



# STUDENT PERSISTENCE IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING: A Case in Hong Kong

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# Background

1. Much work has been done on student persistence in ODL
2. Everyone has a smart phone now - new factors to consider
3. DL students gradually decline - retention becomes more important than ever

## Aim of Our Study

Get a better understanding of the success factors and challenges to improve student retention rate.

# Research Method - Focus Group

- ▶ Invited 135 students from two higher-level computing courses
- ▶ 28 students accepted invitation; 25 students showed up in 3 focus groups
  1. Group 1 - Strong students - final score 71 and higher
  2. Group 2 - Mid-range students - 57 to 70
  3. Group 3 - Weak students - 56 and below
- ▶ Examination was marked but students did not know results yet
- ▶ Interviews held on weekday evenings
- ▶ Students shared their OUHK experience beyond the two courses

# Motivation to Study at OUHK

1. All students want to get a degree
2. Some were influenced by friends studied at OUHK before - word of mouth is important
3. Some were attracted by the optional class attendance
4. Fun in learning seems to predict student performance
5. **We better put our resources on weak students.**

	Performance-Related Factors on Motivation	Thought about quitting ?
Strong students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Want to learn something useful (3 of 9)</li></ul>	Never
Mid-range students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pushed by boss or colleagues to get a degree (3 of 9)</li></ul>	Some
Weak students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demotivated by boring materials and assignments</li><li>• Not motivated by having fun in study</li></ul>	All

# Success Factors Identified by Strong Students

1. Time management
  1. Start early and allocate more time on challenging topics
  2. Study while commuting on a train
  3. Work hard throughout the course not just before exam
2. Study skills
  1. Jot notes while studying and in class
  2. Use mind maps and search engine
  3. Can learn independently
3. Observe advisory prerequisites
4. Try to learn from doing assignments

# Success Factors Identified by Mid-Range Students

1. Memorization
2. Class attendance
3. Exam study guide / Specimen exam paper
4. Two consecutive examination should be far apart

## Reflection

- ▶ Are we sending them a wrong message with our assessment design?
- ▶ More specifically, are we encouraging shallow learning or cram study before the exam?

# Success Factors Identified by Weak Students

1. Adequate time
2. Good health
3. Good luck
4. Rote memorization - same as mid-range students
5. Complete the 3 easy assignments on best 3 out of 4 courses
6. Ability to multi-task - wow, during learning ?!

## Reflection

- ▶ Identified factors may be indirectly related to their study and not under their direct control

# Challenges to All

1. Too much materials in course units - a common outcome in products created by committees
2. Tutors do not share slides with other groups or tutors
3. Late release of model answers
4. Expensive tuition

## Reflection

- ▶ More is better in other course development?

# Challenges to Strong Students

1. Scanty comments on marked assignments - research ideas in learner analytics and support?
2. Examination time (3 hours for 10 credit course) too short
3. Overlapped contents among computing courses - unavoidable if students can take courses in a flexible order
4. Contents not up-to-date in specific courses - (add this question to course-end evaluation?)
5. Assignment questions not posted at course beginning
6. Learning outcomes shown for course level but not for chapter level
7. Video on OLE cannot be pre-downloaded to ensure smooth playback on a bus or train

# Challenges to Mid-range Students

1. (Only) 10% tutors and CCs are bad
2. Bad study habit re-enforced - e.g. rote memorization
3. Two examinations too close to each other

# Challenges to Weak Students

- A. Choosing courses they are not well-prepared for
- B. Lack interests in course contents
- C. Lack mathematical, computational and critical thinking
- D. Reduced interest to complete assignments when weight was reduced from 50% to 30%
- E. Challenging course contents

# Recommendations for OUHK

1. Train students in time management and study skills
2. Collect student feedback in focus groups - why group interview is better than individual interview
3. Reduce verbatim memorization questions from assessment including the pseudo analytical questions
4. Make students write an online self-test before they take a mid-level or higher-level course with advisory prerequisites.
5. Facilitate learning community through peer learning
6. Advisory service for at-risk students

## What about costs?

- ▶ The hidden costs of not taking actions are reduced enrolment and compromised education quality.
- ▶ There exists less expensive ways to carry out above actions.

# My View of Future Education

Quality learning materials are so abundant that institutions will distinguish themselves (or even just to survive) with

- ▶ Assessment

- ▶ Includes 2-way verbal communication - because that is how candidates are selected in job interviews
- ▶ Goes from memorization to thinking

- ▶ Student Support

- ▶ Not necessarily provided by a student centre because ...
- ▶ Students are connected with each other for a supportive learning community
- ▶ Academic staff play the role of coaches to implement student-centred learning