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Editorial



This first issue of 2005 revolves around the usual issues of course development and learner focused learning environment. But then again, these are the pertinent issues as we only use the medium of instruction as a channel to reach the learners. This issue is graced by contributions from eight scholars from Bangladesh, Botswana, India, Indonesia and, of course, Malaysia.

Mohammad Habibur Rahman discusses the design and processes in the development of their course materials including the adoption of a course team approach. As mundane as it sounds, a well design first material will lend a tremendous outlay for the customization of the materials in the future. It is never easy handling academics in the course of the writing and designing the course materials. Only those who have been through it will know the laborious nature of the processes.

Solomon from the University of Botswana shares with us their experience of the use of one of the oldest media in distance education, i.e. audio-based instruction. 'Writing for the ear' as he put it is a challenge and new experience, especially for text-based academics. The transition from text-based to audio-based is daunting: even a simple shift to the audio gave rise to many new parameters such as the intonation, speed, clarity, sound effects, recording and editing, to name a few. Again, as in the first contribution, only those who have gone through it will appreciate the effort.

We are still on the design issue, and Su-Ting Yong from the Curtin University of Technology reviewed the content and page design of distance education software programme used over the Internet. In this case, multimedia capabilities must be taken into consideration and we are now dealing with the elements of not only audio, but video, picture as well as animations. In all, we are now encroaching into human-computer interactions (HCI). Good content and page design will make information easier to navigate and enables a more user-friendly environment.

Let us take a break from the design and approach the learners. In his study, Sanjaya is taking a step backward to get the big picture by presenting a survey of the learner's perceptions about the role of objectives in self-learning materials. The objectives are powerful elements that act as a guide to the writer, designer and the learners. The modular concept is quite specific and Sanjaya found the



preferences of the learners' such as spreading the objectives throughout the learning materials rather than lumping them all at the beginning. Sounds like good design to me. There is always a way to improve the learning materials, all the more so when it is used independently.

Mohd Sharani and Mohamad Ibrani of the Universiti Malaysia Sabah and Universiti Putra Malaysia, respectively, conducted a study to examine the collaborative interactions of children in a mediated computer learning classroom, including the comparison of verbal and physical interactions of normal children and those with learning difficulties. They interpreted their results in terms of processes of social comparison, which appeared to be more potent in their situation than any straight forward domination of resources.

Ramayah et al presented an interesting finding in a web-based course that will impact the design principles. From the student's standpoint, they were more concerned whether it would be easier for them to use the website, rather than worry about whether the given website would be useful to them. Makes sense I guess. The ease of use will lead to higher usage which would result in accessing the content.

M. Rajesh from India shares with us an Indian distance learners' perspective of the aspects of globalization of education. Citing a favourable position for globalization, the learners were of the opinion that there should be worldwide recognition of distance education degrees to facilitate greater labour mobility. Too, market access to foreign educational institutions.

Finally, Mahlan from Indonesia actually investigated the professional competencies of the graduated teachers from the Open University in South Kalimantan. This effort would further enhance the content of their course so that it will be more towards the needs of the profession.

The basic issues are still close the researcher's heart and we are still firmly rooted in the design of instruction and the characteristics of the learner. This should be so as technology is there to facilitate and enhance our teaching and learning efforts. I am sure this trend will persist in the future, maybe with more innovative approaches to enhance the capabilities of multimedia computing, be it stand alone or in a networked situation.

Till then ... take care ...

Rozhan Mohammed Idrus
Chief Editor

