopted. In addition to these five dimensions, a sixth dimension is included so as to meet the objective of examining the cultural dimension of the learning experience. As is widely known, the online learning environment is potentially a powerful domain in which new practices and new relationships can have an important effect on the experience of learning. The online learning experience is critical to the success of the learners and the role of the facilitator in assisting the learners is central in shaping this experience. The learner's experience in online learning environments is very

different from the experience of a face-to-face classroom setting because in a face-to-face setting learners are able to see each other and work together, guided and facilitated step by step, doing the exercises from the SIM in class if need be, through the learning process. As stated by Feenberg (1989), the physical presence of learners and teachers is assumed to be the guarantor of authenticity and the face-to-face encounter completes a successful communication. Naturally, the requirements for learning to be successful become more critical when it is delivered online whether to a culturally diverse or homogeneous group of learners (Dzakiria and Walker 2003). However, according to Dzakiria and Walker (2003) having insights and understanding of the cultural factors that support the academic transition of the group of learners would be fruitful in achieving a successful and satisfying educational experience of learning at a distance.

5.1.3.4 Cultural Differences

Hofstede (1994) defines ‘culture’ as a collective programming of the human mind which distinguishes the members of one group of people from others. Cultural differences and norms among the people of different societies and backgrounds have existed for a very long time and are stable over the long term. This is true among the Asians who are still heavily influenced by the Confucian tradition of teaching and learning. In this tradition, learners are very dependent on the teacher and it is the teacher’s role to teach according to the content of a book (Aylward 2003). This study makes use of Hofstede’s model of cultural values as a framework for the analysis of the potential influence of culture in the online forum discussion. Hofstede’s original Cultural Differences Model (1984) identifies four dimensions which can be used in the analysis of business relations. The model was subsequently extended to other areas such as to education. The following descriptions of the four dimensions are from Hofstede’s (1984) 4-D Model of Cultural Differences:

1. *Power Distance* as a characteristic of a culture defines the extent to which the less powerful persons in a society accept inequality in power and consider it as normal. Inequality exists within any culture, but the degree to which this is tolerated varies between one culture and another.
2. *Individualism* as a characteristic of a culture is opposed to *Collectivism* (the word is used here in an anthropological, not a political sense). Individualist cultures assume that any person looks primarily after his/her own interest and the interest of his/her immediate family (husband, wife and children). Collectivist cultures assume that any person through birth and possible later events belongs to one or more tight “in-groups,” from which he/she cannot detach him/herself. The “in-group” (whether extended family, clan, or organization) protects the interest of its members, but in turn expects their permanent loyalty. A collectivist society is tightly integrated; an individualist society is loosely integrated.
3. *Masculinity* as a characteristic of a culture is opposed to *Femininity*. The two differ in the social roles associated with the biological fact of the existence of two sexes, and in particular in the social roles attributed to men. The values associated with this dimension vary considerably less across countries for women than for men. The fact that the social roles of women vary less, relates to the fact that women in all societies are the ones who give birth to children and take care of them when they are small. The men’s social role compared to the women’s role allows for more variation across countries. In some cultures men are expected to be assertive, ambitious and competitive, to strive for material success, and to respect whatever is big, strong, and fast. Women are expected to serve and to care for the non-material quality of life, for children and for the weak. *Feminine* cultures, on the other hand, define relatively overlapping social roles for the sexes, in which, in particular, men need not be ambitious or competitive but may go for a different quality of life than material success; men may respect whatever is small, weak, and slow. In both masculine and feminine cultures, the dominant values within political and work organizations are those of men. So, in masculine cultures these political/organizational values stress material success and assertiveness; in feminine cultures they stress other types of quality of life, interpersonal relationships, and concern for the weak.
4. *Uncertainty Avoidance* as a characteristic of a culture defines the extent to which people within a culture are made nervous by situations which they perceive as

unstructured, unclear, or unpredictable. These are situations which they therefore try to avoid by maintaining strict codes of behaviour and a belief in absolute truths. Cultures with strong uncertainty avoidance are active, aggressive, emotional, compulsive, security-seeking, and intolerant; Cultures with weak uncertainty avoidance are contemplative, less aggressive, unemotional, relaxed, accepting personal risks, and relatively tolerant. Table 5.2 is an adaptation of Hofstede's (1984) four dimensions that are related to learning and teaching.

Table 5.2: Hofstede's 4-D Model of Cultural Differences (adapted from Hofstede 1984)

Dimensions	Definition
Power distance	A measure of the inequality between teachers and learners - the extent to which this is accepted.
Individualism/Collectivism	The degree to which one thinks in terms of 'I' versus 'we', either individuals prefer to be independent learners or part of a group.
Masculinity/Femininity	The degree of masculinity and femininity of learners' behaviour emotionally and their social roles differentiation- learners with a high degree of masculinity compete openly and try to make themselves visible while learners with high degree of femininity are characterised by mutual solidarity and low open competition.
Uncertainty Avoidance	The degree to which one is comfortable with ambiguous situations and able to tolerate uncertainty such as situations- including learning situations, which are unclear, unstructured or unpredictable.

Source: Hofstede 1984

In a study conducted by Bauer, Chin and Chang (2000), Hofstede's four dimensions model is used to investigate the implications of cultural differences in online learning environments. The study shows that Asians (specifically learners from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Hong Kong) possessed the cultural characteristics of: high power distance, low individualism, weak uncertainty avoidance and high masculinity. This is compared to the Westerners in the study (learners from Australia) whose attributes were low power distance, high individualism, weak uncertainty avoidance and high masculinity. In terms of teacher-

student interaction in web-based learning, the cultural difference dimension suggested in Bauer, Chin and Chang's (2000 p.7) study supports Hofstede's views that Western learners are more accustomed to student-centred situations than Asians learners, who prefer a teacher-centred approach. In the same study the Asian learners were found to be more open and willing to communicate online in a more relaxed manner compared to the face-to-face situation and they were reluctant to impart any opinions unless asked. Hofstede's model has the potential to reflect the learning attitudes and behaviours of the learners in this study through their participation in the online interactive discussion. Hofstede's (1984) model allows for the analysis of a range of cultural features in the online discussion forum. However, according to Jones and Alony (2007 p.413), "Hofstede's study assumes that national domestic population is a homogenous whole". Hofstede (1998, 2002 cited in Jones and Alony 2007) points out however that national identities are the only means we have of identifying and measuring cultural differences. Jones and Alony (2007) stressed that even though the level of controversy regarding Hofstede's work is still quite high, it remains the most valuable piece of work on culture.

5.1.4 The analytical framework and model

The analytical framework used in this study, incorporating elements from Henri's (1992) model, Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) and Hofstede's Cultural models, is shown in Tables 5.3 and 5.4.

Table 5.3: Analytical Framework of study (adapted from Henri 1992 and Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000)

Dimension	Definition	Indicators (examples only)
Participative	The number of messages transmitted by the learners and facilitators and number of type of posts (social dominant or course related).	Number of messages transmitted by learners and facilitators. Numbers of messages transmitted by learners and facilitators according to the type of posts: Social dominant: e.g. “ <i>Assalamualaikum...nice hearing from you.</i> ” Course related: e.g. “ <i>What is the assignment for next week? Please help.</i> ”
Interactive	The chain of connected messages; explicitly (direct response or commentary), implicitly (indirect response or commentary) or independent (new ideas not connected to other messages previously expressed).	“..in response to..” “...I share your opinion...” “...I think the answer is...” “...I think we should refer to...” “After looking at this problem, I think that..”
Cognitive Presence	The ability of constructing meaning, demonstrating knowledge and skills through a sustained communication relating to the learning process.	Sense of puzzlement/Seeking enquiries (e.g: <i>When do you use ‘a’ and ‘an’? Where can I find past year questions?</i>) Information exchange (e.g: <i>You speak English and read newspaper to improve English.</i>) Connecting ideas (e.g: <i>The topic to discuss is about birthday. My birthday is meaningful with my family.</i>) Applying new ideas (e.g: <i>but with a opinion must come with implementation not just an idea...becoz moment like that happen everyday..</i>)
Social Presence	The ability of participants to project their personal characteristics into the community and presenting themselves as real people. The statements made do not relate to formal content of subject matter.	Sharing emotions (e.g: <i>I have no confident in language. I’m just like “rojak English” like you. My head is gonna blow.</i>) Providing expressions (e.g: <i>Good morning, My sympathies on the bad news.</i>) Encouraging collaboration (e.g: <i>We can do it. Try your best.</i>)

Teaching Presence	Responsibilities of individual/facilitator in guiding and instructing participants besides managing the learning process.	Managing discussion topics (e.g; <i>This week's topic of discussion is ...Give 3 reasons and examples to support your suggestions</i>). Sharing personal meaning (e.g: <i>I'll help you to improve your English. Please use English in the forum</i>). Focusing the discussions (e.g: <i>This discussion is getting emotionally charged,... how does culture put the women in the back seat?</i>).
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Source: Henri 1992, Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000

Table 5.4: Analytical Framework of Study for Cultural Presence (Adapted from Hofstede's Cultural Dimension 1984)

Categories	Definition	Indicators
Power Distance	Behaviours which are represented as being influenced by the degree of acceptance of power inequalities.	Teacher-controlled Politeness/respectful
Individualism/Collectivism	Behaviours which are represented as being influenced by the preference of working in as a group or as an individual.	Group work.
Masculinity/Femininity	Behaviours which are represented as being influenced by mutual solidarity and low open competition.	Masculine : Competitive and making self more visible Feminine : more caring and working together (interdependent)
Uncertainty Avoidance	Behaviours which are represented as being influenced by maintaining strict codes of behaviour and beliefs.	Strong uncertainty avoidance Behave emotionally Structured learning situations Weak uncertainty avoidance Relaxed learning situations

Source: Hofstede 1984

5.1.4.1 Participative indicators

This study has employed two dimensions, Participative and Interactive, from Henri's model because the Participative dimension provides for a comparison of the rates of participation of the eight groups. The analysis provides a breakdown of the participation of the learners and facilitators in terms of the number of posted messages. The analysis also allows a comparison of messages according to their content. Two categories of content are used: (i) *social participation*, in which the content of the message is socially oriented (does not relate to teaching and learning processes) or (ii) *content based* (directly related to course), in which the posted message is focused mostly on the content of the course or which relates to the learning or teaching process.

5.1.4.2 Interactive indicators

The interactive dimension of Henri's model focuses on the links between messages. The analysis investigates the interaction patterns among the participants. The analysis of the interaction patterns indicates whether the learners' participation is dependent primarily on the facilitator's intervention or whether it occurs without the intervention of the facilitator. Three categories of interaction are provided in the coding scheme:

1. *Direct response or commentary*

The message posted by the participants refers explicitly to a foregoing message from the facilitators or learners.

2. *Indirect response or commentary*

The message posted refers implicitly to a foregoing message.

3. *Non-interactive*

Non-interactive statements are messages that do not link to any preceding message but are linked only to the subject under discussion.

5.1.4.3 Cognitive Presence indicators

The first indicator for the element in the Cognitive Presence is *sense of puzzlement/seeking enquiries*. Typically, messages in the “*triggering event*” category are questions posted by participants seeking feedback from either the facilitator or other participants. This type of post is considered as ‘evocative’ - bringing up a response/ reaction and ‘inductive’ - producing reasoning, by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000), since it has the potential to trigger an episode of critical thinking.

The next indicator for the cognitive element is *information exchange*. This is an “*exploration event*” phase category in which the participants being ‘inquisitive’ and begin to exchange between the private, reflective world of the person and then move to a deeper exploration of applicable information. In relation to this category the analysis will identify the processes used by the participants in a community of inquiry by moving back and forth in search of relevant information, ideas, facts, and reasons to help them make sense of a problem or issue being discussed.

Another indicator for the cognitive element is *connecting ideas*. In this category, the participants are in the phase of “*integration event*” where the participants construct meaning from the ideas brought forth in the exploratory phase. During this phase the participants are in the process of constructing ‘tentative’ solutions, trying to connect relevant ideas that are capable of providing insight into the issue being discussed.

The final indicator in the cognitive element is *applying new ideas*. This is the “*resolution event*” phase category where participants at this phase may be required to move on to a new issue or problem with the assumption that the participants have acquired useful knowledge. The participants are expected to be able to critically assess the concepts; testing and defending any solutions to the issue or problem discuss and apply new knowledge.

5.1.4.4 Social Presence indicators

The indicators for the elements of Social Presence are *showing emotions*, *providing expressions*, and *encouraging collaboration*. The indicator *showing emotion* refers to the ability that the participants have to express their feelings related to their educational experience and the confidence with which they do so. Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) refer to this type of online behaviour as the “*emotional expression*” category. This analysis will identify messages which have evidence of humour or self-disclosure. Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) indicate that the use of self-disclosure in message postings has the function of reducing the feelings of isolation which the participants may have and allows them to form personal perceptions of each other. Basically according to Garrison and Anderson (2003:52) “the more we know about other members of the community, the more trustful and responsive we become”. It is worth noting that self-disclosure, in the culture of the participants of this study (*bumiputera*) has both positive and negative connotations. Self disclosure is when the participants present details of their life outside the class or also express their weaknesses associated to the course itself (Garrison and Anderson 2003). The sharing of information among them from day to day creates a positive environment especially to those who are actively taking part in the interaction. For participants who do not interact often and who are not willing to disclose themselves when communicating online, there will be feelings of withdrawal that may create a negative environment. The traditional practice of the *bumiputera* in interacting and discussing with others on personal matters requires a very strong trust and longer time (Ibrahim 2002). Lack of trust among the participants can cause them to have pessimistic attitudes towards the course.

The next indicator, *providing expressions*, is in the “*open communication*” category. “*Open communication*” is about relevant and positive responses to the questions and contributions of others. Garrison and Anderson (2003:52) said that “the inherently reflective

and insightful communication in an e-learning experience is built completely upon open communication”. Open communication refers to expressions that indicate interpersonal support, give encouragement and build group cohesiveness by explicitly referring to the content of other posted messages.

The final category, “*group cohesion*”, consists of Social Presence indicators such as *encouraging collaboration*. “*Group cohesion*” is a necessity in sustaining the dedication and purpose of a community of inquiry, especially in a blended learning group which is separated by time and space (Garrison and Anderson 2003). “*Group cohesion*” builds participation and maintains a sense of group commitment among the participants. Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) state that this category is closely associated with, and provided support for the cognitive aspects of an educational experience. We assume that critical inquiry and high quality interaction among the participants are made easier and are fully maximized when the participants see themselves as part of a group rather than as individuals. These indicators help participants to share their personal meanings and the rest of the Social Presence indicators help build understanding among the participants (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000).

5.1.4.5 Teaching Presence indicators

The indicators for Teaching Presence are *managing discussion topics*, *sharing personal meaning*, and *focusing the discussions*. In Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s study (2000), these indicators are categorized in three categories of teaching presence and they are “*instructional management*”, “*building understanding*” and “*direct instruction*”.

The first category, “*instructional management*”, refers to messages where the facilitator is concerned with structural aspects of the course content. This relates to the responsibility that the facilitators have for managing and planning online activities/tasks for the learners, establishing deadlines, and utilizing the discussion forum in an efficient manner.

The second category, “*building understanding*”, applies to messages where the facilitators share personal meaning by giving encouragement, support, identifying areas of agreement and disagreement and trying to reach a consensus and understanding among the participants.

The final category, “*direct instruction*”, applies to messages where the facilitator gives constructive explanatory feedback, proactively guiding and summarizing the discussions that take place during the online forum discussion room as well as confirming understanding through various means of assessment and feedback (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000). The facilitator’s responsibilities as an intellectual and scholarly leader still exist in the online environment even in the absence of paralinguistic communication and non verbal communication. The role of the facilitator in an online environment involves direct instruction that applies to the subject of the course and his or her pedagogical expertise. There are arguments that say the role of the facilitator instead of being “the sage on the stage” in an online environment, functions as “a guide on the side”, facilitating learning in less directive ways; but we argue that it is part of the role of the facilitator to give the learners direction and focus.

5.1.4.6 Cultural Presence indicators

The final dimension in the framework of this study is the cultural dimension. According to Dzakiria and Walker (2003) culture plays a vital role in developing the learners’ perspectives on teaching and learning at a distance: it is also true that the lack of research on the influence of cultural factors on online distance education is very limited. It is therefore evident that there is a great need to understand the experiences and perceptions of the participants, who share the same culture and who have shared experience of a culture and an exam-oriented educational system. Aylward (2003) stated that Asian learners are notoriously

assumed to be very dependent on those who are superior to them in the educational hierarchy, and to be passive learners, reliant on memorization and rote-learning, lacking the capacity for deep learning and self-direction. These attitudes may also be a response to the structure of the educational system. In this connection, Hofstede (1994) argues that cultural differences have implications for teacher-student interaction in the classroom, for culture is experienced through schooling. He characterises Malaysians as having the cultural characteristics of ‘large power distance’, ‘low individualism’, ‘weak uncertainty avoidance’ and ‘masculinity’. One of the aims of this study is to determine whether the learners’ attitudes and behaviours in learning were influenced by cultural factors such as mentioned by Hofstede.

5.2 Data analysis of the BEL100 e-PJJ forum transcripts

The procedure used in the analysis of the transcripts, using the analytical framework set out above, will be further explained in detail in this chapter. The steps taken as preliminaries to analysis of the transcripts are listed here below.

1. The sources of the data were identified: the transcripts of the BEL 100 e-PJJ online discussion forum for the eight groups participating in this study. For an example of a portion of the transcript see Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4: An Example of an Online Transcript from a HTML file of a group

Forum		
Forum Name: BEL 100 - (lf2b1_bel100)		
Topic Name: How to differentiate among it, it's and its		
Subject	From	Date Posted
confuse	N. A.N	14-Sep-2005
RE: confuse	M. H. M	14-Sep-2005
RE: confuse	N. A.N	15-Sep-2005

RE: confuse	N.A.N.	15-Sep-2005
RE: confuse	(lf2b1_bel100)	15-Sep-2005
RE: confuse	(lf2b1_bel100)	15-Sep-2005
RE: confuse	A. N.A.	20-Sep-2005

Subject: confuse [Top](#)

From: N. A.N

Date: 14-Sep-2005 12:59 PM

Dear Ms A.
Need your favour please.
You are already briefed us during the class last week; but I still confused on how to use it.
tq

Subject: RE: confuse [Top](#)

From: M.H. M.

Date: 14-Sep-2005 01:52 PM

Hai S.
May be I can define a little bit what is it, it's and its and when it is going to be used.
It - kata nama bagi benda tak bernyawa
It's - short form utk It is..
Its - dia punya/ kepunyaan..

Subject: RE: confuse [Top](#)

From: N.A.N.

Date: 15-Sep-2005 10:30 AM

TQ M.
That means 'its' - dia punya/kepunyaan is refer to human right and not for thing right ?
rgds.

2. The online transcripts were retrieved.
3. The HTML files as featured in Figure 5.4 were converted into plain text files as in Example 5.12.

Example 5.12: An Example of an Online Transcript in Plain Text Format

```

Forum Name : BEL 100 - (lf2b1_bel100)
Topic Name : How to diffrentiate among it, it's and its
-----
Subject      : confuse
From         : N.A.N.
Date         : 14-Sep-2005 12:59 PM
Dear Ms A.
Need your favour please.
You are already briefed us during the class last week; but I still
confused on how to use it.  tq

```

4. Content analysis was carried out on each group's online transcripts in which the transcripts were analysed in the chronological order in the thread that the messages were posted.
5. For the analysis of each dimension, the plain text messages were copied and pasted into an EXCEL file (see Example 5.13).
6. Each message was coded using the scheme set out above (see Example 5.13).
7. The columns for each code in the EXCEL file were marked with a '1' when the categories were identified in each message. This procedure made it possible to calculate the total of raw frequencies and percentages of each category for each group (see Example 5.13).

Example 5.13: An Example of Analysis of the Plain Text Format of the transcript in an EXCEL file.

						Emotional	Open	Group
						Expression	Comm	Cohesion
Forum Name : BEL 100 - (lf7b1_bel100)								
Topic Name : Assalamualaikum								
						1	1	
Subject : Salam perkenalan								
From : S.M.S.								
Date : 26-Jul-2005 09:21 AM								
Assalamualaikum puan..								
Fistly I just want you to know that i,m so happy to be your student and i hope you can help me about this course..TQ								

5.2.1 Content analysis of the forum transcripts

According to Krippendorff (1980), "Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use". The definition of content analysis contains three fundamental aspects, namely: (a) the findings from a content analysis should be able to be replicated by others, (b) the

analysis should measure what it claims to measure and, (c) content analysis is not limited to textual data (Krippendorff 1980). There are three basic approaches to content analysis. The first is the frequency count of words. This approach is probably least useful for the analysis of single or even multiple categories because of the relatively small number of words in a text. A second approach is to examine the co-occurrence of words. For example, the number of times the words “happy” and “method” go together. Again, this approach is more likely to be appropriate to relatively larger or longer texts, as the likelihood of two words appearing together will always be less than the likelihood of either word appearing individually. Five hundred to 2,000 words has been suggested as an optimal length, because if texts are too long it is highly likely words will co-occur (Krippendorff 1980). The third major approach to content analysis is to code units of text (e.g. words, sentences or paragraphs) using some form of coding scheme. It is this last approach that will be the primary focus of this chapter and which has been most often used by other researchers in the content analysis of online discussion data.

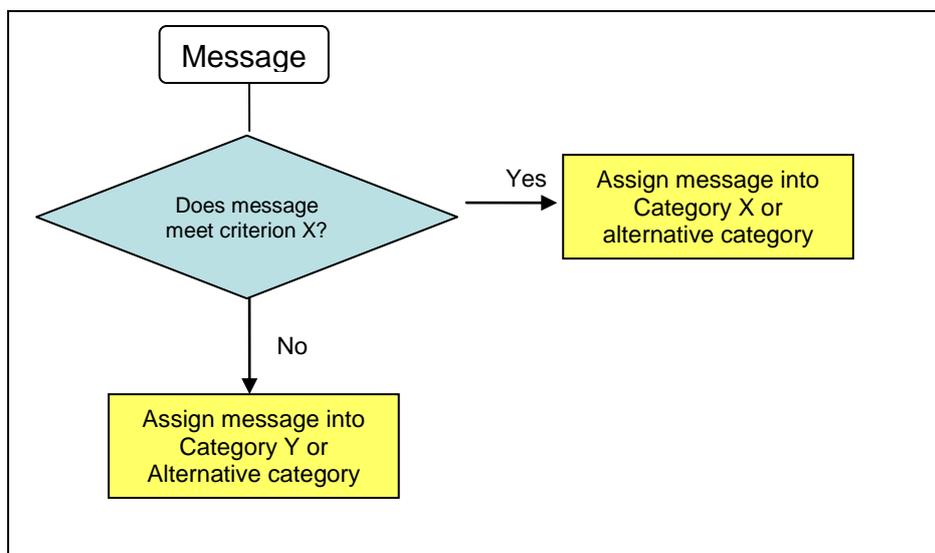
The coding was first carried out on a printout of the hard copy of the plain text files from the online forum discussion. Each message was first coded with identifiers for the contributor: F=Facilitator, L=Learner. The unit of analysis was the message. The message was chosen as the unit of analysis because this unit is easier to identify than other units, and, as a result, the identification of units was likely to be highly reliable. According to Anderson, Rourke, Garrison and Archer (2001) coders generally assign the full message to one category but in Anderson et al’s study, they allowed for the possibility that a single message might display characteristics of more than one category. In the procedure used for the analysis in this study, the Social Presence dimension incorporated overlapping categories: “*emotional expression*”, “*open communication*”, “*group cohesion*”. Whereas the categories in the Participative, Interactive, Cognitive Presence: “*triggering event*”, “*exploration event*”,

“integration event” and “resolution event” and Teacher Presence: “instructional management”, “building cohesion”, “understanding direct instruction”, dimensions were mutually exclusive. The Cultural dimension also includes overlapping categories: “power distance”, “individualism/collectivism”, “masculinity/femininity”, “uncertainty avoidance”, and this accounts for all posted messages. This will be further explained in the later part of this chapter under the sub-topic Cultural Dimension.

5.2.1.1 Content analysis of mutually exclusive categories

Where the categories in a dimension are mutually exclusive, the coder has to decide which category applies, so there is only one decision for each dimension (see Figure 5.5). Once the coding is completed, the totals for each category are determined very easily using the facilities of Excel. The totals are expressed as percentages of the total of the participants’ postings that contain each of the categories in the analysed dimension. The steps taken in analysing the dimensions with mutually exclusive categories were carried out for the Participative, Interactive, Cognitive Presence, and Teaching Presence dimensions.

Figure 5.5: Mutually exclusive categories analytical model of a posted message.



5.2.1.2 Content analysis of overlapping categories

For dimensions where there are overlapping categories, a message may contain evidence of none, one, some or all of the categories in that dimension. For each message, one coding decision has to be made for each category in the dimension, so, for example, where the dimension has three non-mutually-exclusive categories, three coding decisions (yes/no) have to be made. The coder has to decide which of the possible categories are evident in each message (see Table 5.5 for an example). For example, the coder may decide that there is evidence for two out of the three possible categories in a message. Next is to calculate the frequency of occurrence for each category in all the messages posted in each group. The percentage for each category is based on the total of occurrence for each category over the total number of posted messages. The totals can be shown in a table. In this study, the steps taken in analysing overlapping categories were conducted in the Social Presence dimension. The categories in the Social Presence dimension can be identified in one posted message. For example, in a Social Presence dimension, categories of Emotional Expression and Group Cohesion may coexist in one posted message. A learner may voice out his/her worries in learning and at the same time give encouragement to other participants to do their best in improving themselves in the course which is a typical occurrence in posted messages with the presence of social statements.

Table 5.5: Overlapping categories in a message

	Category A	Category B	Category C
Message A	/	/	
Message B	/	/	/
Message C	/		
Total	3	2	1

The quantitative part of this chapter is devoted to an analysis of the frequency of the categories represented in each dimension of the framework. Percentages were calculated by dividing the total number of postings that exhibit the category of a particular dimension in one group by the total number of messages posted by the participants of the group. A comparison of the percentages for each category in each dimension makes it possible to determine the relative frequency of each category in each dimension. The procedure outlined above will be explained in detail in the analysis which follows.

5.3 The participative dimension

In an online learning environment, learners are expected to participate as part of a learning process. This study will look into the amount of learners' and facilitators' participation. In addition, the content of the messages or statements transmitted; whether they are socially or directly related to learning, will be analysed.

5.3.1 Theoretical foundation: participative dimension

A frequency count of the number of messages posted by the facilitator and learners in each group provides an overview of the nature and extent of participation within a particular group. The participation of the learners and facilitators may be related to social concerns or to the content of the course or to the learning process. Some discussion threads showed evidence of social interaction, exchange of general information, the management of tasks as well as the course content (refer to Table 5.6). Messages with only social content are categorized as "Social Messages" and messages which are related to the course content or to the learning process are categorized as "Course-Related".

Table 5.6: Analytical Model: Participation (Adapted from Henri 1992)

Categories	Definition	Indicators
Overall	Total number of messages	Quantitative data supplied by server.
Participation of learners and facilitators	Number of statements either socially or directly related to learning made by learners and facilitators.	Purely social in content, e.g. "Hello, how are you?" Primarily related to content of course, e.g. "Can someone tell me the assignment for this week".

Source: Henri 1992

5.3.2 Analytical method: participative dimension

The messages for each group were analysed by thread, and within each thread in chronological order. For each message, a decision was made as to whether the content was (i) purely social (*Social Messages*) or (ii) primarily related to the content of the course and/or the learning process (*Course-Related*). This was done to establish the motivation of the participants involved in posting the messages to the discussion forum, that is: (i) to maintain/establish a social presence in the forum, or (ii) to exchange information about the content of the course and/or learning process. Examples of "Social Messages" and "Course-Related" messages contributed by the participants are as follows.

Example 5.14

<p>Social Messages</p> <p>a) Puan...how are you??? I hope you are fine. Hi...friends...</p> <p>b) Yeah!!! This is our sacrifice...</p> <p>c) Selamat berpuasa!!! (Happy fasting)</p> <p>Course-related Messages</p> <p>a) I want to know how i want to send the assignment when i completed the answer. I just copy the question & paste it in ms word. Answer it and then just sent the folder by email, is it? The deadline is on 7th August? Please help me!!!!</p> <p>b) Please refer to DISCUSSION 1, Pn. A. have given us assingment to be done before 31st July.</p>
--

5.3.3 Results and interpretation: participative dimension

Quantitative analysis: participative dimension

The rates of participation by learners and facilitators in each of the eight groups are given in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7: Frequency of facilitators and learners participation and posted messages in the online discussion forum in 8 groups of the BEL100 e-PJJ course (raw frequencies and percentages)

Group	No. of registered learners	No. of learners participating online	Total no. of messages posted	No. of messages posted by facilitator	No. of messages posted by learners	Average no. of messages per participating learner
1	34 (9.9%)	28 (82.4%)	54	8 (14.8%)	46 (85.2%)	1.64
2	32 (9.3%)	29 (90.6%)	173	22 (12.7%)	151 (87.3%)	5.21
3	46 (13.3%)	45 (97.8%)	224	34 (15.2%)	190 (84.8%)	4.22
4	28 (8.1%)	27 (96.4%)	247	18 (7.3%)	229 (92.7%)	8.48
5	32 (9.3%)	30 (93.8%)	319	42 (13.2%)	277 (86.8%)	9.23
6	31 (9.0%)	25 (80.6%)	372	72 (19.4%)	300 (80.6%)	12.00
7	58 (16.8%)	57 (98.3%)	454	79 (17.4%)	375 (82.6%)	6.59
8	84 (24.3%)	81 (96.4%)	933	71 (7.6%)	862 (92.4%)	10.64
Total	345 (100%)	322 (93.2%)	2776	346 (12.5%)	2430 (87.5%)	7.55

Firstly it is noted that the groups are of unequal size. As seen in Table 5.7, from all eight groups, the group of learners that contributed the most in terms of the number of messages posted is Group 8. Logically, the explanation for this is because Group 8 has the highest number of learners registered for the course. There are 84 learners and out of 84 learners, 81 (96.4%) of the learners participated in the online forum discussion. In normal circumstances, expectation of number of messages posted for a group with more learners

should be higher provided there is active participation from both quarters: facilitators and learners. In this case however, the number of learners in the group does not seem to have an effect on the percentage of learners in the group who participate, although it obviously affects the number of messages, with Group 8 having the highest number of messages posted. Group 4 for example which has the smallest number of registered learners has a high percentage of learners' participation in the online forum discussion that is 96.4% which is similar to other larger group; with 28 registered learners of whom 27 actively participated online.

Group 6 and Group 8 have the highest average number of messages per participating learner than the other groups (12.0 posts and 10.64 posts respectively) and in Groups 2, 3 and 7 with a lower number of posts (average 5.21, 4.22 and 6.59 post respectively). The contribution from both facilitators and learners can be seen in Table 5.7 (columns 4 and 6). As seen in Table 5.7, Group 6 facilitator posted messages is the highest among the rest of the group with 19.4%, while the facilitators in Group 4 is relatively inactive (7.3% posts). It is not clear on how the evidence of inactivity should be interpreted. However, given that facilitators of online forums are not expected to respond to each individual learner, it does not follow that we would be expecting a facilitator of a group with 84 learners (as in Group 8) in it to contribute say, one third more messages than a group with one third fewer learners. As seen from Table 5.7, the facilitator of Group 8 has been about as active in interacting with the learners as the facilitators for Groups 6 and 7 but because their groups (6 and 7) are smaller and generated a much smaller number of messages, their percentage rate of contribution appears much higher. What we can conclude is that learners in all the groups participated almost actively with more than 50% contribution. There is a possibility that the facilitators of groups that are interacting actively had a style that learners responded to; being friendly and more open in interacting with the learners, supplying the learners with a more productive set of suggestions that are more familiar to them to generate online contributions. What is clear is

that the low rate of contribution from Group 1 learners shows that their experience online is limited to submission of assignments. However, one cannot conclude that Group 1 learners are inactive learners. Group 1 learners may not have the opportunity to be participating actively online among themselves or with the facilitator due to the facilitator's style of managing the online session. To allow the learners to experience an active online interaction, facilitator should be facilitating learners with discussion topics that learners are familiar with (daily and up to date activities) and generate active interactions.

The slight differences between one group and another may also be caused by the lack of opportunities for some learners in a group in accessing a computer. This is also evident in the observation carried out by the researcher when a few learners voiced out their difficulties such as not having enough time to go online, not having access to a computer at home or not having the opportunity to access to a computer at their workplaces. A statistics on "*Information about Computer Usage*" in Appendix 7: p9, Learner's Demographic: Sample Statistics summarised on the access and usage of computers among the BEL 100 learners. Example 5.15 shows an interview comment from a learner regarding access to computers:

Example 5.15

Learner: Very little online activities for me. I don't know much about it because I don't have online facility at home. I also cannot use the office facility that much. So, online activities are limited for me. The computer at home is out of order. Normally I do after office, sometimes going home only at 9:00 p.m. Office finishes at 5:00 p.m. If there is a lot of assignment, then I'll work until 9:30 p.m. But that's the most. This is my worry.

Table 5.8a and 5.8b provide a breakdown of the messages posted by each group according to their content: *Social Messages* and *Course-Related*. In terms of the proportion of posted messages which are social or course-related, as seen in Table 5.8b, both group with the least

number of learners (Group 4) and the highest number of learners (Group 8) has a slight difference. In Group 4 the proportions are 38.5% social and 61.5% course-related while Group 8 had 49.8% and 50.2% course-related respectively. It should also be noted that many of the participants posted messages in the online forum with regard to submission of assignments. Learners were instructed by their facilitators to post their assignments in the forum and facilitators then gave a general comment for the assignments submitted. Besides that, the learners did participate in the online forum discussion room to either (i) maintain/establish a social presence in the forum room, or (ii) to exchange information about the content of the course and/or learning process.

Table 5.8a: Frequency of Social Messages or Course-Related messages in messages posted by facilitators and learners

Groups	Participants	Social messages	Course- related messages	Total
1	Facilitator	0 (0.0%)	8 (100%)	8
2	Facilitator	1 (4.5%)	21 (95.5%)	22
3	Facilitator	3 (8.8%)	31 (91.2%)	34
4	Facilitator	0 (0.0%)	18 (100.0%)	18
5	Facilitator	2 (4.8%)	40 (95.2%)	42
6	Facilitator	4 (5.6%)	68 (94.4%)	72
7	Facilitator	5 (6.3%)	74 (93.7%)	79
8	Facilitator	14 (19.7%)	57 (80.3%)	71
All groups	Facilitator	29 (8.4%)	317 (91.6%)	346
	Total Facilitators & Learners	880 (31.7%)	1896 (68.3%)	2776

Table 5.8b: Frequency of Social Messages or Course-Related messages in messages posted by learners

Groups	Participants	Social messages	Course- related messages	Total
1	Learners	0 (0.0%)	46 (100%)	46
2	Learners	27 (17.9%)	124 (82.1%)	151
3	Learners	41(21.6%)	149 (78.4%)	190
4	Learners	95 (41.5%)	134 (58.5%)	229
5	Learners	76 (27.4%)	201 (72.6%)	277
6	Learners	112 (37.3%)	188 (62.7%)	300
7	Learners	71 (18.9%)	304 (81.1%)	375
8	Learners	429 (49.8%)	433 (50.2%)	862
All groups	Learners	851 (35.0%)	1579 (65.0%)	2430
	Total Facilitators & Learners	880 (31.7%)	1896 (68.3%)	2776

The table also gives us more information about the type of messages sent by both facilitators and learners according to their content (social and course-related). Table 5.8b shows that the total number of messages posted by the learners is 2430 (87.5% of the total 2776). Table 5.8a shows that the total number of messages posted by the facilitators is 346 (12.5% of the total). The total number of messages related to the content of the course or to the learning process is 1896 (68.3% of the total); the number of messages related to social content was 880 (31.7% of the total). We can see a marked difference between the messages of the facilitator in Group 8 and the rest of the facilitators (see Table 5.8a). Almost 20% of the messages were “social” whereas other facilitators were less than 10% “social” and sometimes none at all. Similarly the learners in Group 8 contributed more social messages than the other groups, and this is associated with their higher number of contributions overall (see Table 5.8b). The result from both learners and facilitators is that most of their messages are course-related. The researcher gained the impression in meetings with the learners during the data collection stage of this project that many of them felt that the discussion forum spent

too much time on little “chit chats”; some even complained that the forum was being used to advertise commercial products (see Example 5.16)

Example 5.16:

Learner: Sometime forum discussion... sometime wrong topic they are... social or promotion. I did see in the forum promotion cake. They sell cake. So I think its...they must understand this forum is for our discussion, our study, right.

Learner: They take advantage of the free facility. Just enter and do promotion. It is not easy for the lecturer to remind the students as they are adults and should be able to think for themselves.

Qualitative analysis: participative dimension

As stated earlier this study will look into the extent of learners’ and facilitators’ participation. In addition, the content of the messages or statements transmitted; whether they are socially or directly related to learning. The analysis of the forum discussions suggests that learners participate and post more messages when the topics discussed are associated with issues that are related to learners’ daily accounts or current issues in the country. This is corroborated by evidence from the interview (refer to Example 5.17).

Example 5.17:

Learner: Take the case of the topic on cinema. This is indeed related to knowledge. I like this one.

Facilitator: The one time I did make them discuss more. As in, okay why don’t you tell me what you did yesterday, and then link that to the topic of the study of the day. That was when I did the verb tenses. I ask them to name some things around the room, just like that, so... although it is child like, childish activities, but they responded better than you can dream of...

This is an indication that the learners prefer the type of conferences/ discussions that are familiar to them and participation in learning mounted with learners communicating their opinions, giving and making statements. In some threads, it can also be found that learners

carry on discussing and giving short or long comments regarding the topic of interest until the facilitator intervened with a new instruction.

Example 5.18 :

Facilitator: In our society, males are losing out to the females academically as the university enrolment indicates more female students. What will happen in the long run? What's your opinion?

Learner 1: My opinion is our country will deficient of an intellectual man if we not take this symptom as the serious problems. Some of them think that academics is not important because they already got an experience of works. After finished their SPM exam, they continued doing a part time jobs. Afterwards, when they have their own money, they cannot make a right decision!

Learner 2: Hmm.. First of all, I think, more female will only get married when their are older because they have to make decision either getting married with unintellectual man and having problems with their family (you know what kind of problems, right?) or enjoy their life lonely. Besides, the highest post or management in most of companies in Malaysia will be fulfilled by female. And, I think, it is not impossible if our next Prime Minister is a woman.

Learner 3: In my opinion, by looking at the number of female students enrolled into universities, local or abroad which exceeds the number of male students, doesnt guarantee a thing. Let me remind you that immediate admission to universities after schooling doesnt guarantee immediate success. If we also take a look of the number of unemployed graduates, we could also see that females pose a greater number than males. I admit that a higher paper qualification is needed to survive in the world but the lack of it does not mean that it is the end of the world. I am no male chauvanist but if wee look at it carefully, we will find that most women think with their heart and not their brains (not due to the lack of it). Getting emotionally entangled with a problem that they are supposed to find the solution is a problem commonly faced by women leaders besides the lack of rationale, will power and on the

field experience. I guess that is why there are several prominent women leaders in our country who has a lot of good vision but lack the skills to implement their ideas. The culture in Malaysia also puts women in the back seat and there is not a lot that can be done about this. Based on the above, i believe that even the most "unintellectual" man have what it takes to be more successful than an educated women.

p/s: I dont think Malaysia will ever have a women Prime Minister.

Learner 4: Just want to add some info. Abdul Karim...Women architects and engineers are also active. They have participated in the design of KL's famous skyscrapers. Don't you know who created Putrajaya? Well..women have lots of skills. You have to make more revision in this (sorry to say).. Abdul Karim, sorry ya. I'm just telling the truth. It was just my honest opinion too. But, you know what..our becoming Prime Minister is still a woman..

Facilitator: Hey you guys-hold your horses!! This discussion is getting emotionally charged as I can see both types of chauvinism coming through though both sides are denying it. Come to think of it- how does culture put the women in the back seat? Talk about it.

The participation of the facilitators in the discussion was crucial. When the facilitator was actively intervening in the discussion informally, this helped the learners to participate in the discussion with a purpose (refer to Example 5.18).

From the observation of this study, participation among the participants would almost often start off with online socialization, with learners introducing and greeting each other, after which they got into serious or semi-serious discussion of the topic learned. The intervention of the facilitators in the discussion informally and colloquially actually helped the learners to be more focused and made the learners feel at “home”; the feeling of having common interest and being accepted by the rest of the participants (see Examples 5.19 to 5.21). In Example 5.20, the facilitator makes a very comforting and warm comment to the

learner in Example 5.19. the analysis suggest that learners were able to express their personal opinions online and to share views quite openly – some of the time and in some groups only.

Example 5.19

Learner : Dear Puan,
Thanks. How to control my nervous during the speaking exam...? I think...aarr....Pls don't look at me while I'm reading my text...ehee... thanks! Bye,

Example 5.20

Facilitator: Dear Z,
Do not worry about it. Just regard it as you having a chat with me. That will take care of the nervousness that you feel inside. See you this Sunday.

Example 5.21

Learner: S, it ok. when u feel u can always join us, bcos we cannot depend totally on seminar itself, therefore we must find out alternatives to assist us especially on our study.

According to Salmon (2004), the many benefits of discussing online and building a network in education and training flow from establishing an online community of people who feel that they are working together at common tasks. The messages posted by both learners and facilitators in this study provide evidence that the participants were conveying feelings and building relationships actively. What they posted may not always have been directly relevant to the content of the course, but this does not matter since purely social messages provide practice in using the language. The messages which are purely social in content constitute 31.7% of the total. Typical topics are apologizing for being absent, expressing condolences, and exchanging greetings on special occasions or making an interesting announcement.

5.4 The interactive dimension

We turn now to the analysis of the Interactive dimension of the discussion data. The online discussion component of an e-learning course is recognised by researchers to be an essentially interactive process. In order to understand the nature of the interaction, and its function in the learning process, we need to explore the content of the messages in more detail.

5.4.1 Theoretical foundation: interactive dimension

In the analysis of the Interactive dimension we are not primarily concerned with whether the interaction is socially-related or course-related. The emphasis here is to find out if there is interaction among the participants and what the interaction patterns are by focusing on how message relates (or does not) to other messages.

According to Henri (1992), an online discussion without interactivity would be composed of a series of statements linked only by the theme or subject under discussion. With no interactive dimension, we would be faced with a collection of monologues and one-way statements. Henri (1992) uses the category of “Independent Statement” for statements of this kind. In this study among the exchanges that made up the interactive statements are, as Henri (1992) puts it, ‘*Explicit Interaction*’, ‘*Implicit Interaction*’ and ‘*Independent Statement*’ (see Table 5.9). The examples provided in Table 5.9 are taken from the study’s transcripts.

Explicit Interaction applies to messages that can either be in response to a question (Direct Response) or a commentary on someone else’s message (Direct Commentary). In any Explicit Interaction, the person to whom the communication is directed is indicated in the message. In the analysis of instances of ‘*Explicit Interaction*’ the names of the sender and of the person the message was directed to be noted so that patterns of communication between participants could be followed. The category ‘*Implicit Interaction*’ refers to a message which refers to a previous message, but do not mention specifically which message is being referred

to. If the message is a response, the appropriate category is Indirect Response and if it is a commentary the category is Indirect Commentary.

Finally, the ‘*Independent Statement*’ category was used for cases where a message contained new ideas contributed by participants. The Independent Statements can be statements that are related to the present discussion but they are not responses to previous posts nor are they commentaries which lead to further statements. These statements do not refer to any other previous messages but also is not referred to any subsequent messages. Basically the independent statements deal with participant’s own views and does not regard any other participants in interaction.

Table 5.9: Analytical model: Interactive (Adapted from Henri 1992)

Categories	Definition	Indicators	Examples
Explicit interaction	Statements that refer explicitly to another message; other learner/learners or facilitator	Agreeing with others Responding precisely to others	“I agree with Salmi’s idea of...” “ Azrin, my suggestion....”
Implicit interaction	Statements that refer implicitly to another message; other learner/learners or facilitator	Agreeing indirectly with others Responding indirectly to others	“I think we should ask puan about” “...if you want to solve”
Independent statement	Statements related to subject under discussion, but neither an answer nor a commentary and do not lead to further statements.	Ones own idea with no referral to others	“What I have to say about this” “I suggest...”

Source: Henri 1992

5.4.2 Analytical method: interactive dimension

The first operational approach in the analysis of the Interactive dimension was to identify the interactivity process of each group by identifying the flow of the interactivity patterns among the participants. The unit of analysis employed is the message unit. In analyzing the interactivity pattern a set of patterns relating to the flow of interactivity was identified. The process of identifying these patterns is a three-step process (Bretz [1983], cited in Henri 1992:128).

Step 1: Communication of information

Step 2: A first response to this information

Step 3: A second answer relating to the first.

Schematically the process looks like this: $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow A \rightarrow B$. The process taken in this study to identify the patterns follows the procedure outlined above. Each message in each thread was coded according to whether it was a one-to-one communication or a one-to-many communication. More specifically, the patterns of interactivity were identified as follows:

Pattern 1: Facilitator to the whole group

Pattern 2: Facilitator to individual learner

Pattern 3: Learner to facilitator

Pattern 4: Learner to the whole group (other learners + facilitator or other learners
excluding facilitator)

Pattern 5: Learner to individual learner

When each message had been coded according to the scheme above, the next step was to code each message according to whether the interaction was *Explicit*, *Implicit* or *Independent*. To illustrate the application of the coding scheme in the Interactive dimension,

we provide some examples of each category. In these examples, it is important to take note of the “Subject” and “Date” headings since these indicate whether or not the messages are part of the same thread and whether they are in temporal sequence. Examples 5.22 to 5.25 provide an illustration of a sequence of messages which illustrates the categories of *Explicit* and *Implicit Interaction*:

Example 5.22 (Implicit Interaction-referring to a previous message indirectly)

```
Subject : Assignment
From    : N.M.T (Group 8)
Date    : 25-Aug-2005 10:40 AM
Assalamualaikum..mdm S
How are u? You had told me that you go back hometown last week. Which area it is? I'm from Johor Bahru. That day, i call u but u still driving. Sorry about that. Actually before that I had bought a bus ticket to KL for 2nd seminar and the seminar had postponed to 25th Sept so, I try to return or change the ticket. Luckily, the counter agree to return a bus fares.
Any assignment that i have to forward for incoming seminar on 11 September.
```

Example 5.23 (Explicit interaction- referring to message above directly)

```
Subject : RE: Assignment
From    : (1f9b1_bell00) Group 8
Date    : 26-Aug-2005 02:26PM
I'm from Muar, Johor.
Yes there is an assignment to transform the broken English to standard English. Please check the forum.
```

Example 5.24 (Implicit interaction-referring to message above indirectly)

```
Subject : RE: Assignment
From    : W.N.S. Group 8
Date    : 29-Aug-2005 11:59 PM
a'kum... how are you?
Sorry to say,i can't send the homework today,,
i'm so very busy this week,,,,and i also not feel good...
oh yeh! who is work at celcom?i forgot your name?sorry!
```

Example 5.25 (Explicit interaction- referring to message above directly)

```
Subject : RE: Assignment
From : N.I Group 8
Date : 01-Sep-2005 08:38 AM
S,how can you forgot my name!!!just joking. Why S? Any news
you want to share with me. This is my office number:03-28483372 or you
can call my hp number:013-3493330.
Okla S and all my courmate, good luck and hope we can finish our
assignment before 2nd seminar.
```

In Examples 5.22 to 5.25 the messages are part of the same thread (with the title “Assignment”) and are printed here in the sequence in which they occur in the forum. Message 5.22 in the thread was directly sent to the facilitator by one participant. The facilitator (Message 5.23) responds directly to Message 5.22 so Message 5.23 is categorized as an ‘*Explicit Interaction*’. Message 5.24 refers to Message 5.23 indirectly, so this message is categorised as an ‘*Implicit Interaction*’. Message 5.25 responds directly and explicitly to Message 5.24 (although Message 5.24 does not directly address the poster of Message 5.25 but addressing the poster of Message 5.23), so again this message is categorised as an ‘*Explicit Interaction*’.

Example 5.26 (Independent statement)

```
Subject : RE: BEL 100 - GROUP 1D (ID NO : 2005209580)
From : (lf10b1_bell100)
Date : 12-Aug-2005 12:40 PM
i have printed your work and will discuss this in our next seminar,
which is on the 25th of September. NOT this sunday as i said earlier.
Thank you.
```

Example 5.27 (Independent statement)

```
Subject      : RE: BEL 100 - GROUP 1D (ID NO : 2005209692)
From         : K.T
Date        : 13-Aug-2005 07:09 PM
ass'm,
Actually this exercise should be send 1 week after 1st seminar. But I just
make payment for 3 another subject on wednesday last week. so, im sorry
because too late send this exercise.

WRITE 5 SENTENCES THAT HAVE A SUBJECT, A VERB AND OBJECT.
1. Aminah cooked laksa asam
2. Fadli read a novel book
3. The girl bought a blue skirt
4. Lina drove her car
5. Jamal sings a love song
K.T
```

Examples 5.26 to 5.27 provide an illustration of non-interactive (*Independent Statement*) message. Message 5.26 (the opening message of the thread) is posted by the facilitator. Message 5.27 is the next message in the thread but this message has no interactive function since it does not refer, directly or indirectly, to the facilitator's message 5.26.

Example 5.28 represents explicit posted messages, statement that refers explicitly either as a direct response or direct commentary to another message, person or group. Message 5.28 was posted by a learner to the facilitator and the message was responded by the facilitator directly to the learner. Example 5.29 shows an example of *'Implicit Interaction'*. The message refers implicitly either as an indirect response or indirect commentary to the messages of 5.28a and 5.28b.

Example 5.28a (Explicit interaction)

```
Subject      : RE: BEL 100
From         : H.H Group 5
Date        : 01-Aug-2005 12:55 PM
assalamualaikum miss,saya sangat down dlm English (Translation<I am very
weak in English>),how to improve and understanding in english.
```

Example 5.28b (Explicit interaction)

Subject : RE: BEL 100
From : S.Y Group 5
Date : 17-Aug-2005 09:39 AM
hai.... assalamualaikum
Ms saya student AC100 part 1.saya ada masalah besar ni,oleh kerana semua subjek AC100 dalam BI, so saya nak tanya macam mana nak memperbaiki bahasa inggeris ni.Apa yang perlu saya lakukan.help me Ms. (Translation< **Ms. I am a student of AC100 part 1. I have a big problem, because all AC100 subjects are in English, so how can I improve my English? What should I do? Help me Ms.>**)

Example 5.29 (Implicit interaction)

Subject : RE: BEL 100
From : (1f5b1_bell100) Group 5
Date : 24-Aug-2005 12:21 PM
dear everyone
i am happy that all of you are using this forum as a platform for communication. please keep up this effort. i enjoy reading your remarks on the forum.
people have weaknesses in different areas... now that you know that you are not proficient in the language, you must practice using it without fail. keep trying. you need to get comfortable with the language then only you will enjoy using it.
remember...practice makes perfect.

Example 5.30 (Explicit interaction)

Subject : RE: Salam perkenalan
From : MDF.I Group 6
Date: : 28-Jul-2005 07:37 PM
Assalamualaikum,Puan R and friends. I hope we all will be happy in Puan class and can learn more to improve our english.Nice to meet you in 1st seminar.tq.

Example 5.31 (Implicit Interaction)

Subject : RE: Salam perkenalan
From : N.A.W. Group 6
Date : 28-Jul-2005 10:47 PM
Assalamualaikum..
I hope we can share more information in this class..

In these two examples, Message 5.30 is a general message to the facilitator and the rest of the online forum participants. This was responded to by another participant in Message 5.31 but in an indirect manner. Note that the date of the two messages is the same,

and the time of posting of Message 5.31 is 10:47 p.m., about three hours after the time of posting of Message 5.30. The sender of Message 5.31 was indirectly referring to the same topic as Message 5.30 but without explicit reference to Message 5.30.

5.4.2.1 Interactivity patterns

Examples 5.32 to 5.35 show a sequence which illustrates Interactivity Patterns 1 and 3. There are four messages under the thread titled: *Prepositions & Conjunctions*. The first message (Message 5.32) is posted by the facilitator of the group with the instructions for an assignment. Messages 5.33, 5.34 and 5.35 come from three different individuals and each one represents a response of some kind to Message 5.32.

Example 5.32

```
Forum Name : BEL 100 - (1f2b1_bel100)
Topic Name : PREPOSITIONS & CONJUNCTIONS
-----
Subject    : Readings & Exercises
From      : (1f2b1_bel100) Group 2
Date      : 11-Aug-2005 12:09 PM
Dear all,
Please read pg 111 (Prepositions) and do exercises A, B and C (pg
112-113). Read also pg 105-106 (Conjunctions)and do exercise G (pg. 107)
We'll discuss the exercises this Sunday. See you in class!
```

Example 5.33

```
Subject    : RE: Readings & Exercises
From      : Y.S Group 2
Date      : 11-Aug-2005 11:13 PM
Dear pn. A,
Thank you for remind me. luckily I open this e-mail.
see you.
```

Example 5.34

```
Subject      : RE: Readings & Exercises
From        : N.A.A.Y. Group 2
Date        : 12-Aug-2005 12:20 PM
Akum Pn.A.
Thank for the info & I'm also same like Y.S.Luckly open this e-mail
today...
-a-
```

Example 5.35

```
Subject      : RE: Readings & Exercises
From        : N.S Group 2
Date        : 12-Aug-2005 07:07 PM
Dear Ms A!
All the exercise we will discuss on 25 September or 11 Sept 2005???
Please let us know thank you.
```

As mentioned earlier, the process of identifying these patterns is a three-step process (Bretz [1983], cited in Henri 1992:128). Messages 5.33, 5.34 and 5.35 in the sequence above represent *Step 2*: a first response to the information (Message 5.32), in the interactive process. However, this step does not always occur. There are occasions where *Step 2*, in which there will be a response to a posted message, does not take place. In effect, the first message sent out by an individual to another individual or the group does not receive any response. Example 5.36 provides an illustration of this. In this example, there is only one message posted under the thread titled: *Which, whom, whose, who*.

Example 5.36

```
Forum Name  : BEL 100 - (1f2b1_bell100)
Topic Name  : Which, whom, whose, who
-----
Subject     : how to use those words
From        : N.A.N. Group 2
Date        : 19-Sep-2005 10:29 PM
Dear Ms A and friends.
Would appreciate if you guys can help me to diffrentiate those words.
Tq.
```

One might expect that a message which is framed in terms of the one-to-many mode of participation would receive several responses but this message does not receive any. One might speculate that the lack of response to this message would give rise to frustration in the poster of the message, with a loss of interest in posting further queries. As Vollmeyer and Rheinberg (2005) suggest, feedback is an important variable which influences learning. In their study on the effect of feedback on performance, they found that feedback improves performance and increases the use of learning strategies which make use of feedback. In general, feedback enhances the motivation of the learners to participate.

If the scenario illustrated in Example 5.37 occurs, *Step 3*: a second answer relating to the first, of the process will not take place. If there is a response (i.e. *Step 2*: a first response to this information) to *Step 1*: communication of information, then *Step 3* may or may not occur. Example 5.37 is the initiating message. This receives a response (Example 5.38) from the individual to whom message in Example 5.37 was addressed, but the sender of the message in Example 5.37 does not respond in turn to the message in Example 5.38, and there is no response from any other individual in the group.

Example 5.37

```
Forum Name : BEL 100 - (1f4b1_bell100)
Topic Name : BEL 100
-----
Subject    : PREPARATION
From       : S.A.I. Group 4
Date      : 15-Jul-2005 09:43 AM
Assalamualaikum wrt.
Madam, besides studying the module and make revision for the past year
examination question papers, what should I do before this coming seminar?
```

Example 5.38

```
Subject    : RE: PREPARATION
From       : (1f4b1_bell100)
Date      : 17-Aug-2005 10:33 PM

Refer to my message on the 17th August.
```

In Examples 5.37 and 5.38, *Step 3* does not take place because there is no response to the message in Example 5.38 from the sender of the message in Example 5.37. The reason for the lack of a response to the message in Example 5.38 is likely to be that the sender has received an answer to her query and does not need to pursue the topic further. It's also possible the sender of the message in Example 5.37 did not return to the thread later after posting her query.

Some of the messages in a thread can follow through to the next step and another and the continuation of interactivity can go on and on until an intervention from a participant with a new topic of discussion takes place. Occasionally, a thread that maintains an interactive pattern for some time can stop without any intervention.

5.4.3 Results and interpretation: interactivity patterns

Quantitative Analysis: interactivity patterns

Table 5.10a: Frequency of patterns of facilitators' interactivity from eight groups of BEL 100 e-PJJ course (raw frequencies and percentages)

Patterns of Interactivity		
Group	Pattern 1: Facilitator to whole group	Pattern 2: Facilitator to individual learners
1	5 (9.3 %)	3 (5.6%)
2	19 (11.0%)	4 (2.3%)
3	16 (7.1%)	13 (5.8%)
4	11 (4.5%)	2 (0.8%)
5	34 (10.7%)	6 (1.9%)
6	53 (14.2%)	16 (4.3%)
7	59 (13.0%)	16 (3.5%)
8	29 (3.1%)	33 (3.5%)
TOTAL	226 (8.1%)	93 (3.4%)

Table 5.10b: Frequency of patterns of learners' interactivity from eight groups of BEL 100 e-PJJ course (raw frequencies and percentages)

Patterns of Interactivity				
Group	Pattern 3: Learner to facilitator	Pattern 4: Learner to whole group	Pattern 5: Learner to learner	Total Number of Posted Messages
1	46 (85.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	54
2	73 (42.2%)	50 (28.9%)	27 (15.6%)	173
3	102 (45.5%)	84 (37.5%)	9 (4.0%)	224
4	88 (35.6%)	109 (44.1%)	37 (15.0%)	247
5	132 (41.4%)	95 (29.8%)	52 (16.3%)	319
6	224 (60.2%)	49 (13.2%)	30 (8.1%)	372
7	220 (48.5%)	118 (26.0%)	41 (9.0%)	454
8	233 (25.0%)	487 (52.2%)	151 (16.2%)	933
TOTAL	1118 (40.3%)	992 (35.7)	347 (12.5%)	2776

We consider now the frequency of the 5 Interactivity Patterns as represented in Table 5.10a and 5.10b. We note first that there were no instances of Patterns 4 and 5 in Group 1. Patterns 4 and 5 represent the situations where the facilitator is either not involved in the interaction at all (Pattern 5) or where the facilitator is addressed along with the learners (Pattern 4). These two patterns could be said, therefore, to represent the situation where the learners are displaying more autonomy than in Patterns 1, 2 and 3. An examination of the transcripts for Group 1, however, suggests that a high proportion of the messages are those when learners are submitting assignments to the facilitator. This is reflected in a high incidence of Pattern 3 with a percentage of 85.2%.

Analysis of the overall results shows that Interactivity Pattern 3 (learner to facilitator) recorded the highest percentage (40.3%). However, the data suggests quite marked differences between the groups. Clearly it can be seen that Group 8 comes out as more oriented to interaction with each other than with the facilitator (Pattern 4). Group 8 has the

lowest of learner to facilitator messages (Pattern 3) at 25% whereas other groups are around 40%, 60% and even 85.2% in the case of Group 1, which appears to be operating in a different fashion from Group 8.

This suggests that we cannot presume that the learners are, as a group, strongly dependent on the teacher. It would appear that the nature of the activities provided by the facilitators may have a significance influence on the active interaction patterns among the groups. The results for Pattern 2 (facilitator to individual learner), on the other hand, recorded the lowest percentage (3.4%) of all the five patterns. This result indicates that it is not common for the facilitator to address a message to an individual learner. Interaction initiated by the facilitator is addressed more frequently to the whole group (8.1%) than to individual learners (3.4%). Pattern 4 as seen in Table 5.10b is very frequent in Group 8 (52.2%) and Group 4 (44.1%), which is much more frequent than the other groups. This suggests that there is more of a sense of community in these groups than in the other groups. Notice also that Pattern 1 (3.1%) and Pattern 3 (25.0%) is much lower in Groups 8 and 4 than it is in the other groups. Group 4 recorded the lowest percentage of Pattern 2 (0.8%). However Group 8 and 3 stands out on Pattern 1 and Pattern 2 when compared to the rest of the other groups as seen in Table 5.10a. Both groups stand out with a higher percentage with interaction from facilitator to the whole group and facilitator to individual learner. This also suggests that Group 8 is significantly different among all the groups. This is probably due to the fact that in Group 8 interactions among the learners are more active probably due to the number of learners, facilitator and peer support. This shows that Group 8 differs from the others. Group 8 interactions for majority of the patterns are higher except for Pattern 3 (25%) than the rest of the groups. In stark contrast are Groups 7 and 6, where 48.5% and 60.2% (refer to Table 5.10b) of all learner contributions are to the facilitator. Groups 4 and 8 which also recorded the highest number of posted messages by the learners (92.7% and 92.4% respectively, see

also Table 5.7) suggest that the participants are exercising the sense of community in which interaction among them are mostly self-generated or that the online activities were very much shaped by the facilitators setting tasks and initiating discussions to which the learners had to interact. The results of the analysis across the groups suggest rather than cultural homogeneity and some of the observable uniform patterns of responses and interactions may be due to the inputs of facilitators. We shall explore some of these findings in more detail in the qualitative part of this section.

Qualitative Analysis: interactivity patterns

As we have already noted, Interactivity Pattern 3 (learner to facilitator) is the most frequent pattern overall, with 40.3% of all the posted messages. Even though the distance learning approach requires learners to be independent, resourceful and disciplined, the learners of BEL 100 e-PJJ seem to be quite dependent on their facilitators. In addition facilitators may also be asked to deliver tasks as dictated or it may be the nature of the tasks that made the learners to be teacher-dependent. Typical messages which show this dependence include messages suggesting discussion topics (in response to a request from the facilitator), responding to requests from the facilitator for answers to exercises, enquiring about technical problems and other administrative matters (see also Examples 5.39 to 5.44)

Example 5.39

any topics puan ??

Example 5.40

Madam, besides studying the module and make revision for the past year examination question papers, what should I do before this coming seminar?"

Example 5.41

i've read the BEL100's evaluation and we will having a speaking test with 10% marks.i just want to know is it the speaking test is the same like public speaking or what?"

It is also common for learners to ask their facilitators if their contributions are acceptable, on the right track and as requested by the facilitator.

Example 5.42

I'm also already submit my assignment to your email today. Please tell me the mistakes for the correction.

Example 5.43

Puan, i already send my assignment to you last friday and i hope you receive it.

Example 5.44

Just to ask something. It's not necessary to ask you if you have received our assignment, right? Correct me if I wrong.

Evidence for a high degree of dependence on the teacher comes from messages where the learner asks the facilitator how to proceed in carrying out the tasks, or for advice on how to improve their language skills. They rely too much on the facilitator to guide them for example in their writings and discussions (see Examples 5.45 to 5.46). The data extract also shows that there are possibilities that the environment may influence the identified interactions. In addition to the learners' attitude of being dependent on their facilitators, this might be as much a result of the behaviour of the facilitators; allowing the learners to post every single query that they may have.

Example 5.45

sorry puan, i didn't understand what do you mean collect data from that guys which you already gave above... is't i must going to subject which we are discuss on that day you are given...please!

Example 5.46

puan, can you help me with my english coz i feel my english is too bad compares ohters. hope you can gide me with better ideas.

As Aylward (2003) and Venter (2003) state in their work, the Asian culture of learning is teacher-centred, with a focus on the transmission of content. Therefore it requires time for these learners to move towards a more flexible and autonomous mode of learning. This is also applicable to the facilitators. We may also expect that facilitators who are so in tune with the traditional way of learning will be resistant to new ways of learning and teaching. Second, learners were dependent on the facilitator for receiving reassurance that they were on the right track in carrying out tasks. In addition facilitators were also probably checking and making sure that the learners are carrying out tasks as requested. Third, learners were dependent on the facilitator for advice on how to structure their learning. Fourth, there is also a possibility that the facilitators allow such attitude and behaviour by the learners. Facilitators may prefer learners to confirm any possible queries or activities that they have regarding the course. This behaviour may influence the learners to be dependent on the facilitator. Learners found to be referring explicitly to the messages sent by their facilitator. The learners typically address their facilitator explicitly when responding or commenting to a message from the facilitator. Culturally this would be appropriate in any ethnicity background. Acknowledging a person with a greeting or salutation and then to proceed with responses or comments is a common act as this would be considered as showing respect towards others.

As we might expect, the facilitators in our study typically give a general response or comment to the whole group rather than to individual learners. Instructions to carry out a task are usually sent to all the learners and if one learner posts a query, feedback to this query will most probably be directed by the facilitator to all learners. It is here that one will be able to

see the facilitator carrying out his or her duty by supporting all the learners and encouraging a student-centred style of learning instead of initiating one-to-one tutorials. This is demonstrated in the results for Pattern 1 (facilitator to group), which accounts for 8.1% of all the posts. If we compare this figure with the frequency of 3.4% for Pattern 2 (facilitator to individual learner) we can see that the facilitator directs his/her messages to the whole group more than twice as often as he/she directs messages to individual learners (see Table 5.10). The results for the patterns of interaction among the facilitators and learners show that there is some autonomous interaction occurring (12.5% for Pattern 5, learner to learner), but most of the interaction between learners and facilitators involves the facilitator in one way or another. This supports the hypothesis that facilitator support is considered central in the learning process in this situation.

5.4.4 Learners' interactivity according to Interactive dimension categories

Table 5.11 shows the frequency of the three different categories of the Interactive dimension of our coding scheme. A message may be '*Explicitly Interactive*', '*Implicitly Interactive*', or not interactive at all ('*Independent Statement*').

Table 5.11: Frequency of use of different categories of Learners' Interactive dimension

	Interactive dimension categories			
Group	Explicit	Implicit	Independent	Total
1	38 (70.4%)	13 (24.1%)	3 (5.6%)	54
2	112 (64.7%)	49 (28.3%)	12 (6.9%)	173
3	139 (62.1%)	64 (28.6%)	21 (9.4%)	224
4	168 (68.0%)	50 (20.2%)	29 (11.7%)	247
5	147 (46.1%)	142 (44.5%)	30 (9.4%)	319
6	186 (50.0%)	112 (30.1%)	74 (19.9%)	372
7	304 (67.0%)	127 (28.0%)	23 (5.1%)	454
8	490 (52.5%)	402 (43.1%)	41 (4.4%)	933
TOTAL	1584 (57.1%)	959 (34.5%)	233 (8.4%)	2776

5.4.4.1 Explicit interaction

Quantitative Analysis: Explicit interaction

As we can see from Table 5.11, the number of statements or messages recorded as '*Explicit Interactions*' is 1584 units (57.1% of the total). The frequency of '*Explicit Interaction*' (57.1%) is nearly twice as much as the frequency of '*Implicit Interaction*' overall (34.5%). This might reflect characteristics for direct personal contact, with learners either agreeing or responding precisely with others after earlier statements by others have been made.

There is a low percentage of '*Independent Statement*' in Groups 1, 2, 7 and 8. One might wish to argue that a high proportion of '*Independent Statements*' indicates a lack of social cohesion in the group, since it means that there are lots of messages being posted which do not relate to previous messages and which are not responded to. Conversely, a low proportion of '*Independent Statements*' in this case suggests a high degree of

collaboration/social cohesion in the groups. We know from other evidence that this is the case in Group 8.

We have already noted that Group 1, on the other hand, is distinctive in terms of the interaction patterns in the group; in particular there were, untypically, no instances of Patterns 4 (learner to whole group) and 5 (learner to learner). This suggests that this group is particularly much less active and interactive with each other than the other groups, and that they respond only through the intervention of the facilitator. There is further evidence of this in Table 5.11, where we see that the frequency of *Explicit Interaction* for Group 1 is higher (70.4% of all posts) than in any other group. We explore this point further in the next section.

Qualitative Analysis: Explicit interaction

We have noted that the learners of Group 1 tend to use explicit interaction more than the learners in other groups. If we look at the data for Group 1, it suggests that this is because a high proportion of the messages posted by the learners are addressed explicitly to the facilitator and relate to the submission of assignments. We might again characterise this style of interaction as reflecting a less active and interactive interaction which may be a consequence of the task design of the course or tasks already prepared by the facilitator as such. Besides that learner tends to agree or respond when others (learner or facilitator) have proposed an earlier statement.

The respectful attitude which Malays display towards others which we have noted in our learners is commonly evident in our data. According to Ibrahim (2002), for example, the Malays hold strong to their custom of being polite, respectful and careful with their words when communicating at all times either with their superiors or peers. These occurrences are demonstrated in learners' data extracts in Examples 5.47 to 5.49.

Example 5.47 (Learner to learner)

i'm agree with you Mr. A.N., there must be a lot af techniques to improved our English that we can get from Puan A(lecturer) and reading a lot of English books. If we think that we can do, that's mean we can...yes we can. (Group 2)

Example 5.48 (Learner to learner)

I aggrry with Miss N.Fh., Mr.A.N and Miss N. At the moment it seem that everybody like to watch sci-fiction movies. It will be our advantage to organize movie show to raise funds for our club. Maybe some of the movies that our commitee have mentioned can be consider for the show, but i think why dont we start with new released movie such as War of The World, Fantastic Four or maybe Stealth. All those title could attrack students to come. Offcourse we hope those movie can give some good and exciting stories to the students.(Group 4)

Example 5.49 (Learner to learner)

Ms A.z,if i may suggestion is, if you want to improve your grammar, you can buy a grammar exersice book. (Group 5)

5.4.4.2 Implicit interaction

Quantitative Analysis: Implicit interaction

The total number of *Implicit Interactions* is 959 (34.5% of the total), slightly less than half of the total number of *Explicit Interactions* (57.1%). From the analysis what is found is that majority of the learners' contributions are examples of either *Explicit or Implicit Interactions* portraying that the learners were responding to each other's comments, or to the request or comments of their facilitators. The attitude of the participants in this study in terms of interaction displays a more straightforward attitude in means of manner or language instead of an indirect manner. This again may possibly be the preferred attitude or behaviour among the participants, of responding with other participants explicitly.

Qualitative Analysis: Implicit interaction

Examples 5.50 to 5.53 show some of the extracts of *Implicit Interactions* among a few learners. The topic is ways of improving their English language skills. The sequence of responses from the learners' examples was originally written in the Malay language so these examples are translated from the Malay (the translation is printed in italics and surrounded by angled brackets).

Example 5.50

firstly sorry to say, i type in malay language... mcm mana nak mahirkan dlm memahami penggunaan nouns dan grammer.. sy masih tidak dpt memahami comulatives nouns. harap dapat beri bantuan pada yang lemah bahasa inggeris ini.. *<how do I improve my usage of the nouns and grammar. I still do not understand cumulative nouns. Hoping someone would be able to assist those who are weak in English here.>* Group 5

Example 5.51

hi, bahasa inggeris ni sebenarnya macam bahasa yang lain jugak perlukan kemahiran. tapi terlebih dahulu u mesti faham asas-asas nahu dan praktis. *<English is actually like any other languages which requires expertise but initially you must understand the grammar and practice.>* Group 5

Example 5.52

tq ler... sy bkn nyer tak tahu sgt cuma tak berapa mahir.. tak mahir dengan grammer.. so mcm mana nak mahir kan inggeris dan senang lah sikit paham bila lecture mengajar.. *<Thank you...not that I don't know only not expert in it, especially the grammar. So how do I improve my English and it would be easy to understand the lecturer when she is teaching.>* Group 5

Example 5.53

Hi. Ramai boleh memahami english, ttp apabila tiba bab penulisan esei dsb, penggunaan 'grammer' dan nahu yang betul dlm english masih lemah termasuk saya sendiri. Kene buat banyak latihan. <So many can understand English but when it comes to writing essay and the rest, the usage of the correct grammar in English is still the weakness including I myself. Have to do a lot of exercises.>
-PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT- Group 5

In the original online transcripts it can be seen that most facilitators usually direct their messages to all the learners in general unless the situation requires them to be specific to a particular learner as the following examples suggest.

Example 5.54: Learner-posted message

Assalamualaikum Pn,
I just download and print paper PY 2004. We need to do question 1,2 & 3(section A:grammer) and submit to pn by 31st July 05. Can I submit this assignment before that date? My question is, the assignment submit to you by your email as attachment? Group 3

Example 5.55: Facilitator's response

Walaikumsalam,
Ref: Assignment 1
I've stated in the subject above ^^ (Subject: Assignment 1 - PYQ15 BEL100 March 2004 posted 26-Jul-2005 08:47 AM) that :-
"Since the answer key is also provided in the library, you DON'T have to submit your answers to me"
The instruction :-

"HOWEVER, I need you to complete this assignment by 31st July '05 so that if you have any questions to ask regarding what was being tested, you can do so then"means that AFTER you have done the questions, you can check the answers in the ANSWER KEY that is also provided in the library. Should there be any questions /queries about that section, we can have the discussion AFTER that date as I assume that everyone would have completed it by then.
As I've also said that "I TRUST that you will not look at the Answer Key BEFORE attempting the questions on your own" , I hope everyone will adhere to this rule of thumb =)Group 3

This may be a case of responding to a particular learner's query which is more personal in nature but most queries directed to the facilitator will elicit a response to the

group. Learners make commentaries or give responses to their peers' statements or questions indicating specifically to which message the contribution is referred. Again what can be gathered here is that the learners interact more with each other on a one-to-one basis or the flow of interactivity occurs more frequently in a direct manner; either learners responding directly or commenting directly to prior messages.

Example 5.56 demonstrates a case of an implicit interaction. Learner 1 (L1) posted a message regarding a problem that she was facing in a general manner. This was responded by a Learner 2 (L2) in Example 5.57 without addressing L1 but engaging into the communication indirectly and supplying simple information of how to solve the problem. L2 response was actually monitored by some other learners in the group and was responded with an acknowledgement of "thank you" by a third learner (L3) in Example 5.58 which is also a common gesture practised among the participants of the online discussion groups.

Example 5.56: Message posted by L1

Asalamualaikum wkt & Very good afternoon to everyone! How's the progress of assignment given by Puan A? I have to retype everyting, I save my document under M.softword file then only I do answer all the questions. My PC cannot copy text under pdf file. Anyone outhere have the same problem with me? (Group 3)

Example 5.57: Responding to above message by L2

pdf file can only be open if you have acrobate reader in your computer and for your informations, there no need for us to send the PYP to Puan A, as what i know, we have to print it, do the excercise and discuss the PYP between us at this forum and Puan A will guide us. She also will discuss this PYP on our second seminar. (Group 3)

Example 5.58: Responding to L2 by L3

Thank you for your info.....(Group 3)

5.4.4.3 Independent Statement

Quantitative Analysis: independent statement

This type of interaction refers to messages that are related to the topic of discussion but are neither an answer nor a commentary and do not lead to any further messages. ‘*Independent Statement*’ accounts for 233 messages (8.4% of the total, see Table 5.11). The category ‘*Independent Statement*’ in which the skills of imparting and conveying ideas, occurs less frequently than ‘*Explicit*’ and ‘*Implicit Interactions*’ suggesting a less active and constructivist approach to learning. Bauer, Chin and Chang (2000) found that Asian learners generally are reluctant to express their own ideas because they believe that they do not have sufficient knowledge to have an opinion, or that their opinions and ideas are of less significance than those of their superiors. However, this again can be the cause of how activities and tasks are being shaped and facilitators’ input in the online interaction activities.

Qualitative Analysis: independent statement

Learners who posted Independent Statements show that they are capable of expressing their ideas but not as part of an interaction with other learners or the facilitator, otherwise it would not be in this category. Evidence of this can be seen in a thread that required the learners to carry out a discussion on topics provided by the facilitator (see Example 5.59). In this example, the facilitator asks the learners to respond to the topic which she has provided with the title “Discussion 1” (Example 5.59 to Example 5.62).

Example 5.59

Facilitator: Topic Name: Discussion 1
Subject : The Welfare club is planning to show movies at the hostels to raise funds. As a member of the Planning Committee, suggest the type of movies you think students would enjoy watching.

Please respond to the above ^^ situation on this forum. You may use some of the points given below:

- *Science Fiction / Fantasy
- **exciting and imaginative
- **usually involves aliens or creatures from other worlds
- **examples of such movies

You may add your own points & reasons. The closing date for this discussion is Sunday 31st July '05.

Example 5.60: Learner 1 response

I suggest that we should show a Science Fiction or a Fantasy movies because its would be very exciting and imaginative when they seing this movie. For examples we can show Spiderma, Batman, Species 2 or Starship Troopers. Usually this movies involves alians or creature from other worlds. The sound effect also would make it more interesting to see through this movies.

Example 5.61: Learner 2 response

As a member of Welfare Club to give raise and fund to our students, I would like to suggest some of movie quite famous and good respond from the viewers. We can choose type of the movie in Science Fiction or in the Fantasy. For example; Star Wars, Terminator, Lord Of The Ring or Madagascar. It is very exciting and good imagination. Usually some of the movie has story about the aliens or creatures from the other world. For example; War Of The Would, Cone Head and Aliens

Example 5.62: Learner 3 response

A good type movie during a show at the hostel will attract more students to watch it and raise more funds. As such,as a member of the Planning Committee I would like to suggest that we show science fiction or fantasy movie so that student would enjoy watching it until the end. Those movies are like 'Star Wars','Lord Of The Rings, 'War Of The World', 'Species' and many others. This type of movies consist of aliens or creature from other world and very exciting to watch. It is also imaginative movie since the characters and story line is unthinkable to many of us.

It is a natural expectation that, with this kind of topic, there would not be an exchange of messages regarding the topic among the learners. The topic given did not generate any

discussion among the learners or intervention of facilitator. Aylward (2003) suggests, in a successful distance education environment, the interaction that takes place should be participatory, not straight lectures and an ‘active learning’ approach should be present. There should be interventions from the facilitator to reinforce or guide the discussion and lead the learners to provide explicit or implicit interactions. Instead, in this thread, the learners’ contribution is limited to providing their suggestions on the topic. They rarely contradict or expand other learners’ ideas and suggestions. This to the learners is part of their learning task because what was asked from them was a response to the topic. The ideas contributed did not lead to any extended discussion of the topic. This is a common occurrence in our data when topics of discussion given did not generate discussion. Interaction among the learners does not lead to further discussion but only a submission of one statement after another. The interaction becomes a one-way communication, in which learners are carrying out the activities online but the only interaction that is taking place here is the submission of assignments. Obviously it is the design of the task that is influencing the pattern of this type of interaction.

This study found that the contribution of messages in the online discussion was predominantly an accumulation of general information exchange, contribution of assignments and course related statements. It appears that the learners value the facilitator’s messages above all others and facilitators are providing learning topics that do not generate interactions. If at any time there should be an intervention from the facilitator, it is possibly considered to have a high priority by the learners. In other words, interaction in learning usually takes place with the presence of the facilitator. At times the learners seem to be confused or failing to understand the contributions of others. There are very few instances of critical commentary on other learners’ contributions (see Examples 5.63 to 5.65). Given that

the learners are ‘novice’ users of English they may (understandably) be reluctant to comment on other students’ contributions.

Example 5.63: Learner N

i dont have an idea and i dont understand Puan said about this assingment..

Example 5.64: Learner H responding to Learner N

I think for the assignment we should start with BEL 100 bcoz it's only 4 simple sentences & we can refer from our SIM for the example..plus we also can refer to any dictiory.We should not wait until date line to submit our BEL 100 assingment.

Example 5.65: Learner A responding to Learner H and N

To all my classmates.actually i do not know where and which assignment to start first. I don't know what you are talking about.

As Henri (1992) puts it the analysis of interactivity is central to an understanding of the levels of collaboration among learners, of their active participation in the construction of knowledge, and of their skills in structuring information. The analysis of the interactivity dimension does not indicate that learners who do not participate actively in the forum discussion will not gain knowledge from the lessons discussed. Some learners may read all the messages but not respond. On the other hand, it’s possible that some learners may not be reading any of the posted messages. Only the facilitator is able to identify learners who don’t participate from class register. Yet there are other learners who read everything and also respond to every entry. It is therefore the responsibility of the facilitator to monitor the activity of all learners and to provide support and direction where necessary.

Aylward (2003) suggests that teachers of online distance education courses play a crucial part in producing an active interaction session because meaningful online interaction will not take place without skilled facilitators who can offer well designed tasks that promote

interaction. According to Salmon (2004), at the stage where learners are actively interacting the learners are actually developing a variety of strategies for dealing with potential information overload. Some learners who are not familiar with interacting as a group will fail to adapt to the situation and begin to disappear due to frustration and irritation. Salmon (2004) also stresses that those learners who are already well organized will not experience the problem of information overload and time management. This emphasizes the importance of facilitators recognizing the flow of the interaction among the learners and of maintaining a good balance of ‘*Explicit Interaction*’, ‘*Implicit Interaction*’ and ‘*Independent Statements*’. This can be done by encouraging and supporting a collaborative online community to maintain the success of the learning process and to acknowledge the productive strategies that the learners used when interacting in an online forum discussion.

5.5 The social presence dimension

The element of Social Presence refers to the ability of the participants to project their personal characteristics into the community (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000). If the learners are able to present themselves to the online community as ‘real people’, social cohesion within the group will be enhanced, which may promote a higher level of reasoning. This occurs when the participants in the community, the learners and facilitators, communicate openly and as much as possible making the learning environment they are experiencing as ‘home’. According to Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) the primary function of the Social Presence element is its function in supporting the Cognitive Presence. Indirectly it helps to promote the development of critical thinking in the community of learners.

5.5.1 Theoretical foundation: social presence dimension

The Social Presence dimension in this study incorporates three categories: *emotional expression*, *open communication* and *group cohesion*. These three categories can be recognized when the learners are expressing their feelings confidently, sharing their learning experiences in the discussion forum, encouraging, supporting and complementing each other where necessary and collaborating actively among themselves.

According to Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) emotions are inseparably linked to motivation and perseverance in carrying out a task. *Emotional expression* is indicated by the abilities and confidence of the learners to express their feelings about their educational experience. In Garrison et al's model, the indicators for *emotional expressions* are 'expression of humour' and 'self-disclosure'. Humour is often used as a conversational strategy and includes jokes, teasing and humorous phrases. These expressions are believed to bring people together in a community especially in an online community where participants are at a distance. It is important that participants use a lot of humour and self-disclosure when communicating online to allow a feeling of non-challenging and pleasant environment.

Self-disclosure refers to the sharing of participants' feelings, attitudes, experiences and interests. Participants sharing their personal feelings with the rest will feel at ease with the new learning environment and this will also encourage others to be more open, have the sense of trust towards each other and to begin to provide a lot of support to others who are in need of help when it comes to learning. As stated earlier in this chapter, the significance of self-disclosure in the *bumiputera* culture is not the same as it is in Western culture. In the *bumiputera* culture, *self-disclosure* may mean sharing of personal feelings but the feelings that are shared are not only feelings where participants are experiencing sorrow, unhappiness, anxiety or any other feelings that display unpleasantness. Feelings that are shared in the *bumiputera* culture can be both unpleasant and pleasant feelings. Feelings that can be shared

among the participants may be either happy or sad. According to Mohd.Salleh (2005), the sharing of personal feelings among Malays engages closely to emotional expressions and cautious relationship building. Malay will feel able to share emotions with others when he/she begins to feel comfortable with them, but the sharing of personal feelings should never be too revealing either among friends or even family members (Mohd.Salleh 2005). The exchange of personal information among the participants of an asynchronous online group can help reduce the feelings of social isolation and thus contribute to the formation of a closer-knit group.

The second category of Social Presence is *open communication* and the indicators for this category are ‘mutual awareness’ and ‘recognition’. Mutual awareness actually assists participants of the online discussion group to shape their learning activities collaboratively. Interpersonal support, encouragement and acceptance of the sender of the initial posted message among the participants of an online group will build and sustain the relationship among them. The acknowledgements of other participants receiving an individual message and explicitly responding to the content of the message engender a sense of respect for the individual contributions and this is partly an evidence of mutual awareness.

The second indicator for the category of *open communication* is ‘recognition’. This is usually found in messages that explicitly express gratitude or agreement as well as complimenting and encouraging others. In a face-to-face situation we identify this form of communication in the form of non-verbal cues such as smiles, eye-contact and other body language, but this type of communication is not possible in an online environment. According to Feenberg (1989), the paucity of these kinds of expressions causes social insecurities. It is therefore important that responses such as commending other participants’ work/ideas, actions or comments contribute to affective, behavioural and cognitive learning (Rourke, Anderson, Garrison and Archer 2001). From this perspective, support given to

participants in the forum is the tool that encourages the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationship among the participants. Complementing, acknowledging, and expressing appreciation are ways of communicating in an asynchronous online environment.

The final category of Social Presence is *group cohesion* which represents the activities that build and maintain a sense of group commitment. The two indicators are 'building cohesion' and 'a sense of belonging'. These two indicators are vital in sharing personal meaning among the online participants. The communication among the participants builds participation and feelings of empathy. When the learners see themselves as part of a group rather than as individuals (as evidenced, for example, by the use of 'we', 'us', or 'our' when addressing the group), critical inquiry and the quality of the discussion are being facilitated and optimized. In our data, the participants build these feelings by inquiring about each other's health, making remarks about the weather, holidays spent or by commenting on other petty matters.

Statements or messages which contribute to the Social Presence dimension are crucial for the success of the programme. If the learners find it exciting and personally satisfying to participate in the online learning community they will remain active for the duration of the interactive session in which social presence is then a direct contributor to the success of the learning process (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000).

Table 5.12: Analytical model: Social Presence (Adapted from Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000)

Categories	Definition	Indicators	Examples
Emotional Expression	The ability to express feelings confidently regarding the learning/educational experience.	Sense of humour Self disclosure	“Hi my head is gonna blow off...” “Hi, hello, my friends....” “I am so happy to be in this class.” “I am weak in English, can anyone help me?”
Open Communication	Respectful and reciprocal exchanges among the participants.	Mutual awareness Recognition	“Hi Kak Sas, thanks for your advice.” “Good luck to you too my friend.” “Well done, Azree and good luck in your exam.”
Group Cohesion	Activities that build and sustain a sense of group commitment.	Building cohesion Sense of belonging	“We will work together, don’t worry.” “Let’s help each other by...”

Source: Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000

5.5.2 Analytical method: social presence dimension

In analyzing the social presence dimension, three categories were used to categorise the social content of the posted messages: *Emotional Expression*, *Open Communication* and *Group Cohesion* (see Table 5.12). The indicators in Table 5.12 derive from the work of Rourke, Anderson, Garrison and Archer (2001) and Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000).

At this point, we recall that the categories in the Social Presence dimension of our model are not mutually exclusive. One message unit may be multi-functional and may contain evidence of social elements of more than one category. Different functions are identified by breaking the message into segments. Example 5.66 provides an illustration of

the multi-functionality of messages in the Social Dimension. The message has been divided into segments (marked with '/'), and each segment is labelled with its function printed in italics):

Example 5.66

A'kum Miss I...	/	<i>Recognition - Open Communication</i>
Thanks for your advices that		
you gave to us....	/	<i>Recognition-Open Communication</i>
I'm also got the same problem		
with other friends	/	<i>Self-disclosure-Emotional expression</i>
and we needs more help from		
you expecially, to improve		
in this language.		<i>Self-disclosure-Emotional Expression</i>

The first step in the analysis is to decide if a message contains evidence of the Social Presence dimension. Then the analyst has to decide whether there is evidence for more than one category in the Social Presence. The message is then coded as exhibiting one or more of the categories in the scheme. The coding process is equivalent to using a checklist. If and when the message contains an indicator of any of the categories under the Social Presence dimension, the column for that category is marked with a “1”. A message may have one, more than one, or all of the categories ticked. The frequency of each category is then calculated and expressed as a percentage of the total number of messages posted by the group. Table 5.13 shows the frequencies for each group of the categories in the Social Presence dimension. Through the frequency data, the study will proceed with explanation and actual examples of whether socially oriented statements in the discussion forum help participants to increase their level of communication in learning, establishing group cohesiveness or affective support plays a big or small role in the learning process.

5.5.3 Results and interpretation: social presence dimension

Quantitative analysis: social presence dimension

Table 5.13 shows the frequencies of messages under the different categories of the Social Presence dimension. The category in the Social Presence dimension that occurs most frequently is *Open Communication* with 63.3%. *Emotional Expression* is present in 14.4% of the messages and *Group Cohesion* is present in 3.3%. There are substantial differences in the frequency of Social Presence categories in the eight groups. *Group Cohesion* does not occur at all in the messages for Groups 1, 2 and 7. There is, in fact, no evidence of any of the three categories of Social Presence in the message for Group 1. This is because the messages posted in Group 1 transcripts were restricted to the submission of assignments and the content of all the messages was course-related.

Table 5.13: The number of message segments that have been coded within a group containing evidence of Social Presence, expressed as a percentage of the total number of message segments that have been coded within a group (raw frequencies and percentages)

Group	Social Presence		
	Emotional Expression	Open Communication	Group Cohesion
1	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
2	12 (6.9%)	140 (80.9%)	0 (0.0%)
3	49 (21.9%)	176 (78.6%)	11 (4.9%)
4	32 (13.0%)	215 (87.0%)	7 (2.8%)
5	60(18.8%)	180 (56.4%)	5 (1.6%)
6	27 (7.3%)	111 (29.8%)	3 (0.8%)
7	39 (8.6%)	355 (78.2%)	0 (0.0%)
8	182 (19.5%)	589 (63.1%)	66 (7.1%)
TOTAL	401 (14.4%)	1766 (63.6%)	92 (3.3%)

If there is no evidence of *Group Cohesion* this can be interpreted as a lack of shared feelings among the participants and a lack of a sense of belonging among the members of the group, however, they may still be aware of being respectful towards each other, have mutual exchanges among themselves and may still have the ability to express their feelings in their learning experiences. Group 2 and 7 are two groups that demonstrate this, which has no evidence of *Group Cohesion* but with the existence of *Emotional Expression* and *Open Communication*.

The results also show that Group 4 recorded the highest percentage of the *Open Communication* indicators with 87.0% of the total for the group. Group 6 has the lowest use of *Open Communication* with only 29.8% (excluding Group 1 which has no evidence of *Social Presence* as stated earlier). The remaining groups have fairly high percentages with more than 50.0% of the messages showing evidence of *Open Communication*. This high proportion of *Open Communication* (compared to *Emotional Expression* and *Group Cohesion*) is consistent with Rourke, Anderson, Garrison and Archer's (2001) results which higher percentages of mutual awareness and recognition in the *Open Communication* category. *Open Communication* indicators are commonly and easily communicated in an asynchronous online environment with participants acknowledging, encouraging and complementing each other (Rourke, Anderson, Garrison and Archer 2001).

The results for the *Emotional Expression* category indicators range from 0% (Group 1) to 21.9% (Group 3). The Group 1 messages did not have any indicators of humour or self-disclosure in them since, as we know, they were all concerned with course-related assignments. The frequency of *Emotional Expression* indicators in the other groups was not strikingly high. In this study the frequency of indicators such as humour and self-disclosure seems to be comparatively low. In Rourke, Anderson, Garrison and Archer's (2001) research, humour and self disclosure yielded the lowest number of indicators found in the messages.

Participants in a discussion forum with academic objectives have a tendency to focus on topics relevant to the main purpose of the forum. In a research study carried out in 1997, Eggins and Slade (cited in Rourke, Anderson, Garrison and Archer 2001:14), showed that the use of humorous banter, joking and teasing allowed differences between the participants to be perceived as non-serious and non-challenging.

The high frequency of *Open Communication* indicators found in all the posted messages of the online forum discussion indicates the awareness of the learners of the presence of their peers. They recognize each other's contribution by giving feedback almost explicitly to the contributor of previous messages with words of compliments, encouragements, support and recognition (see Examples 5.67 to 5.69). In face-to-face communication the equivalents of these expressions of interpersonal manners are easy to recognize: smiling, eye-contact and other use of body language.

Example 5.67

As'kum Pn N,
I'll try to do those assignment. How about the answer for
assignment 4, can we discuss?..to all friends, practise makes
perfect..(Group 7)

Example 5.68

Assalamualaikum
Hi good afternoon...
First of all I want to introduce my self.My name is R.M.R just call
me R.I'm working at Celcom.Yesterday I was sit infront from 2nd row
under the air-cond infront A.I wear black t-shirt & brown tudung.
Hopefully all of u can help me to improve my english...:) Nice to
meet all of you...(Group 8)

Example 5.69

hi all, congratulations to all of us. firstly i want to advice u
all including myself please dont be shy to study, practice and
speak in english. that's the way u can improve the skill. i myself
will also face the same problem but we have to struggle and study
smart. good luck to all of us. Tq (Group 7)

Qualitative analysis: social presence dimension

The *Emotional Expression* category in this study covers indicators such as ‘humour’ and ‘self-disclosure’. Both indicators that have been identified in the messages recorded a total of 401 instances. The *Group Cohesion* category with indicators focusing on participation and understanding of each other’s feelings recorded a total of 92 instances. The difference in the percentages of the two categories *Emotional Expression* (14.4%) and *Group Cohesion* (3.3%) are low in comparison to *Open Communication* (63.6%). Expressing emotions and working together in understanding each other’s feelings can be daunting to some learners. The display of emotion in public, regardless of whether the emotions are positive or negative, is not regarded as appropriate in *bumiputera* culture. Revealing personal feelings and sharing expressions of mutual trust with someone is possibly a behaviour confined to the family or to people who are very close. Describing her own experience, Mohd.Salleh (2005) mentions that not much information can be revealed from just communicating with Malay, there are too many hidden messages which are intertwined in the body language and background of the speaker. In other words, there is less exchange of conversation when expressing an emotion instead the actions of the individual will convey the messages. However, there are instances of personal revelation in the data. In these examples (see Examples 5.70 to 5.71) the learners reveal their feelings and show empathy towards each other (the messages were written in Malay language, so a translation is provided):

Example 5.70

```
hai....
assalamualaikum
Ms I. saya student AC100 part 1.saya ada masalah besar ni,oleh
kerana semua subjek AC100 dalam BI, so saya nak tanya macam mana
nak memperbaiki bahasa inggeris ni.Apa yang perlu saya lakukan.help
me MS I
```

<Ms I. I am a student of AC100 part 1. I have a big problem,

because all my AC100 subjects are in English, so I would like to ask you how to improve my English. What should I do, please help me MS Isme> (Group 5)

Example 5.71

assalamualaikum..s
saya pun cam awk gak.lemah english.but i try the best...bukan per..saya kalau bole nak tamat diploma nie walau apa jua sekali pun...so, saya cuba pada diri saya dengan bercakap dgn public in english.tapi campur2 ler heheh..and then baca buku, majalah atau surat khabar english.smbil2 tuh tgk kamus..insyaallah u akan berjaya.take time...yang penting jgn malu..cakap jer wpun broken..masa dlm kelas mis i pun i paham x paham jer...tapi leh gak ikut sket2...sume org dtg uitm nak blaja..so, kita dtg nak blaja termasuk english...i pilih uitm nie pun sbb nak improve english yg lemah...per2 pun slmt blaja n berkenalan

<I am also like you. Weak in English. But I try my best...not for any reason..if possible I would like to finish my diploma course for whatever reason...so, I try and talk to the public in English. But I mix the language heheh..and then read books, magazines or newspapers in English. Besides that I look up the dictionary..with God's help you will be successful. Take time...the most important thing is not to be shy...just talk even if it is broken...during miss i's class I sometimes understand and sometimes I don't...but I can still follow a little bit...everbody comes to uitm to study..so, we come to study including English subject...I chose uitm because I want to improve my English which is weak...whatever it is happy studying and nice knowing you> (Group 5)

For learners to share their experiences and feelings show that the learners are able to open up not much but a little, reduce their feelings of social isolation and allow others to help them whenever necessary. The online forum discussion environment offers the learners an environment that is non-threatening and away from the pressure of the face-to-face situation. One of the eight learners interviewed (Learner R) felt that her peers had helped her feel at ease and had supported her in learning even though the response is rather slow. Learner R commeted:

Example 5.72

When one student does not understand about this, many students will give response about it and help to get resources, giving opportunity to all of us to support and encourage each other. My friends are very helpful and you feel glad you have the support.
(Interview with Learner R, translated from Malay)

Socio-cultural factors such as fear of being laughed at by others or their own peers may hinder positive learning experiences (Aylward 2003). This contradicts the non-threatening situation of an online forum as stated earlier when compared to the face-to-face situation. However, among these learners who are especially not confident of themselves when it comes to learning, only one learner (Student W) out of eight interviewed in this study felt that communicating in the online forum was uncomfortable. Learner W remarks are as follows:

Example 5.73

In seminar, we can communicate directly. In the case of online, we have to wait and sometimes we are shy to ask. With online, everybody can read what we ask. So, I am shy to ask certain questions. Like it or not I have to wait for the seminar, or go directly to the lecturer after the seminar. I feel a bit shy going online.
(Interview with Learner W, translated from Malay)

Collaboration between the learners and facilitators and among the learners is necessary to support the development of knowledge construction either online or face-to-face. The act of collaboration and the confidence which is engendered through the sharing of educational experiences, the feelings of discovery, the feedback that genuinely shows concern and mutual support - all these contribute to the creation of a better learning environment.

5.6 The Cognitive presence dimension

According to Garrison and Anderson (2003) the aim of an educational community of inquiry is always associated with intended cognitive outcomes. The cognitive presence means helping the analysis, structure and confirmation of meaning and understanding within a community of learners through sustained discussion such as the forum.

5.6.1 Theoretical foundation: cognitive presence dimension

The four categories of Cognitive Presence dimension are: (i) *Triggering Event*, (ii) *Exploration*, (iii) *Integration*, and (iv) *Resolution*. In this study, the course-related messages analysed in this dimension involve learners questioning each other and their facilitators, exchanging information, discussing topics, trying to solve issues wherever applicable. The presence of the cognitive dimension is a necessary element for higher levels of thinking and learning to take place when participants of an online discussion collaborate and it is perhaps the closest structuring process to an outcome indicator for educational purposes. This is so since critical thinking and the achievement of higher levels of learning are assumed to be the goals of education.

5.6.2 Analytical method: cognitive presence dimension

The first step in the analysis of the Cognitive Presence dimension was to develop a set of categories, descriptors and indicators in order to code the messages. The categories, descriptors and indicators, with examples of each of the four categories are presented in Table 5.14. Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000)'s specifies four stages or phases as stated earlier in this chapter: (i) *Triggering Event*, (ii) *Exploration*, (iii) *Integrating*, and (iv) *Resolution*. Each step has an associated descriptor: (i) 'evocative', (ii) 'inquisitive', (iii)

‘tentative’, and (iv) ‘committed’ respectively. These descriptors are adjectives that describe the process that is occurring in the particular phase.

For example, the first phase (*Triggering Event*) is a phase where questions are being asked so a sense of confusion is considered ‘evocative’ and ‘inductive’. In this study the act of submitting an assignment is also considered to be a socio-cognitive process, since when the learners are responding to a task or taking up an issue to be discussed a cognitive process of conceptualization takes place. This is when the learners begin to pose problems and submitting what is required of them bearing in mind that it is a part of an educational experience.

Table 5.14: Analytical model: Cognitive Presence (Adapted from Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000)

Categories	Descriptor	Indicators	Examples
Triggering Events	Evocative	Recognizing the problems, a sense of puzzlement, assignment submission.	“Miss gave us a assignment for this week, anyone knows what it is?” “What I need to prepare before seminar?”
Exploration	Inquisitive	Information exchange, discussions/suggestions of ambiguities.	“We're not pronounce 'USED' by 'U'sed but 'Y'used. Please correct me if I'm wrong.”
Integrating	Tentative	Connecting ideas, create solutions to problems in discussions.	“I agree because we must practice often then we improve.” “Why don't you try and use the thesaurus to find words.”
Resolution	Committed	Indirectly applying new ideas and critically assessing solutions.	“Improving in English is vital...there has to be an effort...assign some work to test you.”

Source: Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000

The cognitive or problem-solving nature of this phase is demonstrated frequently in the data transcripts of this study. The second category *Exploration* refers to a search for relevant information and this is reflected in an ‘inquisitive’ mode of expression. The third phase *Integration* exemplifies the construction of possible solutions and therefore this phase is characterised as ‘tentative’. The final category is *Resolution* which is a process of critically

assessing ideas derived from specific instances and, therefore, “represents a commitment to a solution and deductively testing its validity” (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer 2000).

The next step in the analysis is to apply the codes to the data. In order to do this, the unit of analysis must be determined. In this study we use the message as the unit of analysis for the Cognitive Presence dimension. The messages which are considered for coding in this stage of the analysis are those which were categorized earlier as ‘Course Related’ messages in the Participative dimension (see Table 5.8). The content of these messages primarily relates to the course and/or to learning processes.

5.6.3 Results and interpretation: cognitive presence dimension

Table 5.15 shows the frequencies of messages which are categorized as being in the category of ‘Course-Related’ messages.

Table 5.15: Messages with Cognitive Presence as a percentage of all messages posted within the group

Group	Social messages	Course related messages with Cognitive Presence	Total number of messages posted in a group
1	0 (0.0%)	54 (100.0%)	54
2	28 (16.2%)	145 (83.8%)	173
3	44 (19.6%)	180 (80.4%)	224
4	95 (38.5%)	152 (61.5%)	247
5	78 (24.5%)	241 (75.5%)	319
6	116 (31.2%)	256 (75.5%)	300
7	76 (16.7%)	378 (82.3%)	454
8	443 (47.5%)	490 (52.5%)	933
Total	880 (31.7%)	1896 (68.3%)	2776

Quantitative analysis: cognitive presence dimension

The total number of messages that were categorised as ‘course-related’ (and thus as being relevant for the analysis of the Cognitive Presence dimension) is 1896 (68.3% of the total). Table 5.15 shows the percentage of messages with Cognitive Presence as a percentage of all messages. Group 1 records the highest proportion of course-related messages (100%) and Group 8 records the lowest (52.5%). There is a very substantial difference in the total number of messages posted by these two groups. Group 1 has the smallest number of messages (54) and Group 8 has the highest number (490).

Table 5.16: Frequency of different categories of Cognitive Presence dimension in 8 BEL 100 e-PJJ groups (raw frequencies and percentages)

Group	Cognitive				Subtotal
	Triggering Events	Exploration	Integrating	Resolution	
1	47 (87.0%)	7 (13.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	54
2	77 (53.1%)	38 (26.2%)	27 (18.6%)	3 (2.1%)	145
3	94 (52.2%)	51 (28.3%)	31 (17.2%)	4 (2.2%)	180
4	80 (52.6%)	43 (28.3%)	26 (17.1%)	3 (2.0%)	152
5	125 (51.9%)	71 (29.5%)	41 (17.0%)	4 (1.7%)	241
6	123 (48.0%)	79 (30.9%)	52 (20.3%)	2 (0.8%)	256
7	166 (43.9%)	129 (34.1%)	79 (20.9%)	4 (1.1%)	378
8	156 (31.8%)	185 (37.8%)	147 (30.0%)	2 (0.4%)	490
TOTAL	868 (45.8%)	603 (31.8%)	403 (21.3%)	22 (1.2%)	1896

Table 5.16 indicates the distribution of the messages where there is evidence of the Cognitive Presence. Group 1 has the highest percentage of *Triggering Events* (87%) and low percentages of *Exploration* (13%), *Integrating* (0%) and *Resolution* (0%). As we have already observed, the transcripts show that Group 1 used the forum mainly to submit their assignments, and, as we have indicated, the submission of assignments is triggered by a request from the facilitator. Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) stated that in the

Triggering Event category, the teacher plays an important role in communicating learning tasks that become *Triggering Events*. The socio-cognitive process of constructing knowledge among the Group 1 participants only takes place through the teacher's role in triggering assignments. The forum is not used for exploration, the integration of shared meaning, or for testing or defending solutions to any problems discussed. The submission of assignments does not require the learners to suggest ideas nor to give conclusions, neither do the learners have to incorporate other learners' ideas in their submitted assignments (the assignments allocated in the Group 1 forum consisted mostly of sentence-level exercises).

Table 5.16 shows that Group 8 recorded the highest proportion of Cognitive Presence in the *Exploration* category with 37.8% of the total. This group also shows the highest proportion of *Integrating* messages (30%), but, like the other groups, a low proportion of *Resolution* messages. This suggests that the learners of Group 8 are involved more in information exchange, asking questions and brainstorming ideas, but they do not succeed in reaching the *Resolution* stage. Ideas contributed by the learners according to Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000), will move from something which is more of private individuals' ideas to a more social exploration of ideas.

The proportion of messages in the *Integration* category for all groups is 21.3% but for the *Resolution* category the proportion is low (1.2%). It is worth considering why the frequency of the *Resolution* stage should be so low. In the *Integration* phase, according to Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000), participants need time for reflection in order to process information. Salmon (2004) in her study stated that once the participants have processed information with time and developed through various stages to reach the advanced stage of critical thinking and cognitive development, they will be expected to apply the new knowledge in the *Resolution* phase. The final stage of Resolution has obviously not been reached by the learners in this study just yet. Again this is another indication that the findings

of what the *bumiputera* learners experienced are not dissimilar to those already familiar to online learning in very different cultural contexts.

Qualitative analysis: cognitive presence dimension

As we have seen (Table 5.16) the first phase, *Triggering Event*, of the Cognitive Presence model is the most frequent. This is not surprising since ‘asking questions’ reflects a sense of confusion among the learners, where they pose problems regarding the course and/or learning process. The transcripts show that the learners frequently ask questions which focus on intended educational issues or learning experiences as seen in Examples 5.74 to 5.76.

Example 5.74

A'kum Pn S,
I just want to know, any assignment we net to pass up in next seminar? I really afraid miss up again? (Group 8)

Example 5.75

How long it will take to download the acrobate reader into PC?
(Group 3)

Example 5.76

Assalamualaikum, Puan.
Thank you, Puan. Now I understand the different between present continuous and past continuous tense. How about chapter four? In Bahasa Discourse Markers is Penanda Wacana. For example walaupun, tatkalala, justeru and others. How to know the different Discourse Markers of using in English. For example Instead and in addition. It look like same meaning. I've done the exercise C of chapter four and the correct answers only 4/10. It very bad.
Thank you, Puan. Take care. (Group 4)

Confirmation of this observation comes from the interviews with the students. Five of the interviewed students confirmed that they would ask their facilitator or peers when they encountered an educational problem. The interviews also show, however, the query was usually addressed to the facilitator, since they trusted that the facilitator would provide good

results. As said by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000), in the *Triggering Event* phase, the teacher will come up with a well-thought-out activity to ensure full engagement from the learners so as to remain focus on the skill of intended educational outcomes.

The second category, *Exploration*, recorded a total of 603 instances in the Cognitive Presence messages. This is 31.8%, nearly a third of the total. At this stage learners are free to brainstorm their ideas, share their insights and contribute relevant information wherever necessary. According to Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000), early in this phase, learners are required to comprehend the nature of the problem, and then move to a fuller exploration that is relevant to the problem by asking questions, brainstorming and exchanging information. Group 8 records the highest number of *Exploration* messages with 185 instances (37.8%). The transcripts shows that the facilitator of this group often encourages the learners to explore ideas that can help others by suggesting interesting, simple and everyday topics which are familiar to the learners. An example is shown in Example 5.77.

Example 5.77

Hello Darlings
Help me. With all the Megasale activities all over the country, my pocket really need a break. Can you suggest a cheap but fun activity to do during holiday weekend? Not the working Sunday that I have to meet you. (group 8)

Examples 5.78 to 5.79 show some of the contributions made by learners when given a topic for discussion. It will be noted that some of the contributions from the learners are not very challenging. The learners derive many ideas but the ideas are not well elaborated, facts are at times listed and not well defined. The learners tend to contribute many different ideas in a message. The ideas may not be constructive or challenging but this is how the learners sustain heir participation in the course, through the exploration of simple topics, and interaction with others.

Example 5.78

Causes for students stress an anxiety. One of the reasons came from family problem for example parents are too busy with their works and their never care and give enough love to their children. another reasons is the students may have financial problems such as they came from a poor family and didnt have enough money to buy books or to pay school fees. Almost 60% problems comes from family background. (group 4)

Example 5.79

i also have suggestion about what pn.s can do during the holiday weekend... pn.s can do gathering with ur friend or ur familys to share something about ur experience or something interesting...pn.s also can introduce ur children 2 ur friend...maybe long time no see...hehehe it can promote corporation among ur parents or ur friends (Group 8)

The third stage (*Integration*) accounts for 403 (21.3%) of the Cognitive Presence messages and the fourth (*Resolution*) accounts for 22 messages (1.2%). This leads to a clear conclusion that the learners have mastered the skills of integrating meaning from the ideas generated and applying the new knowledge to a new issue. The learners need time for reflection in order to process information. As Kanuka and Garrison (2004) state, in the *Integration* phase the learners are required to think carefully and engage in critical dialogue; most of the learners in our study have difficulties in doing this. In this study, the Cognitive Presence messages tend not to offer ideas and suggestions, perhaps because the learners are afraid that their ideas may be turned down. Bauer, Chin and Chang (2000) found that learners of Asian background were more reluctant to impart their ideas because they believed that as learners their level of knowledge did not allow them to express an opinion, or they felt that their opinion would not be valued by the rest of the participants especially their facilitators. These expectations are due to the learners' educational cultural system. As Dzakiria and Walker (2003) suggest, Malaysian learners' conceptions of learning have been formed by

their experience of years of the Malaysian educational system which doesn't encourage freedom, critical thinking or independent learning. Although these habits in the Malaysian educational culture are changing, the process of change is slow and will not affect the learners in our study since, as adults, their habits and attitudes have already been formed by their experience of the Malaysian educational system.

The explanation as to why messages in the *Resolution* stage are so infrequent could also be attributed to the facilitators. The facilitators are mainly oriented towards the instructional design aspect of the course. There are minimal online purposeful tasks and the content of the activities provided have minimal encouragement of critical response from the learners. The transcripts show that the facilitators have tendency of providing activities that require the learners to list their ideas and opinions and lesser activities which encourage the learners to experiment or to solve problems by collaborating with the other participants. Examples 5.80 to 5.81 below illustrate the point.

Example 5.80

This week's topic of discussion is: (Group 7)
Your friend was walking home alone after a class when a thief on a motorcycle snatched her bag. She lost her wallet, mobile phone and identity card. Give her some advice on how to prevent this incident from happening again. You may use some of the points given below in your discussion (Please elaborate on each of the points given)

- do not walk alone down lonely roads
- do not carry many valuables in your bag
- do not stop to talk to strangers

Example 5.81

Check in your SIM these reading skills and you need to master them for exam purposes as well as for your daily reading.

- a. Contextual clues
- b. Reference skills
- c. Main ideas and supporting details

Read up on these items and we shall have further discussion before the second seminar in september. (Group 7)

5.7 The Teacher presence dimension

Having a teacher available in a face-to-face learning situation is common where there is a knowledgeable person to lead and guide the learners towards the appropriate direction. Likewise in an online discussion forum, active leadership from a facilitator and well designed activities are crucial for the success of a programme.

5.7.1 Theoretical foundation: teacher presence dimension

In this study, each group has its own facilitator to manage, build understanding and direct the learners according to the requirements of the syllabus. The presence of a teacher in the forum discussion is necessary to structure the concerns of the learners regarding the contents of the syllabus, to assess the learners when necessary, and to establish the time frame for assignment or assessments. The facilitators are expected to plan both before and after the forum discussion making sure that the flow of the discussion runs with no difficulties and maintaining an effective collaborative community of inquiry. The role of the facilitator in establishing the learning process are drawing in less active learners, reinforcing appropriate contributions, and facilitating and focusing the discussion. The teaching responsibility of the facilitator in the forum discussion is also clear. The facilitator may not be required to give a lecture or substantial quantities of information but it is the responsibility of the facilitator to guide the learners in acquiring the knowledge disseminated in the lessons.

The participants in our study have a common understanding of the conventional roles of the teacher and the learner through their shared experience of the same educational system. But these conventional roles do not apply to the world of distance learning and the learners need to adapt to their roles as independent learners and not to rely much on the roles that are familiar to them in the conventional educational settings. It is also important for the teachers to realize that they need to create, maintain and control a learning environment in a virtual space positively and successfully (Aylward 2003).

In this section, we provide descriptions of the three categories of Teacher Presence: (i) *Instructional Management*, (ii) *Building Understanding*, and (iii) *Direct Instruction*. We also explain the indicators that are used to identify these categories.

5.7.1.1 Instructional management

The category of *Instructional Management* refers to the designing and planning of the course. These processes are quite time-consuming compared to their equivalents in face-to-face teaching if knowledge in designing and planning activities for an online course is not established. It is the responsibility of the facilitators of the course to plan the course thoroughly so that it is manageable by the learners in terms of the cognitive load and the time available for carrying out the tasks which they assign. One of the responsibilities of the facilitator is to make sure that the learners are aware of the course requirements. The learners need to know that 80-90% of their study time should be devoted to self-study using the Self-Instruction Module. They need to be able to access past examination papers from the e-library and they need to know about times for seminar meetings, tutorials and face-to-face discussion and about the scheduling of the course tests and examinations.

The category of Teacher Presence also requires the facilitators to prepare activities that require the active participation of all learners either individually or as a group with the

negotiation of time lines. The facilitators are also expected to provide useful tips for the learners on their use of learning strategies in the online environment, to give feedback appropriately, to model appropriate etiquette and to make sure that teaching instructions and activities are clearly delivered so that learners are aware of the explicit and implicit learning goals and activities in which they participate (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison and Archer 2001). Facilitators have to be very clear and organize in delivering tasks. This may help the learners to be more motivated and to take a more active part in the learning experience (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison and Archer 2001). Table 5.17 demonstrates the indicators of the Teaching Presence. These are closely based on Anderson, Rourke, Garrison and Archer's (2001) coding scheme for the Teaching Presence dimension.

Table 5.17: Indicators for Instructional Management Category in Teacher Presence Dimension

Indicators	Examples
Determining curriculum	"This week we will be discussing..."
Designing methods	"I am going to divide you into groups, and you will debate..."
Establishing time parameters	"Please post a message by Friday..."
Utilizing the medium effectively	"Try to address issues that others have raised when you post"
Establishing netiquette	"Keep your messages short"

Source: Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000

5.7.1.2 Building understanding

The category of *Building Understanding* is recognised when a facilitator creates and maintains the interest of learners in active learning and provides support and encouragement in the process of building an effective group consciousness. This is achieved by sharing meaning, identifying areas of agreement and disagreement, and generally attempting to reach consensus and understanding (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000). In facilitating the BEL 100 e-PJJ course, the facilitators are expected to be online with the learners, either in synchronous or asynchronous mode, for a minimum of forty-eight hours a week to answer their queries as per instruction of the teaching requirement, to give feedback and to comment on the learners' messages, to allocate tasks that encourage group collaboration and discussion, to make sure that all learners are actively participating in given tasks and to ensure that not just a few learners are dominating the forum discussion room. The facilitators in this study are also expected to assess the effectiveness of the process. The commitment expected from both facilitators and learners is very substantial. However, whether full commitment is practised by all facilitators is uncertain. By western standard the commitments of facilitators mentioned earlier are likely to have impact of facilitation on learners. According to Anderson, Rourke, Garrison and Archer (2001), this category coincides with a lot of the behaviours identified in the larger model of social presence as the teacher is an active member of the community of inquiry that has a responsibility for establishing and maintaining the discourse that produces and supports social presence in the learners' educational experience. The indicators to code the category of *Building Understanding* are as in Table 5.18.

Table 5.18: Indicators for Building Understanding Category in Teacher Presence Dimension

Indicators	Examples
Identifying areas of agreement/disagreement	“Joe, Mary has provided a compelling counter-example to your hypothesis. Would you care to respond?”
Seeking to reach an understanding	“I think Joe and Mary are saying essentially the same thing.”
Encouraging, acknowledging, or reinforcing learners’ contributions	“Thank you for your insightful comments.”
Setting climate for learning	“Don’t feel self-conscious about ‘thinking out loud’ on the forum. This is a place to try out ideas after all”
Drawing in learners, prompting discussion	“Any thoughts on this issue? Anyone care to comment”
Assess the efficacy of the process	“ I think we are getting a little off track here”

Source: Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000

5.7.1.3 Direct instruction

This is third category in the dimension Teacher Presence. This category reflects teacher’s role in exercising rational and academic leadership and in making sure that knowledge of the subject is fairly distributed to all the learners. In a traditional classroom, the teacher is expected to provide learners with clear guidelines and other instructional support. In a virtual classroom such as those in this study, the teacher is expected to communicate the content of the subject by giving direct instructions and by using his/her pedagogical expertise in maintaining the participation of the learners in the online learning environment. Usually what is expected of an online learning teacher is to facilitate learning, that is, to move away from a teacher-centred mode of instruction to a student-centred mode. As Salmon (2004) indicates, the role of an e-moderator or facilitator is to give opportunities to the learners to explore information rather than to ask the learners to accept what the teacher determines.

There should be very little teaching in the conventional sense of instructing. The online learners should be able to construct knowledge on their own through interacting with other learners, and under the guidance of the facilitator. What the facilitator should be doing is to provide *Direct Instruction* by interjecting comments, referring learners to other information resources, and organizing activities that encourage the learners to construct the content in their own minds and personal context. Table 5.19 presents the indicators that are used by Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer (2001) in identifying *Direct Instruction*.

Table 5.19: Indicators for Direct Instruction Category in Teacher Presence Dimension

Indicators	Examples
Present content/asking questions	“Bates says...what do you think”
Focus discussion on specific topics	“I think that’s a dead end. I would ask you to consider....”
Summarize discussion	“The original questions was...Joe said...Mary said...we concluded that... We still haven’t addressed...”
Confirm understanding through assessment and explanatory feedback	“You’re close, but you didn’t account for...this is important because...”
Diagnose thoughts/ideas	“Remember, Bates is speaking from an administrative perspective, so be careful when you say....”
Inject knowledge from other sources	“I was at a conference with Bates once, and he said... You can find the proceedings from the conference at http://www... ”
Responding to technical concerns	“If you want to include a hyperlink in your message, you have....”

Source: Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000

5.7.2 Analytical method: teacher presence dimension

Teacher Presence, as stated by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000), is essential in balancing the cognitive and social needs of the learners consistent with meeting the intended educational outcomes. The following categories are used to code the messages in this dimension: (i) *Instructional Management*, (ii) *Building Understanding*, and (iii) *Direct Instruction*. The indicators used in the coding scheme derive from Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer (2001). The unit of analysis adopted here is the message, and the analysis focuses on messages posted by the facilitator.

5.7.3 Results and interpretation: teacher presence dimension

Table 5.20: Frequency of different categories of Teacher Presence dimension

Group	Teaching			Total of Facilitators' posted messages
	Instructional Management	Building Understanding	Direct Instruction	
1	4 (50.0%)	4 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	8
2	12 (54.5%)	2 (9.1%)	8 (36.4%)	22
3	7 (20.6%)	20 (58.8%)	7 (20.6%)	34
4	8 (44.4%)	10 (55.6%)	0 (0.0%)	18
5	18 (42.9%)	12 (28.6%)	12 (28.6%)	42
6	32 (44.4%)	31 (43.1%)	9 (12.5%)	72
7	48 (60.8%)	20 (25.3%)	11 (13.9%)	79
8	28 (39.4%)	39 (54.9%)	4 (5.6%)	71
TOTAL	157 (45.4%)	138 (39.9%)	51 (14.7%)	346

Quantitative analysis: teacher presence dimension

Table 5.20 shows the frequency of the three different categories of Teacher Presence. The *Instructional Management* category accounts for the largest number of messages, with a total of 157 (45.4% of the total). *Direct Instruction* accounted for the smallest number of messages with 51 (14.7% of the total). *Building Understanding* accounted for 138 messages (39.9%).

The raw frequencies of posts made by the facilitators can be grouped into three clusters. The first cluster consists of Groups 1, 2 and 4, with a total number of facilitators' posts 8, 22 and 18 respectively. The second cluster consists of Groups 3 and 5 with 34 and 42 posts respectively and the third cluster consists of Groups 6, 7 and 8 with 72, 79 and 71 posts respectively.

Group 1, 2 and 7 recorded above the 50% marked for the *Instructional Management* with 50%, 54.5% and 60.8% respectively. Group 3, however, recorded the lowest at 20.6%. This indicates that the facilitators of Group 1, 2 and 7 have spent more time organizing and designing the course with planned activities according to the course requirement and the manual used in the course.

In the category of *Building Understanding*, the group that recorded the most is Group 3 with 58.8%, followed by Group 4 with 55.6% and Group 8 with 54.9%. This group recorded above the 50% marked but what is striking is that Group 2 recorded only 9.1%. This suggests that the facilitator of Group 2 may have lesser time maintaining the interest and motivation of students in active online learning

The final category of Teacher Presence, *Direct Instruction*, recorded the lowest frequency at 51 messages (14.7% of the total). Groups 1 and 4 had no messages in this category at all. This may be due to the absence of the facilitators interjecting comments, referring learners to other information resources, and organizing activities that encourage the

learners to construct the content in their own minds and personal context in the online environment.

Qualitative analysis: teacher presence dimension

The results reported above suggest that the facilitators of this course are seen to be carrying out the tasks given to them as a teacher, performing the duties of a teacher following the course requirement. As Anderson, Rourke, Garrison and Archer (2001) said teachers have difficulty in transposing their role as teachers to an online environment, where they are forced to be learners themselves in learning to design effective learning activities. Most of the facilitators in this study provide the learners with exercises and activities in the forum room. The messages in the transcripts for Group 7 recorded the highest raw frequency (48) and also the highest proportion (60.8%) of messages from the facilitator. The facilitator of this group established a habit of determining the learners' weekly activities and systematically gave them a time-frame for submitting their activities. The facilitator also provided the learners with grammar, reading, writing and discussion activities. The learners were required to post their work to the forum room or submit it to the facilitator via e-mail or to bring the work with them to the face-to-face seminars.

Some facilitators provided the learners with grammar formulae, reading and speaking rules and many other language tips. See the Example 5.82 below:

Example 5.82:

I hope you'll find this useful. Please take note of the use of the action "TO EAT" in its various time of occurrence:

Grammar - Tenses - Examples

Past Tenses - To Eat

Time Now = 12.15

Past Continuous - "He was eating his breakfast at 7.30."

Past Simple - "He ate cornflakes for breakfast."

Past Perfect Simple - "He had already eaten breakfast when he got to work."

Past Perfect Continuous - "He had been eating his breakfast for 2 minutes when his boss phoned."

VERBS

Helping Verbs are used with main verbs to create verb phrases:

can could may might shall should

will would has have had shall have will have do does did must (Group 7)

The facilitator of Group 2 recorded the second highest percentage of messages in the category *Instructional Management* (12 out of a total of 22, 54.5%). The transcript data show that the facilitator of this group had similar characteristics to those of the Group 7 facilitator. The Group 2 facilitator provided the learners with a time frame for the completion of the activities and also reminding them of their netiquette. This facilitator was less involved than the Group 7 facilitator in helping the learners reach understanding, encouraging their responses and drawing less active learners in to participate in the learning environment. Below is an example of the Group 2 facilitator's message:

Example 5.83:

Hi everyone! (Group 2)

Glad to see that most of you have logged into the forum. Please be reminded that you have to use English everytime when you write a message in the forum. That's how you can make use of the language.

So, how's your writing assignment progressing? Hope every one can submit it on time. Ok. I'll see you later in the forum.

Reminder:

Please use English every time you post messages on the forum. Please do not post other materials not related to your BEL course. The forum is consistently being observed by the UiTM Coordinators.

Thank you.

The lack of *Direct Instruction* in the facilitators' messages is striking. Inspection of the transcripts shows that the facilitators concentrated on helping the learners with assignments and online activities and in setting the curriculum, and did not involve themselves in the direct provision of instructional support to the learners. Examples of *Direct Instruction* would include instructing the learners to refer to other resources besides the one that the facilitators have given, directing the focus of discussion to certain issues, assessing the learners' comment and giving explanatory feedback. The lack of *Direct Instruction* is especially obvious in Groups 1 and 4 with zero frequency of the *Direct Instruction* indicators. The facilitators of these groups were clearly giving instructions to their learners about their group exercises to be completed, however they did little to share their knowledge with the learners. As Anderson, Rourke, Garrison and Archer (2001) recommend, the teacher must be able "to set and communicate the intellectual climate of the course and model the qualities of a scholar". The facilitators in these groups were mostly interpreting the course materials, selecting key points and telling learners what to learn most of the time (see Examples 5.82 and 5.83). As found there was no inclusion of instructing the learners to refer to other resources besides the one given, no help in directing the focus of discussion to certain issues, no assistance in assessing the learners' comment and giving explanatory feedback.

All three categories of Teacher Presence play a part in the learners' knowledge construction in the online discussion forum. Apart from the factors reflected in the Teacher Presence dimension there are many other factors that affect the number and content of the facilitators' posts and hence their contribution to teaching presence in the online forum discussion. Some of these factors may be related to the facilitator's expertise in handling the medium of instruction or the facilitator's teaching style and dedication. Other factors that may be relevant include the work load given to each facilitator, the number of learners the facilitator is responsible for and the absence of training in handling the medium.

Results obtained in the Teacher Presence dimension can be corroborated with results found in the interviews with the facilitators. Of the seven facilitators interviewed, six of them represented their role in the online forum as that of a teacher, similar to the role of the teacher in the face-to-face situation. An extract from the interview transcripts provides an illustration of this perception (see Example 5.84).

Example 5.84

Facilitator: There won't be respond like may I try Miss, what is the topics sentence, unless I provide them with activities after that, like I tell them they have to write 5 topic sentences based on the given topic and at the end of the day again they will ask, is this evaluated. You know, it is quite frustrating because students kept asking that question, is there any relevance with our on-going assessment. It is actually very tiring for the facilitators because we have to explain everything online and try to make things simple. So it's actually at the end of the day it becomes longer and read it again and we wonder ok will they be reading it or not, because we need to provide explanation and all and it's actually not easy.

5.8 The cultural dimension

It is now widely accepted that the online learning environment is a powerful domain in which new approaches and practices can make significant contributions to learning. However, the processes of learning need to be well facilitated and it may be necessary to take cognisance of possible cultural factors when designing the content and delivery of the programme.

5.8.1 Theoretical foundation: cultural dimension

What may work in one learning environment that involves the latest technology may not work in another because the effectiveness of technology depends on how it is used. Culture is a property of the group, but not all individuals in a group share the same beliefs.

Rather, the bounds of acceptable behaviour in a particular situation will be, to some extent, flexible and negotiable.

5.8.2 Analytical method: cultural dimension

The purpose of this section is to identify the possible influence of cultural factors on distance learner attitudes and behaviours using Hofstede's model as an analytical framework in the learning process of an asynchronous online environment. In a study of 50 countries focusing on value differences as part of national cultures, Hofstede (1984) found that Malaysian culture falls in the category of having the following cultural characteristics: (i) large Power Distance (the superior is in power), (ii) low Individualism (loyalty towards society), (iii) weak Uncertainty Avoidance (high tolerance and less aggressive), and (iv) Masculine society (a male-dominant society).

The method used to assess Cultural Presence is content analysis as practiced in the previous dimensions in this study. The first step in this study in using this procedure was to develop a set of categories which could be used for coding the data. As we have indicated, we have adopted Hofstede's (1994) four dimension model of cultural values as a foundation for the analysis. The next step is to develop a set of indicators for each category of the Cultural Presence dimension. The indicators were identified using the definition of the categories as the starting point. According to Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000), indicators are concrete examples of how each category manifests itself in the forum transcript data. The four dimensions of cultural differences identified by Hofstede (1984) with definitions and sets of indicators for each category are presented in Table 5.21.

**Table 5.21: Analytical Framework of Study for Cultural Presence
(adapted from Hofstede’s Four Cultural Dimension 1984, 1991)**

Dimensions	Definition	Indicators
Power Distance	Behaviours which are represented as being influenced by the degree of acceptance of power inequalities.	Students’ learning is the teacher’s task. Respect towards teacher. Formal classroom culture. Effective teaching is a teacher centred activity.
Individualism/Collectivism	Behaviours which are represented as being influenced by the preference of working in a group or as an individual.	Learners tend to be passive (individualism) or active when learning in a group (collectivism). Dynamic discussion groups-almost every participant taking part in discussion (collectivism) or static discussion groups-participant in group not taking part in discussion except for a few regulars. No need to maintain face or maintaining face is important.
Masculinity/Femininity	Behaviours which are represented as being influenced by mutual solidarity and low open competition.	Masculinity more challenging (gender roles clearly distinct). Femininity more caring (gender roles overlaps).
Uncertainty Avoidance	Behaviours which are represented as being influenced by maintaining strict codes of behaviour and beliefs.	Uncomfortable with ambiguity Seeks certainty.

Source: Hofstede 1984, 1994 adapted

The next step is to determine the unit of analysis. The unit of analysis for this dimension is the message-level unit. Adopting Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer’s (2001) procedure of message unit analysis, this study also allowed for the possibility that a single message might display characteristics of more than one category. Therefore, each message was coded as displaying or not displaying one or more indicators of each of the four categories of cultural presence.

As the work of Anderson, Garrison and Archer (2001) shows, the use of non-mutually-exclusive categories (a ‘checklist’ scheme) in a coding scheme has a number of advantages. The number of coding decisions is pre-determined as the product of the number of categories and the number of messages. In this case, there are four categories in the coding scheme, so there are four decisions to be made for each message. The use of the message (an easily identifiable unit) as the unit of analysis helps in establishing the reliability

of the scheme. Another advantage is that it is not necessary to take into account the relative importance of different indicators in determining the relevant coding category: all that is necessary is a ‘yes’/‘no’ decision: if there is evidence for one of the four categories, that category is judged to be present. Finally, the totals for each category are easily determined and the percentage of total postings for each group that contains each of the Cultural Presence categories is divided by the total number of messages posted by the group to obtain the percentages.

5.8.3 Results and interpretation: cultural dimension

Table 5.22: Frequency of the 4 categories in the Cultural Presence dimension (raw frequencies and percentages of total)

Gp	Cultural Presence					Sub-total (% of total)	Total no. of posts
	Power Distance (Large)	Collectivist/ Individualist (Collectivist)	Femininity/ Masculinity (Masculine)	Uncertainty Avoidance			
				Weak	Strong		
1	18 (33.3%)	6 (11.1%)	8 (14.8%)	0 (0%)	3 (5.5%)	35 (64.8%)	54
2	80 (46.2%)	10 (5.8%)	24 (13.9%)	0 (0%)	4 (2.3%)	118 (68.2%)	173
3	109 (48.7%)	17 (7.6%)	22 (9.8%)	1 (0.5%)	9 (4.0%)	158 (70.5%)	224
4	103 (41.7%)	29 (11.7%)	24 (9.7%)	0 (0%)	3 (1.2%)	159 (64.4%)	247
5	127 (39.8%)	67 (21.0%)	25 (7.8%)	2 (0.6%)	0 (0%)	221 (69.3%)	319
6	124 (33.3%)	53 (14.2%)	21 (5.6%)	38 (10.2%)	8 (2.2%)	244 (65.6%)	372
7	167 (36.8%)	67 (14.8%)	26 (5.7%)	53 (11.7%)	9 (2.0%)	322 (70.9%)	454
8	314 (33.7%)	98 (10.5%)	93 (10.0%)	79 (8.5%)	13 (1.4%)	597 (64.0%)	933
TOT	1042 (37.5%)	347 (12.5%)	243 (8.8%)	173 (6.2%)	49 (1.8%)	1854 (66.8%)	2776

Quantitative analysis: cultural dimension

The frequencies of the four categories of the Cultural Presence dimension are set out in Table 5.22. As we have indicated, Hofstede (1994) categorises Malaysian culture and not solely the Malay culture as having the following characteristics: large Power Distance, low Individualism, high Masculinity and weak Uncertainty Avoidance. In the coding, each category was treated as a dichotomous variable, so that for each message, a decision was taken as to whether there was evidence of *Power Distance* (small/large), *Collectivism/Individualism*, *Masculinity/Femininity* and *Uncertainty Avoidance* (weak/strong). It is worth noting that there is only one column for *Power Distance*, that is large *Power Distance*, *Collectivism* and *Masculinity* but two columns for *Uncertainty Avoidance*, weak and strong, as see in Table 5.22 and the reason for this follows. For the first three categories, the data present a very clear picture. Where evidence exists for each category, it is always the same value. Thus, for example, for Group 1 there were 18 out of a total of 54 messages displaying evidence of *Power Distance*, and in each case, the value of this variable was ‘large’; there were no instances of ‘small’ *Power Distance*. The same consistency is observed in all eight groups. Similarly there were no instances of messages with evidence of *Individualism* in any of the eight groups; where there was evidence for the category *Collectivism/Individualism*, it was always *Collectivism*. The same is true for the *Masculinity/Femininity* category; where there was evidence for this category, it was always evidence of *Masculinity*. For the category *Uncertainty Avoidance*, on the other hand, there was not such a high degree of consistency. There were some messages which showed evidence of weak *Uncertainty Avoidance* and some which showed evidence of strong *Uncertainty Avoidance*. It seems that the learners of the BEL 100 course may not be quite so homogeneous in respect of *Uncertainty Avoidance* as it is in respect of the other three categories which is still insubstantial. Having said that, the proportion of messages with

weak *Uncertainty Avoidance* (6.2%) is more than three times that of strong *Uncertainty Avoidance* (1.8%), so on balance this study's data as analysed is consistent with Hofstede's analysis of the strength of *Uncertainty Avoidance* in Malaysian culture.

Observing the overall percentage of the categories identified, large *Power Distance* with 1042 indicators (37.5%) found in the posted messages recorded the highest. Next is *Collectivism* with 347 indicators (12.5%), *Masculinity* with 243 indicators (8.8%), weak *Uncertainty Avoidance* recorded 173 indicators (6.2%), and finally strong *Uncertainty Avoidance* with 49 indicators (1.8%).

Group 5 recorded the highest percentage in the *Collectivism* category of the Cultural Presence dimension with 21%, a good deal higher than the rest of the groups. The transcripts show that the learners in this group tend to interact more and to adopt a more collaborative mode of working than is evident in the other groups. Group 5 has 32 registered learners, 30 of whom are active in the forum (see Table 5.7). In addition, this may be an indication that the groups were not homogeneous and being in the same culture did not mean that they all manifested the same characteristics and processes. Where *Collectivists* is linked with more collaborative learning approaches it would be seen in much online learning literature as a positive feature.

There are no obvious group differences in the frequency of the *Masculinity* category. Where there is evidence of this category in this study's data, it is always for the *Masculinity* end of the continuum and this is true for all eight groups. The evidence may provide support for Hofstede's categorisation of Malaysian culture as being strong on *Masculinity*. However the evidence in the data is too small to represent the Malay ethnicity. The most striking differences in the Cultural Presence dimension are in the results for weak *Uncertainty Avoidance*, where we have Groups 6, 7 and 8 with substantial numbers of posts in the category, compared to Groups 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, with hardly any posts in this category. Groups

6, 7 and 8 have the highest number of posted messages and they also have a higher number of learners active online with 25, 57 and 81 learners respectively. The messages of Groups 6, 7, and 8 show more evidence of learners interacting and seeking help. There is also evidence from the interviews with learners from these groups, where five of the eight interviewees state that they often seek help when they are uncertain and this has helped them improve their language skills. All the eight groups however, do not record a high percentage in the *Strong Uncertainty Avoidance* category.

Qualitative analysis: cultural dimension

The evidence for Cultural Presence in the data shows that the participants displayed the characteristics of preference for working in a group, low levels of aggression, and a readiness to accept challenges. In addition, participants of this study are polite when they post messages. For example, participants will almost always acknowledge the sender of the previous message or greet the rest of the participants with a general salutation (see Example 5.85).

Example 5.85

A'kum Puan & friends, Me too happy to be in the class. Actually Puan that day Puan did mentioned about the Assignment through Forum. May I get a clear picture what kind of assignment is that?. Please advise. Thank you. (Group 3)
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As well as to careful observance of conventional greetings, the learners in this study are very prone to apologize for any behaviour which might attract criticism, for example when they are late in submitting assignments or even when they are seeking help. These culturally-determined behaviours are likely to have a positive effect in the online learning environment since they encourage learners to be more open and trusting in their interaction with their peers (see Example 5.86).

Example 5.86:

Asskum, Puan S
I,m so sorry bcoz didn't know about that assignment.Hope you can give me a time to finish. This week I'm quite busy for month end closing at my office. Can I pass it in coming seminar (Group 8)

There were a few instances in the data of strong *Uncertainty Avoidance* could be interpreted as evidence of being emotionally influenced, compulsive or a little aggressive. This kind of behaviour is, however, very rare, especially when a superior is present. Example 5.87 shows how a message with characteristics of strong *Uncertainty Avoidance* in Example 5.87 is still tempered with a sense of politeness and a concern to avoid giving offence.

Example 5.87:

I'm not saying that i hate to see female leaders, it just i would be proud to have more successful career women but not to take a place that suppose to be the mens... This is a frank opinion from me... (Group 4)

In relation to the category of *Power Distance*, we observe that there were 37.5% of messages of large *Power Distance* in the messages. There were no indicators of small *Power Distance*. Examples 5.88 to 5.89 provide an illustration of a message with large *Power Distance*.

Example 5.88:

Well done w.a. keep doing all the exercises in the "vision" book on nouns, verbs, prepositions, adjectives and adverbs (Group 4)

Example 5.89:

Hi Mis I
If you dont mind, I also need the extra book. Actually i'm looking now any books for my excercise and for my refference espcecially Grammar. If you can help to buy 1 for me too , It is very much appreciated. If not could you tell me what is the title and where to where is the place to find it. Thanks & Best regards (Group 5)

If we refer to Table 5.21, message 5.88 above may demonstrate an indicator of “effective teaching is a teacher centred activity”; it is the teacher’s task to encourage the learners to persist with their learning task and to ensure that learners are focused. Message 5.89 displays an indicator of respect towards the teacher, in which the sender greets the teacher even though the salutation is a non-formal one. The message proceeds with polite phrases such as “If you don’t mind...”, “If you can help...”, “very much appreciated”, and ends with an expression of gratitude and a polite salutation. Most of the posted messages that show evidence of large *Power Distance* consist of salutations and polite expressions. Learners are actually displaying an indicator of formal behaviour which would be appropriate in a face-to-face classroom context. Cultural attitudes and behaviours that involve respect towards superiors and others are likely to be displayed in any mode of communication making the environment more comfortable and acceptable.

The result for the next category, *Collectivism* versus *Individualism*, refers to the role of the individual and the group, and which interest prevails over the other. The results show that *Collectivism* is evident in 12.5% of the messages, whereas there is no evidence of *Individualism*. Participants are seen to be more comfortable working in a group, making it easier for them to communicate with each other even in a virtual environment. Surprisingly, Dzakiria and Walker (2003) found that Malays in a distance learning programme displayed an individualistic orientation towards learning. However, they also found that these learners commented that studying in groups is difficult for them because there is not enough time and also the structure of the programme involved is also an obstacle. On the other hand, in this study the situation is such that learners were able to communicate asynchronously virtually and at any time available to them. Lack of time and lack of access to computers can of course

be obstacles to acquiring knowledge in a distance learning programme. Example 5.90 provides evidence of the occurrence of *Collectivism* in our data:

Example 5.90:

If yes, friends, anybody who want the question's paper, it's my pleasure to email it to you.
Kindly provide me you email.Thanks!
To all beloved friends, study smart for the final exam and I wish all of us can make it with flying colours..Good Luck : (Group 7)

Results for *Masculinity/Femininity* show that indicators of *Masculinity* (8.8%) prevail over those of *Femininity* (0%). The *Masculinity* category refers to a society where gender roles are clearly distinct and where priority is given to male values. In our data, however, evidence for gender differences is not common. The participants of this study are active and dynamic because communication among the participants is encouraging. This is actually an indication that the learners can be comfortable to acquire knowledge in this kind of setting where the learners can avoid having to expose their weaknesses face-to-face with their peers and facilitators.

5.9 Summary of chapter

It was the aim of the study to examine the attitudes and behaviours of learners of a Preparatory English distance learning course (BEL 100 e-PJJ) offered at the Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia, and whether those attitudes and behaviours are influenced by their prior educational experiences and whether cultural factors may also have influence in the attitudes and behaviours of these learners. Hence, the study has adopted a framework which was adapted from Henri's (1992) model, with elements taken from Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) model and Hofstede's (1984) taxonomy of cultures.

Two dimensions from Henri's model were adopted and they are the *Participative* and *Interaction* dimensions. The *Participation* dimension is used to calculate the level of

participation among the participants in the form of usage statistics. The *Interaction* dimension is used to examine the information about the nature of the interaction and the patterns of interaction among the learners. Three elements which are the *Social, Cognitive and Teaching Presence* in Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) "*Community of Inquiry*" model were also adopted. For a worthwhile online learning experience, the presence of all three elements; *Social, Cognitive and Teaching Presence* is encouraged. The ability of the online participants to be engaged in an effective discourse, to collaborate with other learners as well as facilitators, to reflect and construct personal meaning, and also confirm mutual understanding are outcomes that are expected by all learners so as to fulfil their learning aspirations (Garrison and Anderson 2003). For the analysis of the role of culture, Hofstede's (1989) 4-D Model of Cultural Differences with dimensions such as *Power Distance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance*, was adopted to examine whether cultural factors were significant in influencing the attitudes and behaviours of the learners within the course.

5.9.1 Summary of Findings for Each Dimension

5.9.1.1 The Participative Dimension

From the analysis it can be summarized that the most messages posted online are course-related messages with facilitators actively intervening in discussion with a purpose and all groups participated actively. Table 5.8a and 5.8b indicate that the total of course-related messages posted (68.3%) by the facilitators and learners are higher as compared to the social messages (31.7%) messages. Table 5.7 shows that almost all learners in all groups participated actively online but that groups differed widely in terms of the activity level in terms of posting messages by these learners. The intervention of the facilitators found in the course-related messages online discussions sessions helps online learners to be more focused,

comfortable, having the feeling of acceptance and sharing prior experiences (as seen in Examples 5.18 to 5.21). The data also demonstrates facilitators guiding learners not to stray from the topic of discussion as to maintain group cohesion. Most of the online activities found in the online forum discussion data suggest that they were very much shaped by the facilitators setting tasks and initiating discussions to which the learners had to respond as in Example 5.18. This may indicate that the learners are dependent on facilitators to guide them, similar to their prior educational experience of a face-to-face traditional setting. Cultural factors such as respect towards the superior as Venter (2003) and Aylward (2003) mentioned in their studies may play a role in this situation. However, it can be argued that it appeared that learners' participation online was more strongly related to the learning tasks used within the course and the facilitator's style of intervention than to prior educational experiences and cultural factors (as in Hofstede's model).

5.9.1.2 The Interactive Dimension

The analysis highlights that it is likely that the nature of the activities provided by the facilitators has a significant influence on the high number of learners' active interactions either directly (Explicit) or indirectly (Implicit). Referring to Table 5.10a 7 5.10b, Pattern 3 (Learner to Facilitator) recorded the highest (40.3%) of interaction patterns among all the patterns of interaction giving an indication of learners being teacher-dependent. This may be due to their prior educational experiences of having guided by their teachers during their schooldays. Examples 5.39 to 5.46 offer evidence of learners seemingly being teacher-dependent. However, one cannot presume that the learners have an attitude and behaviour of being strongly dependent on the teacher. What need to be stressed here is that it is the nature of the activities provided by the facilitators that distinguish the flow of the interaction among the learners and sustain a good balance of '*Explicit Interaction*', '*Implicit Interaction*' and

'Independent Statements'. Group 8 which is significantly different among all the groups interacts more actively among themselves. This is probably due to the number of learners (refer to Table 5.7) and support from both facilitator and peer. The interactions in group 8 are likely due to the tasks given to this group which were very much shaped by the facilitator. These are required tasks which need to be fulfilled according to the course requirement and the facilitator initiating interesting discussions to which the learners had to interact. Examples 5.17 -5.18 indicated that it is likely that with the encouragement and intervention from the facilitators a collaborative online community can be created. The success of the learning process and acknowledging the productive strategies that the learners used when interacting in an online forum discussion would be an ideal method of instruction.

5.9.1.3 The Social Presence Dimension

In analyzing the Social Presence, three categories of the model are recognized that are not mutually exclusive; *emotional expression*, *open communication* and *group cohesion*. This is when the learners express their feelings confidently, share their learning experiences in the discussion forum, encourage, support and complement each other where necessary and collaborate actively among themselves. As to identify the categories in the forum messages indicators as seen in Table 5.12 were replicated from the work of Rourke, Anderson, Garrison and Archer (2001) and Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000). From the analysis it can be summarized that mutual awareness and recognition (open communication) as compared to emotional expression and group cohesion are most likely to be more common and easily communicated in an asynchronous online environment. This indicates that the online forum discussion environment of BEL 100 e-PJJ offers the learners an environment that is non-threatening and away from the pressure of a face-to-face situation. Indicators such as acknowledging, encouraging and complementing were demonstrated in Table 5.13 with more than 50 % across all the BEL 100 e-PJJ groups. These indicators are commonly

and easily communicated in any asynchronous online environment. From the examples in 5.67 to 5.73, *Open Communication* indicators found in most of the posted messages of the online forum discussion indicates that the learners recognize each other's contribution. They do this by giving feedback almost explicitly to the contributors with words of compliments, encouragements, support and recognition. This is consistent with Rourke, Anderson, Garrison and Archer's (2001) results which have higher percentages of mutual awareness and recognition in the *Open Communication* category. This high frequency of *Open Communication* indicators among the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners through the sharing of educational experiences, the feelings of discovery, and the attitude that genuinely shows concern, mutual support from both facilitators and their peers that may contribute to the creation of a better learning environment is in agreement with Dzakiria and Walker's (2003 p.27) argument.

5.9.1.4 The Cognitive Presence Dimension

The analysis of the Cognitive Presence dimension consisted of coding the messages with the categories, descriptors and indicators, with examples of each of the four categories as presented in Table 5.14 replicated from Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000). An overall result shows that the category of *Triggering Events* (45.8%) has the highest percentage and comparatively low percentages of *Exploration* (31.8%), *Integrating* (21.3%) and *Resolution* (1.2%). The results among all the groups indicate that facilitators' contribution/expertise in preparing purposeful tasks and content of the online activities may encourage critical responses in learners. For example in Table 5.16 Group 8 which has the lowest proportion of *Triggering Events* and the highest proportion of *Exploration* and *Integration* may indicate that this group was the least likely to be teacher dependent and the most oriented towards social construction of knowledge/group awareness and interaction. However, overall results

with less than 5% (refer to Table 5.16) indicated that none of the groups reached the *Resolution* stage. At the *Resolution* stage learners are expected to critically assess ideas, come up with solutions to problems discussed and also test their understanding. However, the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners are not seen to be doing these when they are online. There are indications that this may be attributed to the facilitators who are mainly accustomed to providing activities that require the learners to list their ideas and opinions. There were lesser activities which encourage the learners to experiment or to solve problems by collaborating with other participants. (example 5.80 to 5.81). The possibility of lacking of online activities that require the learners to suggest ideas, give conclusions and incorporate other learners' ideas in their contributions may very well be the cause of low percentages in the categories of *Exploration*, *Integrating* and *Resolution*. According to Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000), the online purposeful tasks and the content of the activities provided by the facilitators are crucial to encourage a critical response from the learners. Also to allow the learners to have the skills of applying new ideas and critically assessing solutions in issues discussed in their online forum discussion room.

5.9.1.5 The Teacher Presence Dimension

In balancing the cognitive and social needs of the learners consistent with meeting the intended educational outcomes, Teacher Presence, as stated by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000), is essential. The categories used to code the facilitators' messages in this dimension are *Instructional Management*, *Building Understanding*, and *Direct Instruction*. Again the indicators used in the coding scheme for this dimension derive from Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer (2001). Messages posted by the facilitator are the focus of the analysis. From the analysis it can be summarized that facilitators' skills in handling the distance course and medium of instruction, supporting learners with proper behaviour and

learning strategies so that learners are aware of the explicit and implicit learning goals and activities in which they participate are of importance. This may lead to effective attitudes and behaviours. Overall results (refer to Table 5.20) from this dimension indicated that the *Instructional Management* category has the largest number of messages, with a total of 157 (45.4% of the total). *Direct Instruction*, the smallest number of messages with 51 (14.7% of the total) and *Building Understanding* with 138 messages (39.9%). Anderson, Rourke, Garrison and Archer (2001) stated in their study that online facilitators are forced to be learners themselves in learning to design effective learning activities. From the overall results of this dimension, the facilitators can be seen as favouring to carry out the tasks given to them as a teacher or performing the duties of a teacher especially in covering the syllabus on time (*instructional management*). Their role as teachers who were facilitating and making sure that the knowledge of the subject is fairly distributed to all the learners are limited (*direct instruction*). However, they manage to create and maintain interest of learners in active learning and also providing support and encouragement during the online discussion building effective group consciousness (*building understanding*). Apart from the factors above in the Teacher Presence dimension, some other factors that may affect the content and number of messages posted by the facilitators are related to their skills in handling the medium of instruction in terms of their teaching styles. Their dedication in teaching online, the number of learners under the facilitators' supervision and the lack of training in the online environment may also affect the effective attitudes and behaviours of the distance learners.

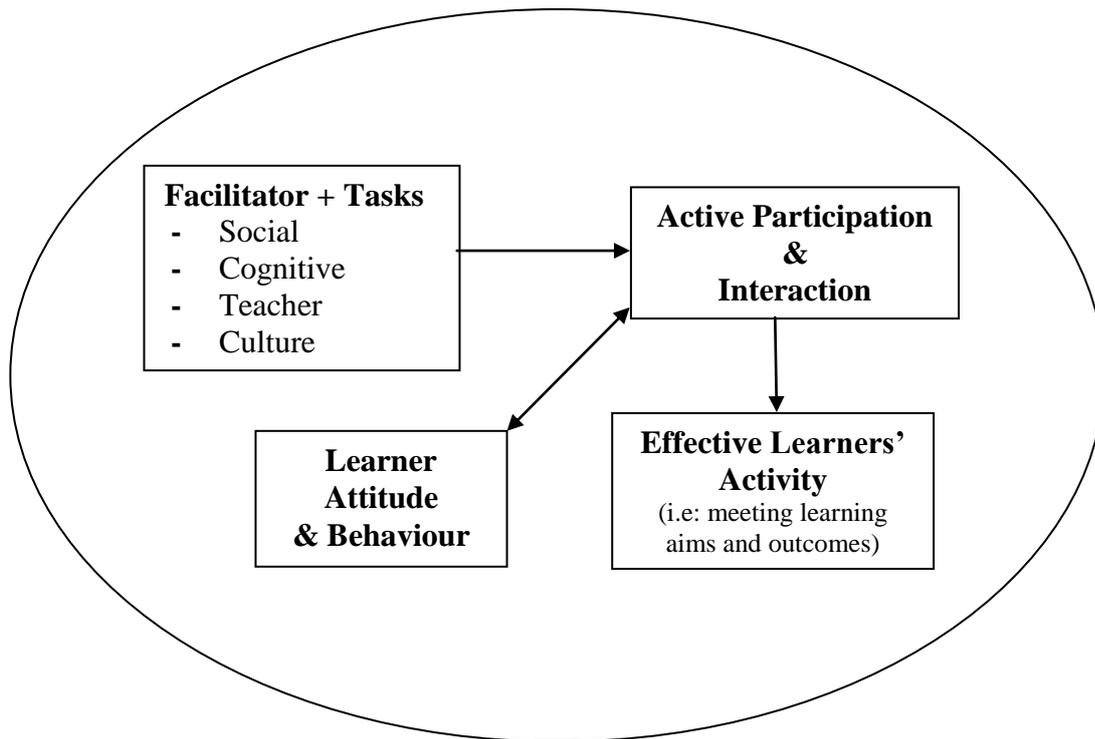
5.9.1.6 The Cultural Dimension

In analyzing the Cultural Dimension, Hofstede's (1984) Four Cultural Dimension was adopted with indicators such as Power Distance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity and Uncertainty Avoidance. From the analysis of the findings, it can

be summarized that although the learners shared many cultural factors relating to prior experiences they were not a homogenous group. In addition, this does not mean that the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners manifested the same characteristics and processes. It should be noted that the results of the cultural dimension based on the available empirical data are too limited to represent the Malay ethnicity of the learners. In this dimension, the results indicate the percentage of the categories as such; large *Power Distance*, 1042 indicators (37.5%) were found in the posted messages and recorded the highest. *Collectivism* is next with 347 indicators (12.5%), *Masculinity* with 243 indicators (8.8%), weak *Uncertainty Avoidance* recorded 173 indicators (6.2%), and finally strong *Uncertainty Avoidance* with 49 indicators (1.8%). Looking at the results in Table 5.22 closely, what can be seen is that all four categories have recorded a total below the 50% mark with no significance difference across all groups. Even though *Power Distance* recorded the highest percentage, all the groups in this category still recorded a percentage of less than 50% (refer to Table 5.22). In addition, most of the posted messages analysed show evidence of large *Power Distance* which consist of salutations and polite expressions (Examples 5.88 – 5.89). This indicates that formal behaviour which is generally used in a face-to-face classroom context is actually being displayed in the asynchronous online environment. Attitudes and behaviours that include respect towards others are likely to be displayed in any typical mode of communication which makes the environment more comfortable and acceptable. Facilitators are also believed to be carrying out the responsibilities given to them as a teacher or carrying out the duties of a teacher in delivering their tasks whenever necessary. However, the high percentage of *Power Distance* does not suggest that the facilitators are not supporting learners in their learning. They do try to make the learning situation comfortable to build learner dependence by giving them tasks that require them to collaborate (Example 5.81). The highest percentage in the *Collectivism* category with 21% (Group 5) suggests that the learners interact more and is

believed to adopt a more collaborative mode of working. The learners are believed to be more comfortable in communicating asynchronously, unlike Hofstede's (1984) study which found Malaysians to have a preference of working as an individual. The transcripts also show that with the presence of facilitators' intervention, this has helped the group to be more active online. Facilitators are found to be encouraging the learners to carry out their online learning task collaboratively and ensure that learners are focused. In the *Masculinity* category, there are no obvious group differences in the frequency due to the data being too small. *Uncertainty Avoidance* strikes a difference in the Cultural Presence dimension, which is between the weak (6.2%) and strong *Uncertainty Avoidance* (1.8%) category. The proportion of messages of the weak *Uncertainty Avoidance* is more than three times that of strong *Uncertainty Avoidance*. This study's data as analysed are consistent with Hofstede's analysis of the strength of *Uncertainty Avoidance* in Malaysian culture but not solely the Malay culture which is the culture of the learners of this study. For example in Table 5.22, the results shows that groups with the highest number of posted messages also have a higher number of learners being active online. The messages in these groups (6, 7, and 8) also show more evidence of learners interacting, challenging and seeking help. This indicates that acquiring knowledge in an online setting for these learners do not stop them from seeking help especially when they are uncertain. This incidentally has helped them improve their language skills with the guidance of their facilitators.

Figure 5.6: Summary of analysis of the forum transcripts: Effective Learners' Activity



It should be noted that not all innovations succeed upon implementation. The above Figure 5.6, derived from the results of the analysis of the forum transcripts of the BEL 100 e-PJJ course. Active participation and interaction online was found to be strongly related to the nature of the tasks used within the course and also the facilitators' productive strategies of intervention. It was found that interesting activities provided by the facilitators will sustain the flow of active interaction and participation among the learners and influence the attitude and behaviour of the learners. Analysis indicated that other than sharing their educational experiences, learners need to be allowed to discover, suggest and contribute new ideas. Facilitators will have to provide tasks that allow these learners to incorporate other learners' ideas in their contributions and encourage critical response from the learners. The activities will consist of a balance of social, cognitive, teacher and culture elements as mentioned in the summary of each dimension (p.324-331). This may then influence an effective learner attitude and behaviour and develop an effective learners' activity, meeting the aims and

objectives of the learning and teaching of the BEL 100 e-PJJ course. These learners may share many cultural factors related to their prior educational experiences, however, they were not a homogenous group. Prior educational experiences and cultural factors are not the main reasons that influence the learners' attitudes and behaviours.

Chapter 6: Reflections and Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

To recap the salient features of this thesis, the main purpose of the study was to examine the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners and whether those attitudes and behaviours are influenced by their prior educational experiences and whether cultural factors may also have an influence on the attitudes and behaviours of these learners. The first part of this chapter is designed to synthesise critically and provide explanations of the key elements as presented in the analysis chapters 4 and 5 and to link this critical examination to the research questions.

The research questions were as follows:

- a. What are the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners?
- b. What is the role of prior educational experiences on the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners?
- c. Is there evidence that cultural factors have an influence on the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners?
- d. What were the attitudes and behaviours that underpinned effective learner activity within this case study?

6.2 Conclusions of research problem

The conclusion of the research problem will be explained accordingly following the research questions of this study.

R1: What are the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ?

The analysis of the interview data summarized the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners as teacher dependent in which the learners are mostly polite and respectful. Learners are also found to be following facilitators' instructions as and when requested. Learners are found to be very respectful and obedient. They often seek help whenever necessary. In addition they are found to be positive about most of the issues that are related to the course if instructions and explanations come from their facilitators. Learners and facilitators who were interviewed stated that most learners have difficulty coming up with ideas or sharing their ideas which led them to be passive. They lacked confidence and are very self-conscious, thinking that they will be making mistakes if they are to offer their ideas and opinions in any activities related to the online course. Facilitators who were interviewed also agreed that these learners are very dependent to both the facilitators and peers. They are not self-directed. They expect personal attention during their online discussion similar to their face-to-face classes. In addition, facilitators found them to be passive online learners. Many of them can be non-participative online and absorb information only through reading others comments. The analysis of the asynchronous online transcripts results summarized the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners as active online learners. It was found that majority of the learners in each group in this study contributed online. They interact actively online either with the facilitator or their own peers and the manner of interaction was mostly direct interaction. They were found to be teacher-centred which focuses on the transmission of content. There are three reasons that can be concluded for the learners' teacher-centred attitude and behaviour. First, the learners need more time to progress towards a more flexible and autonomous mode of learning. Second, learners are dependent on their facilitators most often because they need reassurance that they are on the right track in carrying out tasks. Finally, learners also seek for advice from their

facilitators on how to structure their learning.

From the asynchronous online transcripts analysis, results show that the online learners are respectful which agrees with the results raised in the interviews. A few learners are found to be expressive, challenging and motivated which contradicts with the interview results. The learners are found to be greeting, complementing, encouraging and helping each other when they are communicating online. To be specific these are indicators of learners and facilitators acknowledging each other, encouraging and complementing. These indicators perhaps help to support the learners to socialise in the online environment and keep the interaction going. The findings in this study also indicated that most of the learners are comfortable with the online environment. It offers a non-threatening situation and anonymity compared to their face-to-face classes where they are to respond to facilitator's query when needed and also to their peers. The facilitators' presence which provides tasks that maintain interest and motivate the learners create an attitude and behaviour that led to effective activities. Analysis of the cultural dimension also displayed the learners' attitude and behaviour as being respectful, teacher-centred, active and challenging.

Analyses from both the interview and asynchronous online transcripts results agreed that the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners possess attitude and behaviour of being teacher-dependent/teacher-centred and respectful. This disagrees with Dillon and Greene's (2003) perception of distance education. They characterised distance education as being a learner-centred system which puts learners first. This type of education system according to Dillon and Greene (2003) focus on the learner's attitudes, behaviours, abilities, interests, and learning preferences with the teacher as a facilitator of learning. On the other hand, the results from the current study agree with Hofstede's (1986) and Venter's (2003) studies which stated Asians as expecting to display an emphasis on teacher-centred education. The learners expect the teacher to initiate communication and guide them in learning. Nevertheless, in this study,

the value of being an independent learner cannot be taken for granted. It is the nature of the activities and tasks provided by the facilitators to the learners that play an important role in this aspect. The activities and tasks should determine the flow of interaction among the learners and encourage the learners to be more experimental in solving problems, giving ideas and collaborating with the other learners. As stated by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000), Bloom and Hough (2003), and Lanham and Zhou (2003), the online tasks and the activities provided by the facilitators will enhance learners interest and can be major factors in influencing distance learners' attitudes and behaviours towards a distance course.

There are contradictions between the results from the interview data and the results from the asynchronous online transcripts which will be examined as follows. The facilitators interviewed identified the online learners as not self-directed, teacher-dependent and passive. The learners seemed to have difficulties in giving ideas and they lack in confidence. Results from the asynchronous online transcripts, however, found that all groups were participating actively with more than 50% contributions with learners posting messages from all groups when they are online (Table 5.7, 5.8a and 5.8b). Learners are found to be explicitly interacting and collaborating actively and supporting each other. This happens when facilitators provide them with activities or tasks that initiate interesting discussions. Facilitators are also found to intervene when needed.

The motivation of acquiring knowledge in an online setting for these learners does not prevent them from seeking help when they are uncertain. Hofstede (1984) in his study suggested that Asian learners are more passive and dependent. This was clearly contradicted by Joughin (2006) who stressed that the notion of Asian students as passive rote learners is no longer realistic. It is the ways of imparting knowledge to learners, in the way that learners transmit the knowledge received, and in the student-teacher interactions that probably will shape the distance learners' effective attitudes and behaviours towards a course (Joughin

2006).

The attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners can be concluded from the syntheses of the interview and asynchronous online transcripts results analyses. These online learners attitudes and behaviours (mentioned in the summaries of Chapter 4-p.201-202 and Chapter 5-p.324-333) are teacher dependent, respectful, active (participative and interactive when online), supportive and motivated when challenged with effective activities or tasks that bring up familiar, every day topics for discussions.

R2: What is the role of prior educational experiences on the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners?

From the syntheses of the interview and asynchronous online transcripts analyses, an agreement can be reached that prior educational experiences have a minimal role on the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners. The researcher is aware of the existence of learners' prior experiences as a whole. However, the learners' educational experiences were a focus in this study. Dzakiria and Walker (2003) believe that distance learners' previous experiences, culture and values, should be acknowledged and valued. This is to facilitate a quality distance education course. From the syntheses of both the interview and asynchronous online transcripts analyses results, it indicates that prior educational experiences have an influence on the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners. The attitudes and behaviours of the learners are teacher dependent and respectful. Being teacher-dependent and respectful may lead to some other attitudes and behavioural qualities too; to name a few are learners being polite, following instructions as requested by facilitators, passive and lack of confidence (as mentioned earlier in the summary of Chapter 4). The learners' educational experiences were moulded since the average age of 6 in a traditional face-to-face setting. As Dzakiria and Walker (2003) stated these are experiences

formed from years of following the Malaysian educational system which doesn't encourage freedom, critical thinking or independent learning. From the interview data, facilitators in this study summarized the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners as not being self-directed (p.188-196). Facilitators stated that the learners relied on them for instructions on most tasks and activities provided. Facilitators also indicated that the learners prefer to wait for others to take initiative when discussing online due to their lack of confidence in contributing ideas. This is also found in Venter's (2003) adult distance learners' work in which was stated that Asian learners generally are reluctant to express their own ideas. The learners in the present study believed that they lack sufficient knowledge to have an opinion, or that their opinions and ideas are of less importance than those of their facilitators and peers (Example 4.4). Similarly, Dunbar (1991) stated in his study of distance education that the student-teacher relationship in an Indonesian society is built on a one-way respect. The respect is from students to the teachers which also exist in the Malaysian educational system (Dzakiria and Walker 2003). The respect of the present study participants are found to be towards their facilitators and peers. It is prevalent in both data: interviews and asynchronous online transcripts (Examples 4.3, 5.47-5.49). The learners' prior educational experiences of being courteous and not criticizing others openly in public, especially those who are of higher status are common among the Malay learners. These learners are acculturised from small to avoid behaviours that may be interpreted by others to be expressions of personal autonomy (Thang 2005, Venter 2003, Dzakiria and Walker 2003). These attitudes and behaviours that exist in the Malaysian learners' educational culture are changing slowly. In addition, these can be improved if the online activities and tasks are designed to encourage collaboration among the learners and effective input from the facilitators. What they share online can be of prior experiences and with mutual support from others in the forum room actually boost their confidence with positive attitudes and behaviours. This in addition, will possibly contribute to

a socially active learning environment as demonstrated in Group 8 of this study. As Wheeler (2005) argued in his article, the ability of distance learners working together effectively in groups is central, when social presence is low, the learners will feel disconnected and so the whole group dynamics will suffer.

R3: Is there evidence that cultural factors have an influence on the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners?

The syntheses of the interview and asynchronous online transcripts results analyses conclude that cultural factors have an influence on the attitudes and behaviours of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners but this is limited to certain conditions. This will be explained further as follows. Hofstede (1984) has classified Malaysia as a country that is expected to display an emphasis on student conformity and teacher-dependent education. One should observe that the results of cultural factors evidences from the present study data are too small to represent the Malay ethnicity.

Results indicate that the *Learner to Facilitator* interaction pattern recorded the highest of all the patterns of interaction. This can be an indication of learners being teacher-dependent (Table 5.10a and Table 5.10b). This may be due to their cultural background which requires these learners to respect those who are superior to them such as their facilitators (Venter 2003). Learners are to follow all instructions and refer to the facilitators all the time. Again there is a need for caution when dealing with this issue. Learners conform to their superiors due to the three reasons explained earlier in p.335-336 of this chapter. In addition, facilitators are also displaying their duties as teachers in delivering tasks and activities. This is also stressed in Aylward's (2003) and Dzakiria and Walker's (2003) writings, in which teacher superiority arose because the learners have preference of their teachers telling them what to learn and do in approaching a course. The respectful attitude

and behaviour of the learners are commonly evident in both the interview and asynchronous online transcripts data of the present study (Examples 4.3, 5.47-5.49). According to Ibrahim (2002), being respectful, polite and also careful with their words when communicating at all times either with their superiors or peers are in the Malay custom. The learners in this study held strongly to this custom even when they are participating and interacting online. These can be seen in Examples 5.47-5.49 and 5.85-5.89. Salutations, complementing, apologizing are the kind of attitudes and behaviours practised commonly by these learners when collaborating online making the environment more comfortable and acceptable.

There is also some evidence of the influence of cultural factors among the learners' attitude and behaviour when engaging online. These learners can be found to be sharing their unpleasant and pleasant feelings online when they begin to feel comfortable among themselves as demonstrated in Examples 5.70 -5.72. The learners are able to open up, reducing their feelings of social isolation and helping each other whenever necessary. The online environment is believed to be offering an environment away from the pressure of the face-to-face situation. According to Mohd.Salleh (2005), the sharing of personal feelings in the Malay culture engages closely to emotional expressions and cautious relationship building. These personal feelings that the learners shared are usually never too revealing either among friends or even family members (Mohd.Salleh 2005).

There are also a few occurrences in this study where learners portray attitude and behaviour of being passive, uninterested, lack of confidence and self-conscious. These are testified by the facilitators and learners of this present study in Examples 4.4 and 4.38-4.40. The learners when being interviewed about their participation during the course indicated that they have difficulties in participating online. Their poor language ability and being self-conscious about posting queries online deter them from collaborating actively. As stated by Aylward (2003), socio-cultural factors such as fear of being laughed at by others or their own

peers are cultural learning experiences that may hinder positive learning. The facilitators in this present study indicated in their interviews that the learners' attitude can be very traditional at times, holding strong to habits that have been embedded in these learners since childhood. The learners will display the responsibility of being a learner that listens to instructions and do when they are asked to; again displaying a teacher-superiority situation.

The issue mentioned above is not a major issue in this study as participants interviewed in this study gave some overlapping responses and some which are non-conforming to the Malay culture. Five of the eight interviewees stated that they often post queries when they are uncertain and this has helped them improve their language skills (p.318). Evidence from the asynchronous online transcripts also presented the fact that all the eight groups in this study involved (Table 5.22) are not homogeneous and the shared culture they experience do not mean that they all manifested the same characteristics and processes. Groups 6, 7 and 8 have the highest number of posted messages and they also have a higher number of learners active online. The messages of Groups 6, 7, and 8 show more evidence of interaction and learners seeking help (Table 5.22). Learners are found to be interacting and seeking help when the tasks given are of interest and familiar to them. It can be summarized that the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners are found to be mostly active when online, supportive and motivated when challenged with purposeful activities even when they display a teacher dependent and respectful attitudes and behaviours. Cultural factors play a minimal role in influencing the learners' attitudes and behaviours. The interactive online activities and tasks which meet the learners' needs help improve the learners' communication, collaboration and cooperation. These learners see the online forum experience as a non-threatening experience when they are supported and motivated by their facilitators and peers.

R4: What were the attitudes and behaviours that underpinned effective learner activity within this case study?

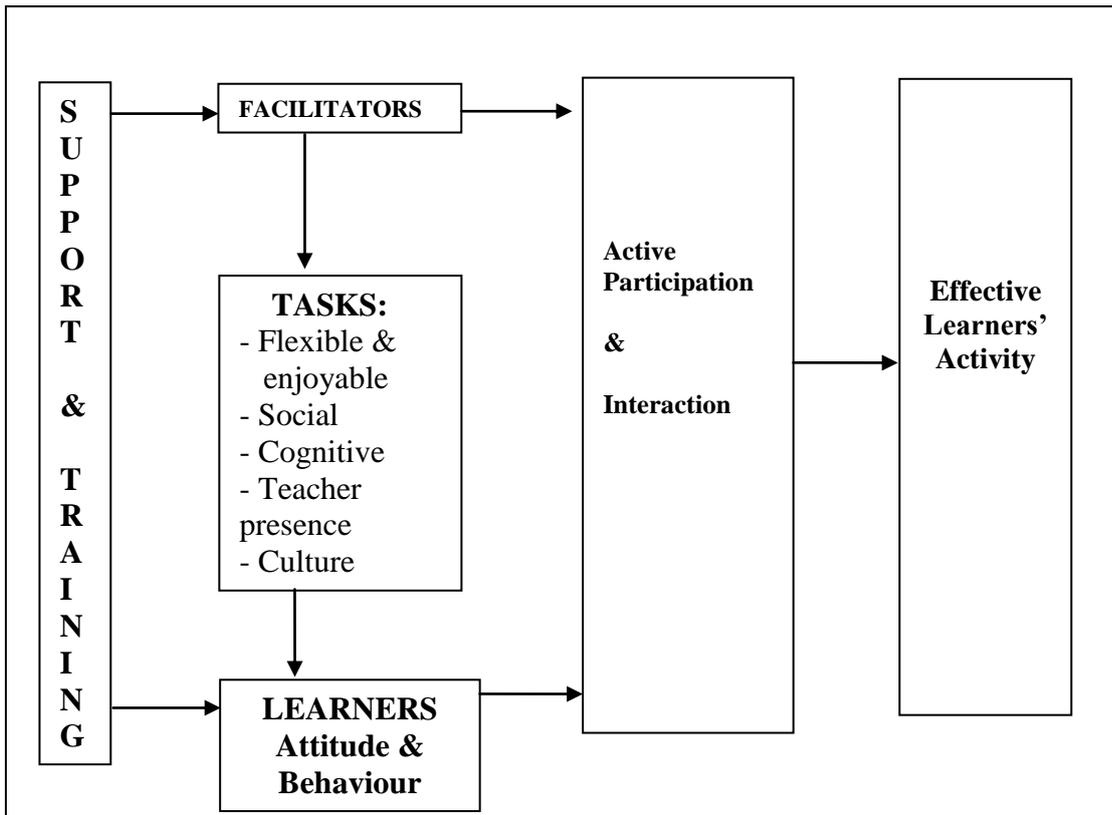
The attitudes and behaviours that underpinned effective learner activity within this case study are learners having preference of being active and respectful. Learners who are active and respectful possess other attitudes and behavioural qualities that will lead learners to have preference in becoming participative, interactive, supportive, challenging, polite, encouraging and motivating. The attitudes and behaviours of the learners will also improve effectively with the presentation of more adequate and enjoyable activities and resources. Overlapping evidence both from the findings of the interview data and the online discussion forum transcripts demonstrate that this can only be achievable if course materials are being designed and presented by taking into consideration the learners' diversity. As mentioned earlier the cultural background of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners is Malay. The sharing of the same cultural background does not represent their needs in learning. This is demonstrated in the diversity of their answers when interviewed regarding their interest of the course (Examples 4.1-4.2). The awareness of the diversity in learners and taking into consideration their needs by designing and providing an environment that is fully understood by the learners is important to help shape effective attitude and behaviour (Lanham and Zhou 2003). The learners of this present study acknowledged that the online component contributes many activities and tasks such as peer discussions. Interesting and familiar activities and tasks would help these learners to participate actively online and have effective attitude and behaviour when participating online (Examples 4.9-4.10).

Merisotis and Phipps (1999) also stressed that taking account of the importance of interaction and feedback with students, the need to familiarize themselves with the facilities and technology provided to the learners and the need to accommodate the use of different pedagogic practices with different group of learners will help minimise the dissatisfaction.

The BEL 100 e-PJJ learners indicated in their interviews that support from facilitators such as being helpful, being active online, providing good feedback, offering prompt feedback online, motivating, providing clear explanations and giving good guidance when they are attempting assigned tasks will help them learn effectively (Example 4.11). Lacking in two-way communication and support will create a stressful and ineffective learning condition. This caused the learners to develop ineffective attitudes and behaviours when participating online as demonstrated in Examples 4.14 and 4.16.

The learners and facilitators also perceived that the online learning of the course can be successfully delivered with the support and training from the management and administrators involved. Both learners and facilitators interviewed in the present study expressed their frustrations with the support received and the need of training in the course (Examples 4.14, 4.32-4.33). The participants recognized that in order to create a positive learning community with positive attitudes and behaviours towards learning, both support and training are needed. Without the support, a lower satisfaction level to participate and interact online from both learners and facilitators will rise as indicated in the interview data (Examples 4.14, 4.16-4.19, 4.22, 4.34-4.36). Kenworthy (2003) and Dzakiria and Walker (2003) in their studies did stress that no doubt that the kind of support distance learners require is much more than just on-line help facility and other administrative support. The flexibility of the course which allows the learners to access the course at anytime any place is also encouraging. Mason (2003) mentioned that this mode of education can be “exciting, interesting and high quality as well as being flexible and adaptable to individual learner requirements without replicating traditional tutoring support systems”. With distance education continually developing, the delivery of instruction to adult learners via this mode will constitute an important alternative for others who need its flexibility and convenience (Dasher-Alston and Patton 1998).

Figure 6.1: Summary of factors that influence effective distance learners' activity



As stated by Bloom and Hough (2003), faculty expertise in the creation, selection and use of the technology is the major factor in influencing distance learners' attitudes and behaviours towards a distance course. Beattie, Spooner, Jordan, Algozzine and Spooner (2002) also agreed that the success of a distance course depends on access to the best instructors and educational resources available.

Figure 6.1 above summarizes the factors that influence effective learners' activity in this present study. From both the interview and asynchronous online transcripts data, it can be concluded that support and training need to be provided to the facilitators and learners of distance learners. Facilitators need to go through the training of developing effective course materials. This will enable them to create, select and develop materials that consist of tasks and activities which are flexible and enjoyable, with the inclusion of social, cognitive, teacher presence and cultural elements. Facilitators are to be aware of the content of the learning

materials. Findings from both analyses of this study suggest that enjoyable activities and also ones that meet the learners' needs either in fulfilling their personal satisfaction or professional demands are preferable which in turn will help influence effective learners' attitudes and behaviours. Gibson (1996) and Lanham and Zhou (2003) stated that awareness of the learners' attitudes or behaviours besides encouraging them to develop themselves as distance learners according to their preferences would help achieve effective learners' activity in a particular course. Moreover, the approach used by facilitators and resources that encourage group orientation, the sharing of prior experiences, the creation of a comfortable learning environment and stimulating positive motivation are of preference to develop effective learners' attitudes and behaviours.

As seen in Figure 6.1, there is a need of the inclusion of cognitive presence indicators which is characterised by "exploration, construction, resolution and confirmation of understanding" (Garrison, 2007, p. 65) in the tasks and activities provided by the facilitators of this present study. This will then be supported by the social elements which indirectly will be helping the process of critical thinking that is carried on by the community of learners (Garrison 2007). To maintain interactions in an asynchronous part of the distance course to be focused, teacher presence is essential in balancing cognitive and social issues (Garrison et al., 2000). Teacher presence consists of instructional design and organisation, facilitating discourse and direct instruction (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). Within the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, the challenge is to recognise and assess indications of meaningful collaborative learning in the asynchronous part of the online course as in this study (Garrison et al., 2000). Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) suggested for the blended mode in distance education which can be applied in tandem with their CoI model. The existence of the above mentioned elements in the tasks and activities provided for an online course may lead to active participation of facilitators and learners in the online interaction. It is hoped that

more critical discussions and collaboration of a learning community will rise and effective learners' attitude and behaviour will be developed.

Venter (2003) and Hofstede's (1986) arguments of characterising Asian learners as less participative and motivated due to the "surrogate-teacher" model or teacher-dependent is unrealistic based on the results from this study. The learners in this study are seen to be participating actively especially when the group is provided with flexible and enjoyable tasks. To foster a critical discourse in the asynchronous online environment, being aware and understanding the distance learners' needs should be a priority (Lanham and Zhou 2003). Next is to determine an appropriate alignment of curriculum, faculty and learners interactions to the environment best suited. Then the guiding principles, learning objectives and activities of the distance course need to be developed to support cognitive, social, teacher presence and cultural elements that are essential. The present study highlighted the diversity of the learners' attitudes and behaviours that were not heavily influenced by their prior educational experiences and cultural factors. Instead, a combination of factors such as support, training, resourceful tasks and materials which consist of the above mentioned elements is hoped to develop effective learner activity. This in turn would help maintain the effective outcomes and aims of a distance education course. With the advancement of technology, one has to acknowledge the distance learners' attitudes and behaviours, and support the learners to develop skills in managing self-directed learning more effectively.

Chapter 7: Research Implications and Limitations

7.1 Introduction

This study was concerned with examining the attitudes and behavior of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners and whether these were influenced by prior educational experiences. Additionally the study sought to examine if cultural factors were significant in influencing the attitudes and behaviour of these learners. A mixed-method case study design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to the data collection and analysis was adopted. In analyzing the interview data qualitatively, thematic analysis has been adopted as an analysis tool. As emphasized by Attride-Stirling (2001), thematic networks which were constructed from the thematic analyses served as an organizing framework and an illustrative tool in interpreting the analysed interview data. The asynchronous forum discussion transcripts were another major source of data collected for this study. Several categories and examples of Henri's (1992) framework combined with elements from Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) CoI model and Hofstede's (1991) cultural values tool were adapted in analysing the asynchronous forum discussion transcripts to identify the factors which contributed to the attitudes and behaviour of the BEL 100 e-PJJ learners.

7.2 Implications of current findings for Distance Education

Venter (2003) and Hofstede's (1986) characterise Asian learners as less participative and motivated compared to the Western learners due to the "surrogate-teacher" model or teacher-dependency. On the other hand, Joughin (2006) contradicted this characterisation by stressing that the notion of Asian students as passive rote learners is unrealistic. It is the creative ways of how the teachers deliver the activities and tasks required via online

interaction that probably will shape the distance learners' effective attitudes and behaviours towards a distance course (Joughin 2006).

From the results of this exploratory case study, there are clear indications that cultural factors and prior educational experiences have minimal impact on the learners' attitudes and behaviours in the BEL 100 e-PJJ course (Chapter 4:p.189-190; Chapter 5:.p.309-310: Chapter 6: p.320-321). Contradictions between the interview data and online transcripts analysis reflected the differences in perspectives between the learners and facilitators. Results show that while facilitators identified learners as teacher-dependent and passive, learners were explicitly interacting and collaborating and supporting each other and requesting help when they were uncertain (Chapter 6:p.312, p.314).

7.2.1. Distinctions between teacher centredness and student centredness

It was found that this study contradicts the findings of Hofstede (1984 p.88-89) which classified Malaysia as one of the countries that might be expected to “display an emphasis on personal trusts” and “set of expectations of how people should behave” towards their superior; a reflection of student conformity and teacher-dependent education. The current study supports the work of Joughin (2006 p.9) in claiming that “the notion of Asian student as a passive rote learner is based on a failure to appreciate the complex relations between memorising and understanding”. Although findings from this study cannot simply be generalized to all situations, what can be concluded is that previous understandings of teacher-centred and student-centred learning are problematic and somewhat simplistic. The attitudes and behaviours of the learners in this case study were found to be, at certain times, teacher dependent and at other times displaying aspects of student centredness. Learners were found to be respectful, active, supportive and motivated when challenged with effective and relevant tasks. The distinction between teacher-centred and student-centred learning provides

a simple polarity which fails to highlight the complex and nuanced interactions between course participants. These interactions are often difficult to categorise as being either simply student-centred or teacher-centred. Venter (2003) stated that the degree to which learning is student-centred or teacher-centred is subject to cultural variations. Providing clear and effective definitions of what student-centred or teacher-centred is highly problematic. As found in the current study (Chapter 4,p.179-184), some learners were found to be teacher dependent and passive during online interactions. Prior educational experiences and cultural factors were mentioned as potential causes of these introverted personalities.

7.3 Limitations

7.3.1 Case study

A case study method enables a researcher to closely examine the data within a specific context. As defined by Yin (1984:23), the case study research method investigates a current phenomenon within its real-life context; “when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.” Case study allows us to infer patterns and causality within the boundaries of one or more carefully analyzed situations. While anything can essentially be a "case" for study, such as individuals, programs, events and processes, it is the relationships and causality, which are the true topics of analysis. By developing strategies to apply multiple methods within a single case or between multiple cases, these can be usefully applied towards understanding relationships within an integrated or "bounded system" (Stake 2000). The data for a case study can be of qualitative but also of quantitative nature and can be collected through various sources like interviews, observations, or archives (Yin 1984).

In the current study, the use of the case study methodology meant that research findings are bounded by the context of the study namely the BEL 100 e-PJJ course and

participants. The findings presented in this study are context specific and may not be found in a different case involving a different context. The study explores a specific group of learners from a culturally distinct and one small group of Malay *bumiputera* learners in a very specific context (a preparatory course at the UiTM, Malaysia mentioned in Chapter 1) through detailed contextual analysis. A key strength of the case study method in the current study is the use of multiple sources and techniques in the data gathering process as stated in Chapter 3 (page 56). Yin (2003) stated that multiple data collection techniques will strengthen the credibility of findings in case study research as this allows for triangulation. This study used qualitative and quantitative methodologies in order to triangulate the findings.

On the basis of the current study, the contradictions between the interview data and asynchronous online transcripts analysis were found to show that while facilitators identified learners as teacher-dependent and passive, learners were explicitly interacting and collaborating, supporting each other and requesting help when uncertain where facilitators provided them with appropriate activities and tasks. The implication of the findings may not be generalised to all situations or contexts. The data sets provided and the rich descriptions of the analysis in this current study are sufficient to enable other researchers to make judgments about the findings' transferability to different settings or contexts.

7.3.2 Methodology

In this study the mixed method case study was used in which varied data was collected, analysed and synthesized to develop a “rich picture” of a single case. This study uses both “method triangulation” and the “sources triangulation”. The method triangulation uses the multiple techniques for gathering information such as the interviews, questionnaires and data from the asynchronous online forum discussions. The use of multiple sources of evidence in this study may lessen the partial information derived from any single source

(Oliver 2000, Anglin and Morrison 2000, Robson 1993). The sources triangulation in this current study involved the gathering of data from multiple sources such as the learners and facilitators' interviews and data from the asynchronous online forum discussion of the BEL100 e-PJJ. Triangulation of multiple sources of data is crucial for investigators to develop "converging lines of inquiry" (Yin, 2003). The interviews emphasized the learners' prior educational and cultural experiences and the analytical frameworks of Henri (1996), Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) *CoI model* and Hofstede's (1984) cultural values were then brought together. The incorporation of the elements (refer to page 208-209) from these frameworks have helped me reach a detailed understanding.

7.3.3 Data triangulation and bias

Following on from this, the small sample sizes in both qualitative (seven facilitators and eight learners interviewed) and quantitative (eight classes of asynchronous online transcripts) cases might be argued to limit the study. The size, scope and integration of evidence in case studies have often come under scrutiny (Stake 2000). The learners of this study were very new to distance education and were interviewed just after a month or so after their study began. The asynchronous online transcripts were only downloaded for a month (refer to Chapter 3 p.68). A different or wider sample of learners might have produced rather different findings. However, this possibility does not negate the findings from this specific study and sample.

The analysis of the whole data was also wholly dependent on my judgements and with no checks by another coder. A sample of the transcripts was first coded by my initial supervisor and a comparison was carried out to check the coding consistency. The coding of the transcript data was then undertaken by myself with only minimal verification by my original supervisor. Though this may be seen as a potential source of bias in the analysis, the

use of multiple coders does not necessarily lead to consistency as, according to Miles & Huberman (1994), coders' understanding of the categories and coding rules may change subtly over the time, which may lead to greater inconsistency. The detailed and transparent documentation of data handling and process also provides means for confirmation in checking.

Despite the limitations and potential bias in this current study, descriptive statistics, such as frequency of criteria occurrence, were reported in this study in detail (refer to Chapter 4 and 5). Definitions, keywords, examples and quotations excerpted from interview transcripts and asynchronous online transcripts were used to further describe the identified criteria, as well as to illustrate the situational contexts in which the criteria were applied.

7.4 Strengths

The analysis of the current study with its range of methods, the extensive explanation and step by step analysis of how the frameworks were brought together are seen to be significant elements of the study. The extensive data analysis of both interview and asynchronous online transcripts data was described and applied carefully and clearly in a very transparent manner. The explanation of the analysis and how the frameworks of Henri (1996), Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) *CoI model* and Hofstede's (1984) cultural values were brought together in this study should be useful for future researchers. Henri (1996) presented a framework and analytical model that could be used by educators for a better understanding of the five dimensions of learning process and of the riches available in the content of computer mediated messages: *participation, interaction, social, cognitive and metacognitive dimensions*. Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) *CoI model* represents a template or tool to guide research into the effective use of computer-conferencing as a medium for realizing educational community of inquiry in terms of *cognitive, social and teaching presence*. Hofstede's (1984) 4-D model of cultural differences identifies four

dimensions; *Power Distance*, *Individualism/Collectivism*, *Masculinity/Femininity*, *Uncertainty Avoidance*, which was used in a study by Bauer, Chin and Chang (2000) to investigate the implications of cultural differences in online learning environments. The current study has incorporated the elements from Henri's (1992) model (*participative* and *interactive*), Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) *CoI model* (*cognitive*, *social* and *teaching presence*) and Hofstede's 4-D Cultural model in analysing the asynchronous online transcripts. In addition, the technique of thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling 2001) was used to analyse the interview data. Despite the richness of the data that is available in interviews and asynchronous online forums, not many researchers have attempted an in-depth analysis of this kind of data. The reluctance to carry out this kind of analysis is mainly due to the painstaking nature of such an undertaking. There is a great need for more systematic tool to facilitate such analysis. This study has detailed an extensive and transparent step-by-step guide in analyzing interview or asynchronous online transcripts by applying the methods used in the current study not necessarily to duplicate what has been done, but to apply these techniques in new contexts and to possibly develop the techniques further.

7.5 Personal reflections

The study should be beneficial for other distance educators to help them examine and develop their pedagogical methods to provide more effective teaching and learning at a distance; in addition, incorporating greater flexibility in meeting the diverse needs of the learners. The findings of this current study presented contradictions between the interview data and the asynchronous online transcripts analysis reflected the differences in the participants' perspectives; the learners and facilitators.

On a personal level, conducting this study has enabled me to develop into a more experienced educator cum researcher in the developing field of distance education in

Malaysia. At the beginning of this journey, embarking on this study, I thought that maybe I have aimed too high. I thought I was just not up to joining the ranks of successful researchers. However, as I proceed along the reading, writing, analyzing, rewriting, I eventually find that accomplishing the tasks is a painful yet rewarding journey.

I would like to provide some personal remarks on what I have truly found significant in this study. Although the findings in my study are “contextually bounded”, I am now aware of the potential value of my research process, in particular the synthesis of the analytical frameworks to other researchers. I strongly feel that the term “teacher centred/student centred” in certain culture should be carefully investigated and nuanced for further research. In addition, this study has presented more systematic tools detailing an extensive and transparent step-by-step guide in analyzing interview or asynchronous online transcripts. I value the insights and capabilities of other educators and researchers, and recognized their contributions to the study of distance education. The dissertation writing has helped me to be more confident of myself and move beyond the fear of failure. I learned a lot of things that are impossible can become possible and learned to believe in myself.

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