Editorial

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It is an undeniable fact that technology has become an irreversible force driving the transformation of teaching and learning practices. Enabled by the latest information and communication technologies, open learning, flexible learning and personalised learning are three promising modes of learning with proven advantages. In recent years, they have evolved as global trends in education with wide acceptance. Open learning emphasises open or free accesses to educational resources, materials and courses, principally through the internet. Flexible learning emphasises learning anywhere and anytime, without any restriction on time and space. Personalised learning allows certain levels of adaptation in the learning process to cater for individual and personal learning needs and preferences. These three modes of learning share a common objective which is to enrich the students' learning experience beyond the conventional classrooms.

This special issue of the *International Journal of Innovation and Learning* focus on online learning, flexible learning and personalised learning. It contains six refereed papers, selected from the papers presented at the 7th International Conference on Hybrid Learning, held in East China Normal University, Shanghai, China on 8–10 August 2014, with some expansion and revision.

Within the context of open learning, the first paper 'Technical considerations in the development of an online platform for open textbooks' investigates technical issues, limitations and considerations in designing and developing an online platform for open textbooks. Open textbooks are by nature open education resources that allow users to use, reuse, revise, remix and redistribute openly and freely, and an online platform is required for hosting the open textbooks. The author used an experimental online platform to study the technical feasibility, functionality and usability of the platform. Technical limitations and problems in the development process are discussed. User friendliness and easiness of use are identified as two essential design objectives of the online platform. There is a trade-off on the functional features if a simple and concise user interface is adopted. It is revealed that a right balance between user friendliness and functional comprehensiveness is important but difficult to achieve.

The second paper 'Leveraging education of information technology in business: the application of a project-based, problem-based, and flexible learning model' investigates a flexible learning model for teaching and learning information technology in business courses. The authors shared their experience in a higher education institution in implementing project-based and problem-based learning through the establishment of a Business Technology Centre, where students formed cross-disciplinary project teams to solve some real business cases based on group members' expertise and techniques. Some preliminary evaluation was done through survey. It is reported that the students' learning experience can be enriched and the students' employability can be enhanced. Students also enjoy the learning process.

The third paper 'A multi-party Mahjong-like spelling game for English vocabulary learning' is a case study of flexible learning. This paper investigates the application of games, specifically Chinese Mahjong game, for learning English vocabulary. Through game-based learning, the authors claimed that the main benefit is to enrich the students' learning experience, such as creating fun in the learning process, and encouraging peer and collaborative learning. The authors shared their experience in designing a Mahjong-like game for helping students in English vocabulary spelling. A detailed description of the game design and the technical implementation was given. The advantageous features and benefits are also discussed.

The fourth paper 'Personalised-adaptive learning – an operational framework for developing competency-based curricula in computer information technology' reports a personalised and adaptive learning system for computer and information technology curricula. The authors proposed a personalised learning model to enhance the adaptive capacities, such as feedback and remediation for students. It is claimed that the addition of adaptive capacities provide cost-effective customisation that can better serve both the teachers and students. The authors demonstrated the model and shared their experience. An important finding is that the conceptualisation and operationalisation of adaptive learning environments can accommodate different theories of cognition and learning. There are also possibilities to extend the model to some cross-theory studies for different cognition and learning theories.

Also within the context of personalised learning, the fifth paper 'Learning via mobile phones – students' learning styles, needs, preferences and concerns' investigates the students' learning styles, preferences and concerns about mobile learning, specifically learning languages through mobile devices. It reports a number of findings in a five-year ongoing project on delivering English language learning materials to Japanese university students through mobile devices. Based on the data collected from the project mainly through conducting a survey, the authors studied the learning styles, needs, preferences and concerns of mobile learning, mainly from the students' perspectives. It is found that mobile learning contents should be short, topical and interesting, and that mobile learning should be connected to a mandatory course with assessment of the students' performance in order to engage students.

The sixth paper 'Surveying university teaching and students' learning styles' reports another study on the teaching and learning styles in different modes of learning, including the traditional face-to-face learning, online learning and blended learning. The authors conducted a survey in two universities, one in Czech and the other in Kazakhstan. Students' opinions on teaching and learning styles are collected. The opinions focus on the form of instructions, students' learning styles and preferences. It is revealed that

students favoured auditory learning style. They are of the view that teachers' guidance on online learning and blended learning is important.

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We hope that you would enjoy reading the papers.