

MALAYSIAN JOURNAL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Jurnal Pendidikan Jarak Jauh Malaysia

From the Chief Editor



I have known Ali Musawi for many years via the Internet and my attendance as a Keynote Speaker at the International Conference on Distance Education (ICODE 2006) in the Sultan Qaboos University, the Sultanate of Oman was the first face to face encounter with him. I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation for the hospitality received and wish that the Sultanate, the University and the wonderful people in the University will achieve the prospective goals of the Omani leadership.

Overall I was also impressed by the turnout and the diversity of papers presented at the Conference and decided to take the opportunity to share the scholarly contributions with fellow academics via the Malaysian Journal of Distance Education.

To cut a long story short, we pre-selected nine papers from the list of contributed papers and ended up with seven after the usual review processes. We are also delighted that Ali accepted our invitation to be the Guest Editor of this issue. I can only hope that we have contributed to the awareness on the contributions of distance education in the field of education and the exciting research and publications that has resulted from the academics to the Middle East in general. Our thanks too go to the contributing authors for their willingness to share their work and uphold the quality of the Journal.

On a more personal note, this will be my last issue as the Chief Editor of the Malaysian Journal of Distance Education after being at the helm since the year 2000. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Editorial Board as well as the International Advisory Board for their dedication and hard work to make the Journal a success. Thanks too, to the Dean of the School of Distance Education for his trust and support during that time. Most of all, my sincere thanks to all the contributors for choosing the Malaysian Journal of Distance Education to publish their painstaking scholarly works. In any case, I will still be around.

Rozhan Mohammed Idrus
Chief Editor

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Editorial



The International Conference on Distance Education (ICODE 2006) was a joint efforts between the Ministry of Higher Education and the Sultan Qaboos University of the Sultanate of Oman. The conference was held from the 27-29 March 2006 at the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and was inaugurated by His Highness Sayed Shihab bin Tariq Al Said, Adviser to His Majesty the Sultan.

Among the topics addressed were New approaches in distance learning and best practices, innovative educational technologies-applications in the Arabic enterprises, e-management systems for education; distance learning applications for learners with special needs, in addition to issues such as quality assurance, standards and evaluation, as well as criteria for recognition and certification of Distance Learning in Higher Education.

The SQU became a beehive with people from all walks of life. There were about 65 research papers with professors and international experts from various countries of the world. The participants from 32 Arab and foreign countries such as Egypt, Sudan, Jordon, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Japan, India, Malaysia, Belgium, South Africa, Sweden, Romania, Canada further enriched the congregation.

I am extremely delighted to share with readers in this Special Issue of the esteemed Malaysian Journal of Distance Education selected contributions from the conference. The choice would hopefully reflect the diversity and range of areas addressed by the contributors and that they be viewed from a holistic approach of the conference.

Elizabeth from the University of Qatar shares with us a qualitative research methodology in Grounded Theory; a method that is explicitly different from other methods in that it does not test a hypothesis but seeks, rather, to understand the research situation.

Moosa Al Kindi et al put forth an analytical article is to describe the development of Distance Learning For Common Courses Research Project at the Omani Sultan Qaboos University (SQU); analysing literary evidence of the possibility of offering distance learning (DL) courses as a feasible option to the physical classroom learning. More importantly, the courses that can be offered in a multimedia and traditional formats, will help diminish the impact of the facility restrictions.

Amira H. A. Razzaq & Mayada F. Abdul-Halim from the University of Bahrain presented a descriptive, and analytical paper demonstrating the availability of using MIND FLASH package in designing one of the courses. Hayder Al-Ameed & Shaikha Al-Ketbi from the UAE University described a School Management Systems (SMSs) that provides a single database design and broad set of functionalities that benefit all education stakeholders: administrators, teachers, students and their parents in a secure and authenticated manner.

Distance education engineering students need to be exposed to real-life apparatus to increase the awareness and understanding of the engineering concepts. Nevertheless, the lacking of these equipment, partly due to its size, cost and space, has constrained the distance learning process. The research by Zol Bahri Razali was conducted to study and recognise the usage of distance learning module based on multimedia in engineering subjects.

We move from engineering to architecture as Rabee M. Reffat of the King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals in Dahrhan analysed the impact of e-learning hypothesis on education and learning, addresses the uniqueness of learning design and architecture, and presents the developments of e-learning in design and architectural education including multi-user 3D virtual collaborative learning environments and adaptive learning environments; WINDS (Web-based INtelligent Design tutoring System). Finally, a blended learning approach in the language centre was discussed by James Scully from Sultan Qaboos University.

We hope that the richness of the conference as portrayed in the discussions of this Special Issue can act as an impetus to the development of standards that fit the Middle East context for accrediting distance education programmes and institutions. We are grateful to the Malaysian Journal of

Distance Education for this opportunity to showcase scholarly contributions by the conference participants and further enrich the construction of knowledge in the world of distance education.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the contributing authors; to Professor Rozhan M. Idrus and his colleagues for accommodating us in this Journal; to Dr Moosa Al-Khindi, the Chairman of the Organizing Committee of the Conference; the Center for Educational Technology and the College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University.

Ali Sharaf Al Musawi
Guest Editor



Participants at the ICODE 2006