

## GUEST EDITORIAL PREFACE

# Best Practices in Management, Design and Development of E-Courses: Standards of Excellence and Creativity

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It seems not long ago when I was beta-testing the first hyperlinked educational program that failed to deliver on expectations yet it presented itself as the basis of operations in the hyperlinked world-wide-web. Since then, the field of distance learning has come a very long way. Today we find learning management systems in almost all major universities of the world that are prepared to deliver e-learning in whatever form required; mobile, distance learning, blended learning, collaborative learning and project based learning.

Research represents to fast growing fields like e-learning is no different from the water and sunlight plants need to keep growing. Conferences, represent the mineral mix in the soil where ideas merge to feed the aspiring tree. Together, we can plant a forest. Therefore, this special issue emerged from the fourth e-learning conference organized by Zain e-Learning center at the University of Bahrain. A select few of

the papers were invited to contribute extended versions to this first special issue.

In this special issue; Prof. Hamdy Ahmed Abdelaziz from the Arabian Gulf University published his paper on creative design of Interactive eLearning activities and materials. Dr. Hamdy already implemented this approach in his own teaching and it is also being implementing at a University in the USA. Dr. Hamdy won the Khalifa Award for his innovative contribution in this paper and its impact on the educational world. In this paper, he presents a model that guides course designers to develop elearning activities and materials based upon several main components. These include; knowledge domains and classification of knowledge, pedagogical techniques, learning tools and media, pedagogical standards of interactive activities, creativity processes and mental knowledge structure. He bases much of his background knowledge on well known

researchers in the field and brings all their theories together to help create an e-educational environment that can be implemented across different course topics and different languages.

In this issue also, Professors Merengo, Pagano and Barbone from the University of Bari, publish a paper that proposes an evaluation approach of student performance in an open adaptive e-learning environment with active tutorship. The adaptive system utilizes learning objects from a large library to be used to influence learning. These objects may include, examples represented as texts, videos, images, etc. The proposed system analyzes how different factors influence student passing rates in the subject. It especially focuses on learning styles, learning paths, methodology issues and student behaviors.

A third paper asks if learning management systems are ready to assist students in their learning. Prof. Edrees from the University of Bahrain compares two well known learning management systems to find out if they are ready to present themselves as learning mediums and finds only one of the two passing his tests. He focuses on the availability of the system, ease of use and ease of integration. Perhaps one of the key drivers to this research is the resistance of instructors in adopting learning management systems.

The fourth paper studies student perception of the utilization of specific learning management system features in a geology course in King Fahad University for Petroleum and

Minerals. The paper aims to understand the particularities of student perspectives of how an LMS influences their learning. In fact, one of the main conclusions is that they found on-line discussions as particularly useful to their learning process. Other communication features like email, announcements were also found to be important to students.

The fifth paper, also studies the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to investigate the adoption of e-learning in the Kingdom. Results revealed that obstacles to adoption come from several different reasons of which two are extremely influential the language barrier, and the resistance of older faculty to adopt the new medium even though the young generations demand such services.

To sum up, this special issue is presenting four papers that come from four different countries and all seek to contribute to the advancement of e-learning. No one can deny that people are learning from the e-platform whether that learning comes from printed documents, wiki pages, discussion boards, chat rooms, or simply through random information search. The world will never be the same again so we as researchers try to catch up and understand the contexts and learning occurring every day around us.

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