Editorial

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Biographical notes: Fu Lee Wang is the Vice President (Research & Advancement) of the Caritas Institute of Higher Education. Prior to joining Caritas, he was a faculty member at City University of Hong Kong. He received his PhD in Systems Engineering and Engineering Management from The Chinese University of Hong Kong. His research interests include financial engineering, information systems, information retrieval and e-learning. He has over 100 publications, including papers in leading journals and proceedings of international conferences i.e., Neurocomputing, IEEE Intelligent Systems, Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, Decision Support Systems, Information Processing Letters, IW3C, SIGIR, and more. He has organised a number of international conferences. He is the Chairman of IEEE Hong Kong Section Computer Society Chapter and Past Chairman of ACM Hong Kong Chapter.

K.C. Li received his PhD on curriculum design related areas from the University of Hong Kong, and four MAs in Management and Language Education areas from the University of London and other universities in the UK and Hong Kong, as well as a Bachelor's degree in Law and Education from Peking University and UK institutions. He has overseen undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at the Open University of Hong Kong. Currently, he is the Director of the research centre of the university. His research interest lies in innovative ways for distance and adult learning. He has chaired management committees of many high schools and has also served as an honorary Chair Professor and a Visiting Professor of various tertiary institutions.

Simon K.S. Cheung received his BSc and PhD in Computer Science from City University of Hong Kong, and his Master of Public Administration from University of Hong Kong. He is a Chartered Engineer, Chartered Scientist, Chartered IT Professional, and Fellow of a number of professional institutions in Computer Science, Engineering, Technology and Management. Currently, he is the Director of Information Technology at the Open University of Hong Kong. Prior to this, he was the Director of IT Services, SPACE at the University of Hong Kong. He serves on editorial boards of journals and committees of international conferences, and he is an Honorary Consultant in e-Learning for Beijing Open University. His publications include 10 books and over 100 refereed journal articles, book chapters, and conference papers. His current research interests are in the areas of IT in teaching and learning.

Reggie Kwan is the President of the Caritas Institute of Higher Education. Before joining Caritas to help build a Catholic university in Hong Kong, he was the Head of Computing and Mathematics and Intermittent Acting Dean of Science and Technology at the Open University of Hong Kong. Prior to that, he was a Professor and Chair of Computer Science at Montana Tech of the University of Montana from the mid-80s to late 90s. With his Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees in Computer Science and Computer Science Education, he has a wide range of research interests ranging from data compression, computer science education to e-learning. He has been on editorial boards of journals and has been active organising international conferences in computer science, education and e-learning. Even after becoming a full-time administrator, he continues to be active in contributing to the field of e-learning and has over 100 publications in the area.

Online education comes in many forms and it is now ubiquitous because of the maturity in technology. Education which is delivered online can be highly cost-effective. It also removes the time and geographical limitations. Despite the advantages it may bring, many aspects on the pedagogy side are yet to show improvement. The trend to bring education online is like a tidal wave in higher education, and thus the faculty members need to be vigilant when they design and implement online programs and courses, and keep themselves up-to-date and proactive when they design materials and institutional policy for online learning.

This special issue on Online Education aims to summarise the development of online education and its emerging theories and practice. Students are always the pivotal point in the educational process. The first three papers discuss how students are engaged in online learning. The fourth paper focuses on how online learning is supported by open educational resources and the last paper investigates the effectiveness of a web-based homework and testing software for operations management education.

As a result of the development of internet technology, distance learning courses nowadays are commonly delivered with an online learning system. The first paper, 'Students engagement in a technology mediated distance learning course', by Li and Lam, reports interesting findings from students in a distance learning course. The study has overcome the difficulties of collecting detailed data of how individual students go about their learning. It highlights that while instructional designers and professors work conscientiously to utilise interactive technology and make the learning process interesting, their efforts could be futile, if a proper understanding of how students are engaged in the course of learning is not present.

The second paper, 'A report on the online learning experience of students in accounting course', by Lam, Chan and Yan, provides further evidence that students' preferences could differ from the course and the staff's expectations. The paper investigates students' online learning experience in a blended learning course. The study provides useful empirical findings for insights in designing blended learning courses. It lends support to the importance of taking students' views into consideration in the course development or learning design process.

Online learning is typically supported by a Learning Management System. The third paper, 'Japanese learners' point of view on Learning Management System', by Hirata and Hirata, reports a year-long study of students' perceptions and expectations of the system in contexts with and without the instructor's direction. From a different perspective and with a different set of data, the results draw the attention again to the individual students' learning preferences and needs. This paper, together with the last paper, points earnestly and cogently to student-centeredness, not only in the learning process, but also in the course or system design stage.

As it is mentioned in the third paper, it is critical to give more control to students based on their own individual learning preferences and needs. Traditional printed textbooks are not flexible enough to cater to the learning differences among individual classes or students. Open learning resources bridge the gap to maximise the benefit of online learning. The fourth paper, 'Open textbooks: engaging education stakeholders to share learning resources', by Cheung, Yuen, Li, Tsang and Wong, delineates open textbooks' development, potential advantages and challenges. It also presents a plan to systematically develop open textbooks in the context of Hong Kong.

The last paper, 'The effectiveness of a web-based homework and testing software for operations management', by Rao, presents the reasons for using web-based homework and testing software, especially for courses such as Operations Management with quantitative content. It describes the features of MyOMLab and then the paper focuses on the effectiveness of this software subjectively and objectively. A survey measures the perceptions of the students making use of the software for its effectiveness. A correlation of pre-test scores and post-test scores measures the effectiveness of the software objectively. The paper concludes that this software is extremely useful for large classes and indispensable for online classes andthe correlation results showed some interesting differences in gender.

Sincerely, we wish to thank the authors, and hope that the readers will share our excitement and enthusiasm on the data and methods presented in this special issue and we would greatly appreciate any comments to this issue.