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A Learner Support Model for Tertiary Web-based English Language Education in China

—Dialogues Between Learner Support System Design, Utilisation, and Learning Ecologies

中国高等英语网络教育 学生支持服务生态体系建模研究

王彤 著

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Abstract

This project is one of the first research attempts in China designed to explore learner support system design and utilisation by tertiary Chinese e-learners. It investigated how tertiary English language e-learners interacted with the elearning systems and how they managed their learning activities in their elearning process. The project was carried out for the purpose of empirically informing learner support system design. Based on the research findings, a learning-process-based ecological support model was proposed in the thesis.

This research aims to examine four major issues: what is the national pattern of learner support system design and utilisation by tertiary English language e-learners in China? How do different achieving groups utilise online and offline learning resources and support services? What are the learning ecologies of the e-learners? How can the e-learners be supported ecologically?

The empirical project is organised into three phases: Phase 1—a national study on tertiary learner support system design and service utilisation by English language e-learners in China; Phase 2—an institutional case study on the utilisation patterns of learner support provisions by different achieving groups; Phase 3—a longitudinal study on learner-system interaction and on how learners manage their elearning activities.

A variety of research methods were employed in different phases of the study: questionnaire survey, one-on-one interview, focus-group interview, and self-reporting learner diary. Important findings were discovered in relation to the national patterns of learner support system design and reception, the patterns of using resources and services by different achieving groups of e-learners, and the learning ecologies of tertiary English language e-learners.

Based on a literature review of distance education theories, learner support theories, and the findings of three research phases, a learning-

process-based ecological support model was proposed for tertiary English language elearning. Preliminary pilot study yielded positive results about the effectiveness of the model. Though the project was carried out in a discipline-specific setting, that is, English language education in an elearning environment, it is believed that the ecological learner support model can serve as a reference to other disciplines as well in elearning settings.

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