

## **Evaluation and Re-design of the Module ‘International Marketing’: an exploratory study**

Mesfin Habtom  
London Metropolitan Business School  
London Metropolitan University

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### **Introduction**

As one of the core modules for MA Marketing course, the module ‘International Marketing’ (MKP001N) is offered to postgraduate students in both autumn and spring semesters. The module focuses on practical application of international marketing concepts and it also provides useful insights for students who choose a dissertation topics related to international marketing. This paper outlines the process and outcomes of an evaluation of this module, and suggests options for improving or redesigning the module.

### **Context**

Among the suite of postgraduate courses offered by our London Metropolitan Business School (LMBS) is the MA Marketing degree. The course equips students with an understanding of the core marketing disciplines; it introduces a range of issues of current importance to marketers and also highlights the significance of marketing in both large and small organisations, commercial and non-for-profit organisations (LMU 2009). According to QAA (2006) graduates are expected to be able to demonstrate a range of cognitive and intellectual skills together with techniques specific to business and management and also to gain relevant personal and interpersonal skills. The MA Marketing course outcomes have been formulated in relation to these QAA benchmark statements.

The evaluation of the chosen module sought to understand and enhance the role of the module as a key component of the postgraduate course, in accordance with the principles of London Metropolitan University and HE practices with regard to the need for periodic evaluation and development of courses/modules in terms of learning and teaching processes, assessment and feedback practices and shareholders needs (LMU 2009a).

## Approach

A curriculum or module can be evaluated for different purposes: to enhance learning and teaching, to strengthen courses, to appraise teacher competence, to measure results against standards or to review the effectiveness of a new approach or method. The literature provides several models or approaches of curriculum evaluation. While some of the models are generic in their approach (e.g. see Guba and Lincoln, 1989, Madaus *et al.* 1983), others developed stages of evaluation process (e.g. see, Madaus and Kellaghan 2000, Patton 1990, Stufflebeam 2000, Kirkpatrick 1998, Hounsell 2003).

Other scholars have discussed evaluation in the context of curriculum and module development. Based on the concept of constructive alignment (Biggs 1996) which stresses the congruence between aims/learning outcomes, the teaching and learning activities and the assessment, Cowan *et al.* (2004) developed a “logical” model for curriculum development. Compared to the traditional models of curriculum development which follows a linear or chronological one (e.g. see Toohey 1999), the logical model calls for simultaneous consideration of the evaluation components. Moon (2002) developed a map for module development where learning outcomes, assessment criteria, assessment method and a teaching strategy are derived from level descriptors and module aims. It follows a sequence that focuses on the rationale for the links between the different components.

## Conceptual framework

In evaluating the module in question a framework based on a combination of these models was adopted. Earlier studies conducted by Qualmann (2009) and Vitiello (2009) also verify the applicability of the model components.

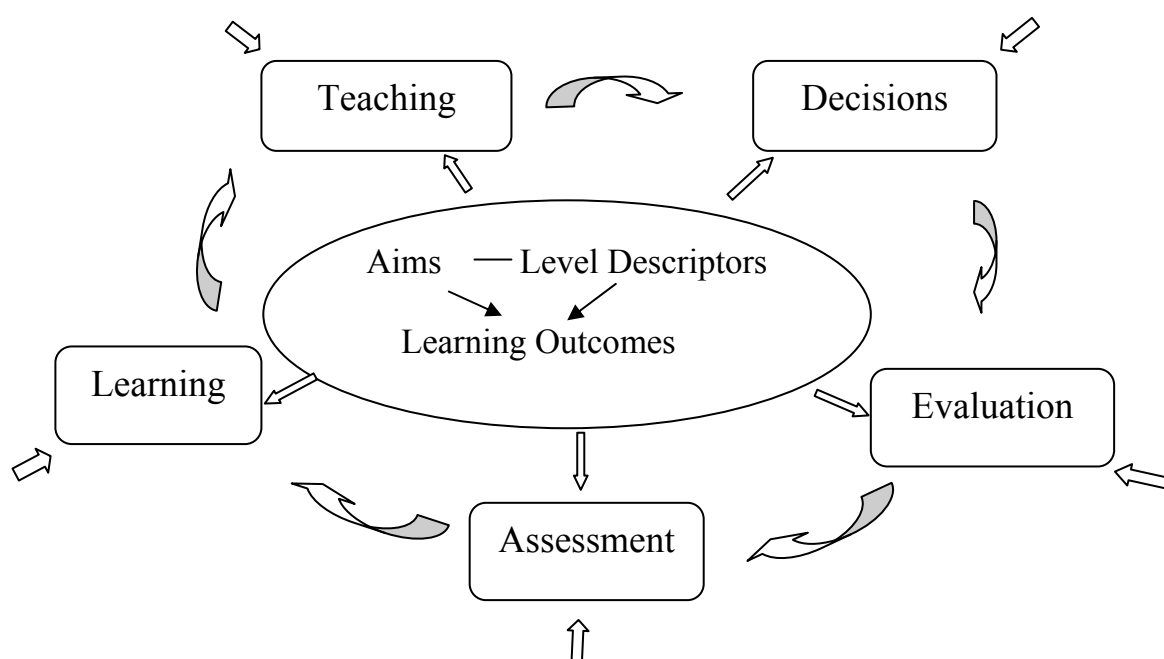


Figure 1: Adapted from models developed by Biggs (1996), Moon (2002) and Cowan *et al* (2004)

This framework served the main objective to evaluate the module under investigation in terms of its levelness, aims, learning outcomes, learning and teaching activities, assessment and feedback. While the logical model for curriculum development (Cowan *et al* 2004) specifically addresses to these elements, Biggs' (1996) framework is useful in focusing on the degree of congruence between these elements. In addition, Moon's (2002) framework considers the importance of level descriptors as a guide in determining learning outcomes. Level descriptors are descriptions of what a learner is expected to achieve at the end of a level of study (*ibid.*). The selected models are student-centred and complement each other in terms of content and approach.

## **Methodology**

The fact that there are different approaches to evaluation in common use simply shows that no single methodology is 'the best' (Harvey 1998, Brennan and Williams 2004). In evaluating the module in question qualitative case-study approach was followed, because case studies have the potential to deepen our understanding of the research phenomenon from different dimensions in a real-life context (Eisenhardt 1989, Miles and Huberman 1994). Case study also allows the use of multiple sources of evidence converging on the same set of issues (Yin 1994).

To find answers to the evaluation objectives, both focus group and in-depth interviews were carried out with students taking MKP001N in autumn semester 2009/10. For this purpose a discussion guideline was prepared (see *Appendix 1*). A focus group interview was conducted with six students, followed by an in-depth interview with two other students. The students taking the MKP001N module come from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds and include both genders and accordingly, the interviewees were selected to represent student diversity. The interviewees included students from the USA, Bangladesh, the Netherlands, Germany, Nigeria, Denmark and Turkey. Additionally, both formal and informal discussions were held with the module leader and tutors. Relevant secondary data were collected by consulting various sources such as module specifications, module booklets, students' feedback reports, external examiners reports and other related materials.

## **Discussion**

Biggs (1996) has emphasised the importance of aligning teaching and learning activities and the assessments and feedback to the learning outcomes. With regard to the module in question, the evaluation findings indicated these components were partially but not fully in congruence (see *appendix 2* for a thematic summary of student comments).

According to the responding students, most of the learning outcomes were clear - with the exception of LO 5 which requires further articulation - and the lecture and seminar sessions were perceived as generally aligned with them. Consistent with the learning outcomes, the seminar sessions aim at developing key intellectual abilities of the learners in terms of critical understanding and application of marketing concepts. Towards that end the students are provided with real-world examples and some of the case studies require higher-order thinking, problem identification and a more rigorous analysis. Students are actively engaged in analysing the case studies, first individually and then in groups during seminars. Students found the use of real-world case studies and supplementary video clips interesting and helpful for their learning.

Concerning teaching and learning activities, however, the responding students raised three issues: class size, time management of lectures and invitation of guest lecturers from companies operating in international markets. The respondents explained that the lecture class was overcrowded with 125 students and the slides were too many (ranging from 25 to 40), which make it difficult to cover all the slides within the time slot. The module leader, on the other hand, saw the slides as a general learning resource not confined to the lecture session, explaining:

*'I know that the lecture slides are many but informative [...] I usually focus on some of the slides that require in-depth discussion and the other slides not covered during the lecture provide students a guideline for further reading.'*

Although no guest speakers have been invited in the last two years the module team is currently identifying relevant individuals and companies who are involved in international marketing activities.

With regards to assessment, good practice requires that the written assessment criteria should provide information on the specific requirements of the assessment task (Gosling and Moon 2002). The MKP001N module is assessed through a group presentation (20%), group written work (30%) and a three-hour unseen examination (50%). For group presentations students are required to choose one mini-case study from the list of case studies provided on the module booklet, and the written work consists of critical analysis of a comprehensive case study which is also available on the module booklet. The unseen examination consists of 6 essay questions of which students are required to answer 3. Overall, the assessment methods are aligned to the LOs and are suitable for demonstrating the knowledge and skills required in the LOs.

However, the responding students raised some questions regarding the assessment components. According to the students, the assessments are more focused on groupwork rather than on individual assignments, and a few students proposed the possibility of replacing the unseen examination by individual projects. Some students commented that some of the mini-case-study questions prepared for presentations

lacked clarity and or needed to be updated. Other students also noted that they should be provided with grading criteria for the group presentation.

According to Black and Wiliam (1998) and Gibbs and Simpson (2004), feedback is an essential aspect of the assessment process in raising achievement. Ovando (1994) also noted that the feedback provided should be timely, factual, structured, helpful, confidential, respectful, tailored and encouraging. Students taking the module usually receive oral feedback immediately after their group presentation, which they found helpful. The students also prefer to be provided with written feedback a few weeks after their group presentation. However, this is not usually the case as written feedback and grades are given to students after all presentations are completed. Students usually submit their group written report in week 10 of each semester and they rarely collect the written feedback from tutors.

## **Conclusion**

The evaluation results reveal that the module under review possessed a certain degree of curriculum alignment, in that the lectures, seminars and assessments were appropriate to the module learning outcomes. At the same time, areas for improvement include better management of lectures, updating of case-study materials, clarification of assessment criteria and provision of more immediate formative feedback.

One way to enhance the module is to take advantage of what new technologies can offer educationally. Formative e-assessment can provide an effective way to relate students tasks to learning outcomes, and the use of wikis, blogs or mobile technologies could help in providing timely and instructive feedback (Ooms *et al* 2008). Pachler *et al.* (2009) and Hase and Saenger (1997), for example, found that tutors who use audio and video feedback tended to comment more freely than in their equivalent written feedback. Prins *et al.* (2005) showed that students' attitude towards peer assessment via Virtual Learning Environments was positive. These kinds of strategies could offer dynamic was to engage students more deeply in the learning and assessment process.

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## **Biographical Note**

**Dr. Mesfin Habtom** is a Senior Lecturer in International Marketing at London Metropolitan Business School, London Metropolitan University.

### Focus-group and in-depth interview: Discussion points

#### Learning Outcomes (LOs)

- How would you evaluate the module aims and LOs in terms of their clarity, breadth and depth? (Please first read the module aims and LOs for 5-10 minutes)
- During the lecture and seminar sessions, do you think you have covered all the points listed as LOs?
- If yes, which LOs do you think were covered? Explain.
- If No, which LOs do you think were not covered? Explain.
- What are your suggestions on future improvement of the LOs?
- To what extent do you think the LOs are related to the teaching and learning activities, assessments and feedback ? Elaborate.

#### Teaching and Learning Activities

How would you evaluate the lecture and seminar session? You may evaluate the lecture and the seminars in terms of:

- delivery methods
- focus of the discussion
- time management
- clarity and content of slides
- interaction with students
- relevance of concepts/theories
- application to real world situations
- Room size
- Relevance of the case studies provided in seminars
- Degree of student engagement
- Alignment of lecture and seminar sessions

Any other issues that you would like to raise in this case?

- How would you evaluate the learning resources?
- To what extent do you think that the Weblearn provided you with useful resources that complement the lecture and seminar sessions? How?
- What future improvements would you suggest in this regard?



## **Assessment and feedback**

As mentioned in your module booklet, the assessments consist of group presentations (20%), group written report (30%) and unseen examination (50%).

- How would you evaluate the assessment components in terms of clarity and level of engagement? For example, how would you evaluate the mini-case studies in terms of their relevance? Explain.
- How would you evaluate the group written report which is based on the case study? Do you think the case study was interesting and the questions were challenging?
- What is your view on the importance of un-seen examination as part of assessment? Why, or why not? Explain.
- Do you think that the assessments focus more on group work than individual assignments? How?
- How would you evaluate the weighing given to the assessments?
- To what extent do you think that the assessments are aligned with the learning objectives and the delivery methods? Elaborate.
- How would you evaluate the feedback provided in this module, in terms of both formative and summative feedback?

**Summary of feedback from focus-group and individual interviews**

<b>Discussion topic</b>	<b>Module achievements</b>	<b>Areas for improvement</b>
<p>Module Aims &amp; LOs</p>	<p>R1: LOs 1 to 4 are almost covered during the lecture and seminar, but I am not sure about LO5.</p> <p>R2: Most of the LOs are related to the discussions of seminars.</p> <p>R7: some of the LOs are also related to the case studies and journal articles discussed.</p> <p>R8: Yea, I agree with SR7. I think almost all of these LOs are covered.</p>	<p>R3: I think LO5 does not reflect what has been discussed during lecture or seminars. I don't think we covered things like.. writing up a feasibility plan or an audit report</p> <p>R4: I think LO5 should be clearly written</p> <p>R5: Also LO1, the last phrase...[Sustainability issues relating to strategic alliances...] is less clear</p> <p>R6: I think it is also good to include the learning outcomes of group presentations as well.</p>
<p>Teaching &amp; Learning Activities</p>	<p>R1: the module tutors are more interactive with students. Good dealings with the practical side of case studies and relating the theory from the lectures to real world situations.</p> <p>R2: I learned a lot from the lecture. Each lecture session starts with briefing the LOs and it covers relevant international marketing concepts and practices.</p> <p>R7: I found the lecture slides useful and the seminars complement the lecture sessions.</p> <p>R3: I found the case studies interesting and challenging.</p> <p>R4: I agree with R3. I liked the discussions on case studies as well. The group debates helped me to share knowledge with my class mates</p> <p>R5: I liked the video clips shown during seminars.</p> <p>R6: Oh yeh, I liked the video clips about the companies as well. I could not find them on Weblearn though.</p> <p>R8: I found the Weblearn resourceful. I could easily access the lecture slides and case studies form there.</p> <p>R6: For me I liked the journal articles available on Weblearn. I used these</p>	<p>R1, R3, R4 and R6: The lecture class is overcrowded with more than 125 students.</p> <p>R3, R4: Too many slides, ranging from 25-40 slides to be covered within one and half hour without break.</p> <p>R8: The lecture seems never ending</p> <p>R3 and R4: It would be good to invite guest speakers from companies though.</p> <p>R5: I agree with R3 and R4 in inviting guest lecturers.</p> <p>R6: To be honest with you, it has been difficult for me to understand the lecturer's accent and during the lecture I was reading the slides to understand the main points of discussion.</p> <p>R3: I disagree with R2's comments on the lecture. I think sometimes the lecturer was a bit distracted – tangent and sometimes examples lacked application, also as R6 said it was a bit difficult to understand his speech patterns.</p> <p>R8: A lot of focus on Hollensen's book. Would be useful and motivating to go through some of the other books as well.</p> <p>R6: In addition to discussing the case studies, it would be also useful to bring in new topics on 'world events' and ask students opinions about it. Regarding Weblearn, I think it is useful to make use</p>

	<p>resources for my other modules and hopefully I will use it for my dissertation.</p> <p>R3: The announcements provided through Weblearn are extremely useful. Also, tutors usually responded to my emails.</p>	<p>of blogs to share information.</p> <p>R8: I believe we should get a free printed copy of the case studies and other resources for the module. I found it expensive to printout all the resources.</p>
Assessment	<p>R1: I remember in Week 1 or Week 2, the tutor gave us relevant information on the module assessment components. I think the marks are allocated fairly across the three modes of assessment.</p> <p>R2: I liked the group presentations. I feel more confident now in standing before others.</p> <p>R6: The case study prepared for the group written report was interesting and challenging. I feel I know a lot about Motorola company now.</p> <p>R8: The grading criteria for the group written work helped in understanding what is expected of the group. I like the fact that all the mini-case study for presentations and the other case study for group written work were all included in the module booklet.</p>	<p>R3: Too much focus on group work. It is very hard to work in groups. You end up doing others' work in order to get a decent mark.</p> <p>R4: I think group work (50%) weighs too heavy. Personal work either through personal coursework or exams should account for 70% of the total grade.</p> <p>R6: I felt the different topics for group presentations were imbalanced as to difficulty. Some of the mini-cases were very subjective with a little theory and others were history-based.</p> <p>R7: The group presentation topics were a bit complicated. Further instruction required.</p> <p>R8: We should be supplied with written assessment criteria for group presentations.</p> <p>R6: I agree with R8: I only knew what is expected from the group presentations after I received feedback from the tutor. In my view it would also be useful to ask students evaluate group presentations, perhaps by allocating about 5% for peer assessment.</p> <p>R1: I have no knowledge of what an unseen exam is? more clarification is needed on how to prepare and what is needed.</p> <p>R2: I think exams are more useful for undergraduates. For me I learn more form individual coursework than from exams.</p>
Feedback	<p>R1, R3, and R4 &amp; R6: the oral feedback we received immediately after our presentations was helpful.</p> <p>R5: I like the word...'feedback sandwich', it's an inspiring phrase. I think it worked well in our case.</p> <p>R4: The written feedback on our presentation was useful and outlines the main areas for improvement.</p>	<p>R3: But we received our provisional grades for the presentations a bit late.</p> <p>R6: Yeh, I agree with R3. We have just submitted our group written report on Motorola today. By the way, when are going to get our feedback on this?</p>

Other comments	<p>R6: I am happy that I took the module.</p> <p>R5: This is my first time to be interviewed with regard to the module I have taken.</p>	<p>R6: I do not know where I will be employed after I graduate. It would be helpful if the university provide us with information on this.</p>
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**Key:** R I stands for student respondent I