



Case Study

A) General Part

General	
Case Study Title	Quality Indicators in Life Long Learning Activities: METU Continuous Education Centre (CEC)
DIALOGUE thematic group	Quality
Date of the case study	10.12.2011
Contact Information	
Name of the institution	Middle East Technical University (METU)
Location/country	Ankara, Turkey
Size of the organisation/ Number of academic/research and non-academic/administrative staff	CEC is managed by a professor from METU as a part time responsibility. The administrative board includes 8 professors, one associate professor and one lecturer. The centre staff includes 5 non-academic, administrative personnel, 3 research assistants, 1 contractual personnel. There are five classrooms for education activities, one computer lab and one large auditorium used for different purposes like exams, conferences, etc.
Website	http://www.sem.metu.edu.tr
Abstract	
Key words	Lifelong learning, adult education, personnel education, human resources development, continuous education
Please provide a short abstract of the case study	This case study is based on assessment of quality in various types of educational activities provided by CEC (Continuous Education Centre) at Middle East Technical University through the evaluation forms filled out by participants and interviews with the service providers (namely professors and instructors at METU). The study explored effective and ineffective practices in the seminars and conferences the Centre organized. Effective practices included interest building, active delivery of instruction, assessment of learning, establishing a positive learning climate, and the use of relevant and effective materials to support delivery. Lack of expertise and interest, ineffective delivery and group management, inauthenticity of seminar, irrelevant materials, inappropriate climate and context were the main factors that made the learning activities ineffective.



B) Specific Part

The following part depends on each thematic group, outlining strengths and weaknesses of the chosen situations.

1. Context:

Please present the general background (“landscape of experience”) of the activity and in which institutions, organisations, units or sectors the case took place.

The Continuous Education Centre (CEC) at METU offers education to public and private institutions as well as individuals who are looking to improve themselves in their professions and make a career change. The education is provided in the forms of seminars, workshops and conferences (hereafter the term “seminar” is used to cover all) to various types of participants such as employees in both public and private organizations, individuals without a job but looking to improve knowledge and skills, and general public. The employees from various organizations who participated in the seminars investigated for this case study included human resources specialist, manager, manager assistant, teacher, inspector, hiring specialist, front desk personnel, receptionist, businessman, public relation officer, guest relations personnel, general coordinator, engineer, training specialist, project manager and tourism officer. The ages of the participants ranged from 23 to 58. They are mostly university graduates with a job.

The seminars are given by the METU instructors and professors to build a space for continuous development and learning for the individuals who are already working as well as those who are out of job and looking to update their knowledge and skills in their areas. The seminars can take place at METU or the workplace depending on the type of seminar and the agreement made by the university and the recipient organization.

The CEC provided 71 seminars in 2010. Of these, 50 were specialized seminars based on needs of an institution, and 21 were more general and open to public. The CEC reports indicate that there is an increase in specialized seminars and as well as public conferences last year. Specifically the growing demand for public conferences (61%) might be an indication of the increasing need by the public to learn from the university’s knowledge and experience. At the same time, this might be an indication of the university’s changing mission to share the knowledge and expertise produced with larger community.

Some of the seminars included recruitment of new personnel; climate change and adaptation; health-based knowledge systems; training the trainer, effective teaching, human resources management and measurement and evaluation. Public conferences focused on more general issues like family and marriage therapy, communication skills and computer education.

Continuing education centres of the universities in Turkey assume an important responsibility for life long education of adults in various sectors of the society. The CEC at METU was the first centre established for this purpose, and over the years it has assumed a leading role in providing both specialized knowledge and skills to industrial sectors as well as more general education for larger public audience. The purpose of the centre is stated officially as to develop cooperation between the university and public, private and international organizations through continuing education programmes in the fields the university has excelled and is experienced, and to contribute to the development of Turkish

industry and society, and to carry out such services at the international level as well.

2. What are the objectives and purposes of the concrete action?

This purpose of this case study is to identify the factors that make adult education effective and in effective for the recipients. These factors can be divided into three categories: contextual factors such as classrooms, materials, social and psychological environment of learning, teacher factors such as the skills and styles of the instructor, and the recipient factors such as readiness, experience and willingness to use learning experiences. These factors are investigated through the feedback forms the recipients of life long learning filled out and the views of the instructors.

3. How does this activity combine insights from research and practical hands-on experience?

The instructors at CEC are university professors and their academic staff. They are experts in their respective areas, but may not necessarily be expert instructors. That is they do high level research, contribute to the scientific literature and teach undergraduate and graduate level courses as part of their responsibility. With regard to adult education or life long education most of them do not have specific training. Therefore, they often use the skills and strategies they utilize in their traditional classrooms which consist of students with motivation to receive a diploma. However, adult learners are different from typical university students in terms of their motivation, experience, learning preferences and needs. That may create difficulties for the university professors since their expertise may not be respected if the content is not delivered to them meaningfully and based on their respective learning needs. The main hypothesis of this case study is that when the university professors take into consideration the learning needs of adults, their seminars will have a better chance of being an effective one. Whereas those professors who do not comply with adult learning principles will have a more difficult time in reaching the adult learner and this will in turn influence the outcome of the seminars for the recipients. Therefore, this case study will inquire into the factors that make seminars effective or not so effective for the recipients from a 'quality' perspective.

4. Does the institution/sector/unit provide instruments (e.g. ICT or human resources) for the implementation of the concrete action? Which tools were applied?

CEC implements seminar evaluation forms for all the participants at the end of each seminar, and these forms are used to provide feedback to the instructors. At the same time, the information gathered from the evaluation forms serves for the centre to evaluate itself as the provider institution. In addition to these forms, the centre staff takes into consideration of the suggestions made by the instructors as they gather information from participants with regard to the effectiveness of the Centre and the specific seminar. ICT is also used to provide some of



the seminars to the recipients as distance education. Currently there are projects to extend the life long learning services through distance education.

5. Best practice/ Bad practice:

What kinds of results were obtained? What do you consider to be the innovative or interesting part of this concrete action?

What are the barriers (potential and effective) to the full implementation of this action and what are its benefits?

In which sense can this action be useful for DIALOGUE?

Innovative and Interesting Part of the Action

The assessment of seminars the CEC has provided last year showed that there are a number of factors that made education effective.

First, the instructors who built interest early on in the seminar were found to be more effective since participants felt that they better connected to the seminar topic and activities. For this purpose, the instructors began their seminars with an effective introduction such as an interesting question, a picture, a film or a brainstorming activity to involve participants early on as well as provide an opportunity to get to know each other. In addition, effective instructors established their expertise at the beginning by talking about their background and achievements, and that helped them gain respect from the participants. Furthermore, effective instructors spent some time at the beginning of the seminar to assess participants' prior learning and expectations from the seminar. Through this, they were able to establish the seminar purpose in connection to these experiences and expectations.

Second, the effective instructors delivered education more actively and meaningfully. They used variation in voice, nonverbal messages (body language) to emphasize key points, and they clearly displayed an enthusiasm with teaching. These behaviours motivated the adult learners positively in class. In addition, effective instructors consciously tried to connect to participants' experiences and expectations during the delivery of the content by using the information they gathered at the beginning of the seminar. Also, they used clear examples and understandable language to transmit the content. Relevance was established in terms of the work context and daily life as these connections made the learning experiences more meaningful for the participants. Furthermore, effective instructors carefully used the time to establish a balance between the seminar objectives and the needs of the participants to interact and share.

Third, effective instructors often checked participants' understanding with questions and provided them with opportunities to practice what they learned. The balance between theoretical knowledge and applications was well established, and feedback was given to the participants on their learning as well as progress they made. In addition, effective instructors spared some time at the end of the seminar to do an overall assessment of the seminar as well as to connect to future learning opportunities in relation to the seminar objectives.

Fourth, the materials effective instructors used were relevant to the seminar objectives, clear, interesting and complemented to the content delivered during the seminar. The

instructors often used supporting visuals like pictures, cartoons, video films, slides to support verbal presentation. Some of the effective instructors also used some materials like tests and questions to increase the readiness level of the participants.

Finally, the learning climate was well established in effective instructors' classes. Participants felt they were respected as adult learners. Instructors welcomed their questions and suggestions, used jokes, social conversation and fun activities to create a positive and friendly climate among the participants. In addition, these instructors encouraged participants to participate in the activities, share their experiences and perspectives and engage in group activities so that they found opportunities to interact with the instructor and the other participants.

Barriers to Effective Implementation

Although most of the seminars given at CEC were rated positively by the participants, some of the seminars suffered from problems of ineffective delivery.

First, lack of expertise and interest building was a major barrier in providing adult learners with meaningful and long-term learning experiences. In these seminars, participants felt that the instructor was not well prepared and displayed an attitude of indifference about the effectiveness of the seminar.

Second, the instructor was monotonous and boring. S/he had a slow pace or fast-forwarding style of content delivery and too much dependence on powerpoint presentation using only one side of the classroom and not moving at all (e.g., sitting). The instructor did not display any enthusiasm about the seminar and the participants and this made the participants lose attention after a short while. In these seminars, there was a one-way presentation, that is, no interaction between the instructor and the participants. The instructor was too serious, had no smile, and made participants feel uneasy through the seminar. There was no connection to work context, no practice with the concepts learned and no feedback on their learning. The seminar was mostly theoretical with little or no practice on learning experiences.

Third, in ineffective seminars, the instructor had a difficult time with the group management, did not care about how the participants felt and did not do anything about uninterested or sleeping participants.

Fourth, ineffective seminars also suffered from authenticity of learning experiences. The participants felt that the content was outdated, lacked coherence, did not make sense based on their own work experiences.

Fifth, the materials both written and visuals either were not there or not relevant to the course objectives. The visuals were dull, powerpoint presentations were full of text, uninteresting, confusing and difficult to read.

Finally, ineffective seminars suffered from unpleasant contextual aspects such as small and cold classroom, uncomfortable chairs, outdated technology like computers, low quality food, lack of welcoming attitude from CEC personnel.

Use for DIALOGUE

The findings of the case study outlined above are in line with adult learners' characteristics and learning needs. When these needs are met through actions taken by the provider institution and the instructor, the learning experience tends to be a meaningful and

long-term one. When these needs are not taken into consideration, the result could be failure in continuing education. In this sense, the results could be transformed into a list of principles or standards for the delivery of continuing education opportunities to adult learners in DIALOGUE.

6. Are researchers and practitioners directly linked in this activity?

- If yes, how are they linked and what are the communication and interaction processes?
- If they do not communicate directly, how are findings from research connected to practical activities and vice versa?

The CEC seminars are assessed through evaluation forms by the Centre staff even though this evaluation is not done in a systematic fashion. There are also detailed evaluation reports on a portion of the activities of the Centre. However, again these reports are written occasionally, so they could only be representative of certain years. The Centre needs a more systematic evaluation of its activities through the help of researchers either internal or external.

In addition, seminars on effective instruction are provided to the academic staff at the METU two times a year. The participation in these seminars is voluntary and mostly young academic staff participates in these seminars. The seminars cover adult learning principles, how to prepare effective presentations, how to build interest, effective delivery strategies and assessment. These seminars are provided to the university academic staff based on adult learning principles and techniques. It is hoped that these learning experiences will be translated into practice in the CEC seminars as well. In that sense, there is a clear link between research and practice.

7. Which elements would you identify as easily transferable to other institutions in different regional and national contexts?

The effective teaching and learning practices summarized in this case study can be transferable to other institutions in different regional and national contexts. In addition, the barrier to effective practice in continuing education can also be used as practiced to be avoided in similar contexts.

8. Recommendations for dissemination:

Briefly identify the most important points in the case study for other ULLL managers and practitioners – these may include risks as well as benefits.

Please formulate some recommendations for the dissemination on the basis of the case study addressed to the working group and other partners.

The most important lesson of this case study points to the necessity of training the trainer workshops/seminars for those who will serve as the providers of continuing education for adult learners. Teaching adults is different from teaching school age children. They have different characteristics and learning needs. Therefore, unless these characteristics and needs are taken into consideration in planning, implementation and assessment of adult learning opportunities, the continuing education activities are doomed to failure. In our case, the consciousness about adult learning and the use of effective adult learning strategies has proven effective in delivery of the most seminars. Therefore, training on adult education for continuous education providers would be very useful.

9. Additional information. E.g. bibliography, website, publications, reports

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LSDC (2010). University Instructors Needs Assessment Report for Effective Teaching, 2010. Learning and Student Development Center, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey.

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Website of the case: <http://www.sem.metu.edu.tr>

We are intending to put your case study on the website.

Please tick here if you do **not** wish to see your case study published on the project's website

ANNEX I

Example: New Media TWG. (How to connect virtual and physical space?)

