Explaining inclusion and exclusion from ICT-based distance education in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh

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E-learning in developing countries

- Education is seen as one of the most (if not the most) important key for poverty alleviation and economic growth in developing countries.

- E-learning is growing in almost all developing countries and is seen as a very interesting option for governments struggling to meet the growing demand for education.

- Drop-out rates from e-learning educations are much higher compared to traditional, classroom based, teaching.

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- For progressive governments and western aid organisations the goals with e-learning are specifically targeted towards reaching the marginalised groups such as the rural poor and women

- However, large surveys on distance education in south Asia show that distance education in the poorer parts of Asia basically only reaches urban, middle-class men

- The ambition of the planned thesis is therefore to reverse this exclusion by identifying exactly who the excluded students are and describing the causes for this exclusion

Having a critical point of departure

I think it's wrong that the most needed people do not benefit from ICT-based distance education.

সমস্ত মানুষ স্বাধীনভাবে সমান মর্যাদা এবং অধিকার নিয়ে জন্মগ্রহণ করে । তাঁদের বিবেক এবং বুদ্ধি আছে ; সুতরাং সকলেরই একে অপরের প্রতি ভ্রাতৃত্বসুলভ মনোভাব নিয়ে আচরণ করা উচিৎ ।

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

(Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

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Research question

What are the inhibiting and facilitating factors that can explain inclusion and exclusion in ICT-based distance education in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh?
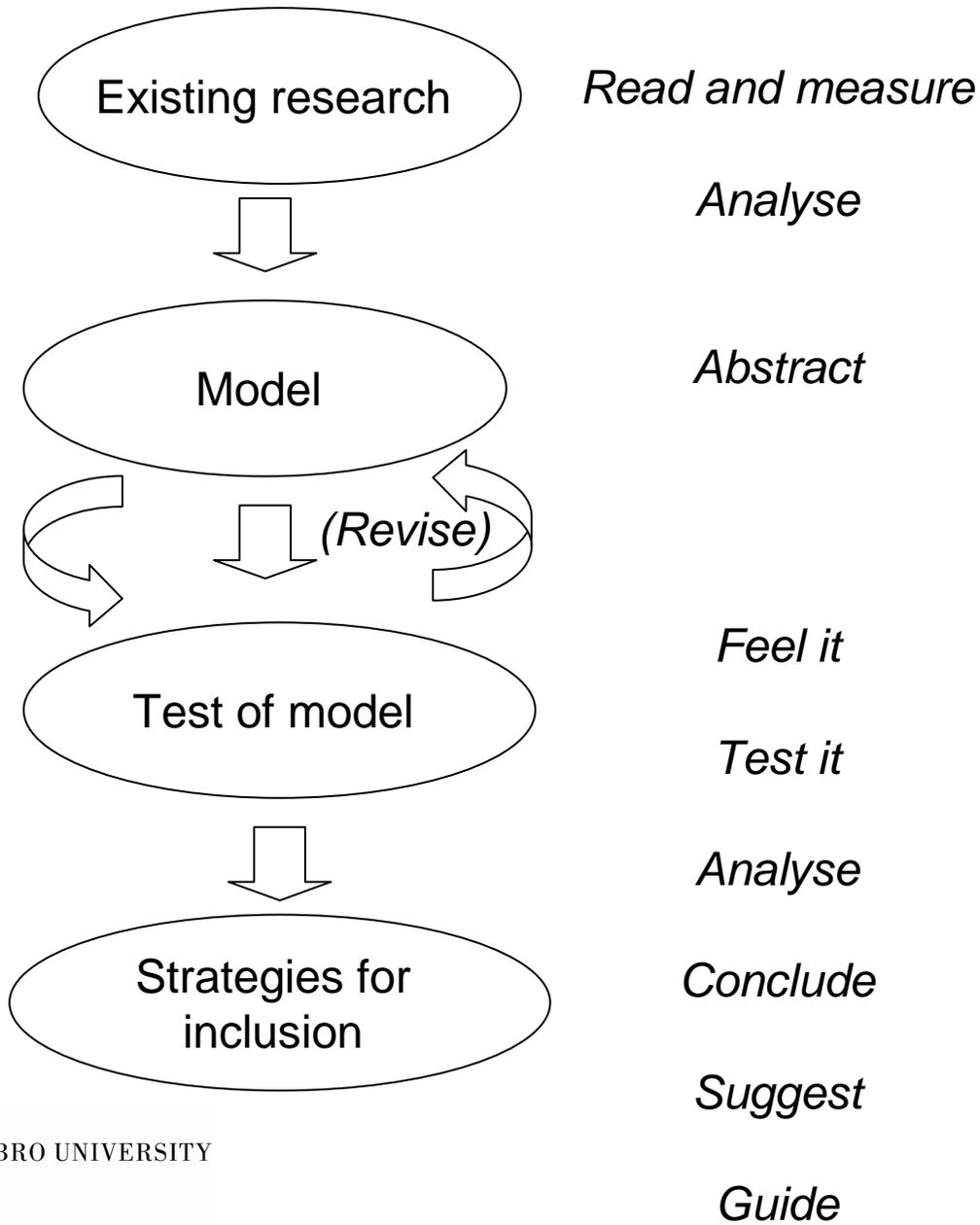
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Prospective result

- Creation of a model that can explain inclusion- and exclusion factors of e-learning in a developing country setting.

- On basis of this model one can also develop relevant inclusion strategies for the most excluded.

PhD project structure

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Existing research        Read and measure

         ↓
                         Analyse

   Model                 Abstract

      (Revise)
         ↓
                         Feel it

Test of model            Test it

         ↓
                         Analyse

Strategies for           Conclude
inclusion
                         Suggest

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                         Guide
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Method

1. Literature study (existing research on drop-out, retention, inhibitors and facilitators) → This is where I am now.
2. Create model on inhibiting and facilitating factors.
3. Test the model in an empirical case SriLanka (project documentation, interviews with everyone involved in project, stories of the drop-outs)
4. Analysis
5. Revised model (or confirmed)
6. Make conclusions of critical success factors for inclusion of the excluded (explained on basis of different categories – institutional, individual aspects etc.)
7. Create strategies for inclusion
8. Use and test the strategies for inclusion - possibly post-doc ;-)

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Preliminary findings

- Literature study on about 20 articles and reports (as of today) comparing factors impacting drop-out and retention in developing and industrialized countries

- Categorization draws on a coding process done using an access database including direct statements made on reasons on why one has dropped out or fulfilled the course.

- In the database comments are made on the strength and magnitude of the statements by commenting on who makes a claim and where surveys are used the number of how many students took part in the study is documented.

- What we can see so far is that in regard to stated factors influencing retention and attrition they are universal and the same no matter what the degree of development the country is in. But the factors seem to have different importance depending on the social and economical setting. The factors are "same, same, but different".

Drop-out reason	Comment/example	Importance
Lack of time/ other activities prioritized	Time conflicts with work, family, other studies.	Major/ Average
Lack of social support/ support from family	Family complains that the student is paying more attention to the studies than family etc.	Major
Lack of Motivation	Lack of motivation, learning what one needed to know before compleition of course, enrolled to the wrong course	Average
Lack of Familiarity with the technologies	Uncomfortable with the technologies used	Average
Poor design/pedagogics	Design of the course is poor, low teacher-student interaction, student left to self studies, bad techers	Average/ minor
Lack of Familiarity with the academic world and/or studying	lackof/low previous education qualifications	-
Poor Economy	Cannot afford computer/Internet/books	High in developing countries Minor in developed countries
Not sufficient access to technology	Technical factors, such as Internet connection problems	Average in developing countries Minor in developed countries

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Questions

- I have the general plan, the building blocks. But I seem to lack the glue that will keep the blocks together.
- Methodology?
- Theories?
- Is this critical research?
- Tools for analysing the findings from the qualitative interviews? Stories from drop-out students – find themes – lift and incorporate them in the model.
- What about using Gidden's Structuration theory?
- Thesis on similar subject?

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