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Do Open and Distance Learning institutions need more (or better supported) centres for teaching and learning?

The scope of research among the articles in this issue is broad. The article topics range from Arabic nursing students using artificial intelligence (AI) to teaching opera online in China to using mobile learning to teach mathematics. What they share is a common interest in initiating or understanding the use of open, digital, or distance education to support or improve learning.

Aydemir and Kır researched AI-generated tests. The study assessed how learners and experts responded to AI-generated multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blank exercises, and true-false activities in an online course. Students were more likely to view and then complete instructor-created content than AI-generated content. Students seemed to have more superficial engagement with AI-generated content, as they struggled to clearly understand instructions from AI. Therefore, the authors strongly advocate for the role of human oversight with AI content.

As AI becomes used in various educational courses and programs, it is important to assess its uptake and use. **Alenazi** studied the psychometric properties of an Arabic version of the well-known UTAUT model of technology adoption (Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology). Was the model useful for assessing nursing students' use of AI? The analysis supported the construct validity of the nine UTAUT constructs: performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, hedonic motivation, price value, habit, behavioral intention, and use behavior. The results support the validity of the UTAUT model in the Arabic cultural context. The study also offers insights into the factors influencing nursing students' acceptance and use of AI in healthcare education.

Shen, Chang, & Yang discuss learning effectiveness and deep learning in blended learning formats. Poor integration of online and in-person learning can lead to superficial student engagement. Using the Community of Inquiry-based blended learning model, the authors conducted a quasi-experimental design to study learning effectiveness and deep learning. They found that the blended learning group demonstrated superior learning effectiveness and reported higher deep learning perceptions compared to the traditional learning group. The results are useful, especially to educators who want to design blended learning that fosters deep learning.

Wang, Zhan & Song researched HyFlex courses, courses where students can choose to attend classes in person, participate synchronously online, or engage asynchronously through recorded materials. Hyflex allows students to combine multiple modes to tailor their learning experience. Though the multiple modes could pose challenges for team collaboration, the study found that effective communication significantly enhanced team performance. Creating a positive team atmosphere moderated this relationship. But an overly positive atmosphere may hinder constructive critique and diminish performance. They suggest that educators foster communication strategies that encourage open dialogue and critical thinking, while maintaining a supportive yet not overly positive team environment**.**

Islam and Mahmud were interested in the experience of important, often understudied educators in ODL: tutors. Over 80 tutors at eight tutorial centres of the Bangladesh Open University were asked to identify areas requiring improvement and provide suggestions for enhancing the academic quality of the programs. Major findings from the study include: the importance of tutor professional development; offering and requiring attendance of tutorial sessions to develop pedagogical competence; ensuring curriculum and modules are revised and updated; developing dedicated physical resources for students (computer labs, library and multimedia support); the crucial role of coordinators as essential in aligning tutorial schedules, resolving administrative challenges, and serving as communication bridges between institutional leadership and ground-level tutors. By hearing the voices of people doing the work, this study contributes to a more inclusive model of academic development.

Li writes about teaching opera online. Li compared the strengths of specific master classes at Juilliard Extension and the Royal College of Music, vs online seminars at Living Opera and Angel's Music Academy. The study finds that individuals learning to sing opera through master classes reported experiencing improvements in memory and problem-solving skills. Students who attended the online seminars reported improvements in concentration and memory. The study shows how ODL can be used for learning a broad range of skills, including vocal skills.

Meylani conducted a systematic review of how mobile learning in math affected students' learning attitudes, motivation, and performance. The research found that mobile learning enhances students' essential thinking skills and higher-order thinking skills. Mobile fostered interactivity and inquiry-based learning. Uneven access to resources and technology was still a barrier. Importantly, Meylani contends institutions should try to improve digital competency, engage faculty members in collaborative platforms to enhance their experience with mobile platforms and ensure data protection.

ElGamal and Zawacki-Richter conducted an umbrella review of flipped learning in higher education. An umbrella review is a second-order systematic review: it consolidates systematic reviews. They analyze 23 systematic reviews on flipped teaching and learning in open, distance and digital education. Their synthesis reveals several themes, including: how effective are flipped learning and teaching interventions, how flipped classrooms have been applied in various fields, learning design considerations, a scarcity of theoretical frameworks, and limited research on the pedagogical challenges of flipped learning models.

Martin reviews the timely book Resisting the Dehumanization of Refugees. Written by Abu Laban, Frishkopf, Hasmath, and Kirova, the book explores the struggle refugees face in creating a sense of

belonging during a time of immense backlash against refugees and immigration. As Martin points out, the thoughtful chapters are important for educators who can either exacerbate dehumanization or mitigate this.

Boulhrir reviews the book Brave New Worlds by Salman Khan. This book is aimed at parents, teachers or education administrators who are new to AI. It is unsurprising that, as the CEO of the eponymous Khan Academy, Khan is very enthusiastic about AI in education. However, as Boulhrir states, Khan's enthusiasm for AI technology in education outpaces a deeper engagement with its long-term social and pedagogical implications.

The world is changing quickly, creating much uncertainty. Open and Distributed Learning is changing quickly as well. Without a doubt, AI is the elephant in the room for ODL and all education. We know the pace is accelerating for using AI and other technologies in learning and teaching. There are many other important (non-AI) ODL practices that are ongoing, from hyflex to online opera. This brings many challenges for planning, designing, and supporting ODL on the ground.

As learning models and learning become more flexible, there is a demand for more, not less, human interaction and sophisticated instructional design. As the Shen article on blended learning suggests, the response to "superficial student engagement" is not in the *blend*, but in the *design*.

Perhaps more or better-supported teaching and learning centres can act as intermediaries. They can allow for the sandboxing of ODL initiatives on the ground, whether it be AI, Hyflex, online opera, or math on mobile. Education leaders may not necessarily know what to do with some of these initiatives. Perhaps leadership in ODL institutions do not really know what is happening with AI and other ed tech initiatives. And maybe they don't need to know all of it. Teaching and learning centres can be resources and repositories. They can help support the work of students, tutors, teachers, and perhaps even researchers.

AI transparency statement: No GenAI apps were used for writing this editorial.