



Editorial

Five Years of Serving the Asian ODE Community

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In this Editorial, we look back over the past five years that we have edited this Journal ; not nostalgically but with renewed interest in the future of open and distance education (ODE) in Asia.

We set out in February 2002 at the Asian Association of Open Universities annual conference that was held in New Delhi, to provide a free service to researchers and practitioners in ODE, and the first Issue was published in the following year. Since then we have maintained the format of about seven full Articles per issue, and we continue to revise the design of the website to keep it up to date and accessible open to all. We are pleased to note that two Assistant Editors have been appointed – Jack Fei Yang, and Irshad Hussain – and we welcome their participation and contribution to the future of the Journal. Jacky is in Taiwan, while Irshad is in Pakistan. They bring their professional expertise and thus a wider stronger field of expertise to the Journal.

In the first Editorial (2003), we described the Asian ODE landscape as we saw it and expounded on the reasons for the Journal – that it was needed and timely. We argued there that while general concepts were being borrowed massively from the West, these imported ideas and concepts need to be tested, tried out, and reported on within Asia for Asia. The next four years have since validated our claims we formulated and made back then in 2002.

We note some seminal Articles from non-Asian countries such as by Fred Lockwood in the UK, by Tony Bates in Canada, Kinshuk in New Zealand, and from Asian countries. Indeed much brilliant work has been edited and published by us, from all across Asia. The current Issue is no exception. We have Papers from the easternmost edge from Japan, from the central part from India, and from the westernmost edge from Israel.

The first is by Polu Satyanarayana and Emmanuel Meduri. They remind us that it is not only the students that have their own context to be taken into consideration, and not only the teachers too, but they report on the functions of leadership that differ particularly between conventional education and distance education. Just as the qualities of students vary by context, it should be clear that the qualities of leadership vary within distance education according to the specific context. They emphasize that technological vision is the key leadership quality in distance education. No doubt many in conventional education will also find their paper to be useful, relevant and inspiring.

The second Paper is by Ashok Gaba on the successful programmes at IGNOU that have increased the education and employment of women in India. This is a remarkable achievement for India, considering the poor results in other regions of Asia, and indeed in the West too. The 3rd

Millennium Development Goal to “eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015” has generally diverted attention away from higher education and employment skills training for women in developing countries including India (Mamoon, 2006). So this report on the work by IGNOU and their success in promoting women’s higher education and employment is particularly timely and welcomed. We are especially interested in this Paper by Ashok since next year is the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Our 2008 volume 6 will include papers related to Article 26 on the Right to Education. However we must also note that Article 25 is on the rights of women and children. Ashok’s Paper reports on remarkable progress in achieving improved access to education for women and that such access is effective in helping them. The low follow-up rate of 38% may be due to the less successful achievers not responding, or to the cultural reluctance for women in Asia to voice their successes and opinions, or to the majority being busy now working. Nevertheless, their data reflect the noteworthy progress achieved in women empowerment by IGNOU.

The third Paper is by Junaidah Januin who reports survey data from distance students on their perceptions of the roles of their teachers, the students and in their own language learning abilities to discover to what extent the students have adequate language learning autonomy to succeed in distance education. What is surprising is Junaidah’s Paper is that it describes distance education as providing high levels of social contact with other students and access to experts that the students would not otherwise have obtained through conventional education. That this is now taken for granted in distance education should truly welcomed, after having to battle critics of ODE who have since almost forty years ago argued to the contrary and been repeatedly proven wrong – not only in their lack of vision but also in their own slow uptake of technology and e-learning. Only very recently in the past couple of

years are we seeing a few in conventional education begin to adopt e-learning and distance techniques.

The fourth Paper is by Sanjaya Mishra and Santosh Panda and follows on from this previous point. They report the development of an instrument to gauge faculty attitude towards e-learning. Their Paper focused on teachers in single-mode distance education. The next logical step will be applying this instrument in a dual-mode institution, and also in a single-modeconventional education institute. The strength of this Paper is that it now gives management an effective tool to investigate and identify ways to improve teacher attitudes and the uptake of e-learning.

The fifth is by Tamar Benaya, Anat Lerner and Ela Zur in Israel. This Paper gives the latest results from their following students who had not achieved the entry requirements for graduate school and who had been assigned probationary two courses to get qualified and then enter the graduate school proper. This is an interesting concept from the perspective of applying entry requirements to graduate school in open education and how to resolve the situation for students who are keen to study but just fall short of the requirements. Since the original description of the British Open University was as a second chance for those who had missed out on a university education, this Paper shows comparative data within the same course of those who chose to study as a second chance alongside those who fully met the entry requirements. Their follow-up data indicate about half the second-chance students were performing satisfactorily – only 46% had dropped out, and the other were either successful or were midway in their studies. This drop-out rate compares fairly with that reported worldwide from distance education, supporting their vision to provide graduate opportunities to those motivated to try.

The sixth Paper is by Indrajit Bhattacharya and Kunal Sharma who give an overview of need for deploying e-learning technologies for national development. This Paper is special since it addresses the issue for conventional education arguing that all universities

whether conventional or distance mode must engage e-learning for long-term economic development. The focus of their argument is that technology industry and the government must cooperate to provide the necessary infrastructure to enable conventional universities to utilize information technologies and e-learning.

The seventh Paper is by Rabindra Kumar Sinha, Abhishek Singh and Manjamuthu Vaithilingam. Their Paper reports their long-term results from offering the master's course in population studies to students at a distance for the past twelve years. Generally throughout the world, distance education has attracted a high proportion of young women in the initial intake. Here in this report, the Authors report that while indeed the proportion of women did fall in subsequent years, that they have now recovered to achieve a fairly balanced high intake. The average age too has remained fairly balanced at 30 years old, and more interesting a balanced has been achieved between students who are married and students who are unmarried.

The last Paper in this issue is a Focus Report by Paul Kawachi. This reports the new International Professors Project that is quickly establishing a new label of International Professor who works internationally often with experience of teaching or research in two or more regions or countries providing expertise to under-developed hosting universities. The Project is a non-profit registered charity and has a membership of hundreds of experienced professors and scholars mainly in the fields

of economic and ecological areas essential for helping bridge the developmental divide. This Project should be of particular and general interest to all conventional and open distance universities throughout Asia.

The Editors are pleased to note that we continue to attract about seven high quality Papers for each issue over the past four years. These Papers are selected for their relevance to open and distance education in Asia. Many past authors and prospective authors take up our offer of free editorial assistance to get their work published, and we are expanding this offer with the appointment of two new Assistant Editors Jack Fei Yang, and Irshad Hussain. More news on our continuous development will be in the next issue.

We are pleased that we continue to be successful, we thank all our supporters and authors over the years, and as we wrote in that first Editorial, "We are looking forward to a busy future" (2003, p. 4).

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