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Editorial



December 2004 is a historic month for Open and Distance Learning in Malaysia as I was appointed (promoted) to the position of a Professor of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) by the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). The appointment is another first as it also signifies the first appointment of a Professor in Open and Distance Learning by an institution of higher learning in Malaysia. To fellow academics in the world of ODL, I would like to express my sincere thanks for your cooperation, collaboration, support as well as collegiality in our association in ODL.

In this issue, we have six contributions with three coming from India, Indonesia and Nigeria, and the remainders are contributions from Malaysia. The Malaysian contributions from Mardziah, Madinah et al. and Hisham addresses the issues of social presence in online conferences, practices of lifelong learning and the advocacy of qualitative approaches in research, respectively.

Mardziah argues that online communication lacks the nonverbal and paralinguistic signals normally available in face-to-face interactions that convey the social presence of interlocutors. Her study examines how online interlocutors, in the absence of such crucial cues, establish social presence in a wholly text-based environment.

Madinah et al. identifies and describes the practices of lifelong learning in a local government authority. Her effort will eventually direct the learning processes to an open and flexible model that is able to accommodate the needs of the staff at the workplace. The distance mode of study is sought in the current emphasis on lifelong learning and we hope the effort will fully benefit from the array of interactive technologies that is available via the Internet.

I find myself in agreement with Hisham's deliberation on the usage of qualitative methods in the research design. Again, he pinpointed the key features of all qualitative analysis, *viz*, the intense immersion in the data, the emergence of patterns and themes as well as the similarities and differences between individual respondent. We have subsumed too much in quantitative analysis, when sometimes qualitative responses provides the contrary.

Ramesh et al. from the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) looks at the aspects of the organisation of counseling for various academic programmes in IGNOU together with the relevant recommendations to make counseling more effective. The duration of the counselling sessions, training of the counsellors, the use of audio-visual aids to enhance counseling and the student-counsellor ratio in programmes and at the centres are among others the items identified for further action.

Ogili presents the challenges of open and distance education in achieving education for all in Nigeria. Relating the trials and tribulation of the education system that is seen a liberating factor, the country is targeting distance education as a strategy to bridge the need of the masses.

Finally, Mahlan from Indonesia investigates the correlations between the perception of distance learners' learning achievement and the tutors. Students at the Universitas Terbuka (Open University) Banjarmasin showed no correlation between the perception of an excellent teacher and the student's learning achievement.

Sincere thanks to the contributors. See you all in June 2005.

Rozhan Mohammed Idrus
Chief Editor