

Editorial

As Pakistan was an early adopter of distance education, the challenge, so far, has not been to familiarize people with the concept of open distance learning (ODL), rather to provide quality education via ODL to make it a viable replacement of traditional face-to-face mode of education still dominant in Pakistan. International paradigm shift in education due to the advancements in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the introduction of open education has excavated many challenges. The foremost amongst them are the need of quality instructional design, appropriate instructional engineering and differentiated online education. Moving from pedagogy to andragogy to heutagogy, ODL has triggered research on topics like personal learning environments (PLEs), importance of learning context, and the exploration of cognitive processing with the help of modern information processing theories. Theories like multiple intelligences, social constructivism and connectivism drag students from the periphery of the traditional methods of teaching to the centre of self-discovery of knowledge. The greatest challenge faced by ODL is either to identify one of the best models of instructional design or blend a few to get one that may actually turn out to be the universal design of e-learning. However, constant evolution of such design is necessary as cultural sensitivity would always remain a challenge which determines the need of nationally flavoured ODL to develop a real sense of ownership of their self-constructed knowledge amongst students.

The Journal of Distance Education and Research (JDER) is an attempt from the platform of Virtual University of Pakistan (VUP) to contribute to national and international e-learning research scene by being dedicated to emerging multidisciplinary e-learning issues both in theory and practice. The challenges faced by ODL in Pakistan are the need for a constantly evolving instructional design that should stem from learning analytics and lead to differentiated instruction, effective student support system, quality assurance of programs and processes, accreditation of programs, devising ways of improving students' soft skills and above all, training teachers. In this regard, the first edition of JDER is a humble attempt to promote original e-learning research taking place in Pakistan.

The first edition includes six papers on a range of topics. The first article "Quality Assurance in Higher Education: A Framework for Distance Education" by Mariam Tanweer and Mubashar Majeed Qadri is an attempt to redefine the concept of quality in higher education with particular

reference to distance education/e-learning. The authors propose a framework by using Systems Approach to Program Evaluation (SAPE) and Components of Open Distance Learning (CODL). This framework can be useful in developing a quality structure with quality assurance indicators used as parameters for different degree programs. The second article “Perceived Communal Benefits, Conceivable Risks and Potential Implications: Opinions of E-Educators” by Sadia Jabeen explores the potential of e-learning for social sector communal benefits while also highlighting conceivable risks based on the opinion of e-educators. The findings construe many social sector development possibilities through e-learning.

The third article “Effectiveness of Online Discussions in Developing Higher Order Thinking Skills” by Asma Zafar attempts to find out the effectiveness of discussions in a formal e-learning context. The article is a case study of VUP and tries to discover whether VUP Graded Discussion Board (GDB) discussions in Psychology courses facilitate in developing Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) among students by inculcating critical thinking and problem solving skills or not. The fourth article “Motivational Goal Orientation and Learning Strategies of E-Learners” by Narjis Sherazi and Sadia Jabeen explores the connection between motivational goal orientation and metacognitive learning strategies. The study affirms that motivational goal orientation helps students adopt better learning strategies which lead them towards self-directed and self-regulated learning.

The fifth article “Virtual Socialization in Pakistan: A Step Towards Social Transformation” by Nadia Saleem attempts to find out the relationship between the use of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) and the trend of virtual socialization amongst the youth of Lahore. The findings reveal that even Pakistani society has been affected by the social transformation brought about by ICTs resulting in changing communication patterns. The last article “An Investigation of the Orthographic Errors in the Graded Discussion Board of Virtual University of Pakistan” by Muhammad Asif investigates the nature and causes of the spelling errors the e-language learners commit while posting their comments on VUP’s GDB. The author recommends strategies to avoid spelling mistakes in an e-learning context.

I hope you would enjoy reading these research papers.

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Co-editor