



Teaching, Engaging, and Motivating Learners Online Through Weekly, Tailored, and Relevant Communication: Academic Content, Information for the Course, and Motivation (AIM)

Andy Kenah, Open Polytechnic of New Zealand
Catherine Nash, Open Polytechnic of New Zealand

Abstract

Engaging and motivating learners to successfully complete their studies are crucial elements for the success of distance educators around the world. The researchers' AIM newsletter, which is formatted in accordance with motivational learning theory, has been delivered to first-year learners in economics at Open Polytechnic of New Zealand from 2010 to 2022. AIM is an acronym for Academic content, Information for the course, and Motivation—three critical elements that are required to meet the challenges of effective online course facilitation. This paper uses Keller's IMMS to evaluate the learner's perspective of the AIM newsletter. Results show that learners consider AIM newsletter attracts the learner's attention and provides relevant links between theory and current world examples, linking the learner's own experiences, increasing their confidence in the course, and providing overall satisfaction with the learning experience. In essence, AIM newsletter provides an effective and efficient method of delivering and motivating learners throughout their studies.

Keywords: online learning; motivation; motivational emails; ARCS; engage; e-learning; economics; iQualify; nudge; online communication

Introduction

This article is a critical reflection on the use of AIM newsletter from the learner's perspective. AIM is an acronym for academic content, information for the course, and motivation. The object of AIM (Nash, 2014) is to keep learners engaged in the course and reduce transactional distance—the physiological distance between learner and teacher (Moore, 1980). The newsletter is designed, formatted, and published to attract the learner's attention, provide relevant, current, and timely information, build learner confidence in their studies, and provide satisfaction in their learning. AIM newsletter is published as one A4 page PDF and is posted at the beginning of each week of the trimester via the Learning Management System, iQualify. It is available to all learners enrolled in the undergraduate course, "The Economic Environment", at Open Polytechnic of New Zealand.

This paper builds on Nash's 2014 critical reflection on the use of AIM newsletters in accordance with motivational learning theories and concepts. Nash's original article outlined the environment that led to the creation of AIM newsletter and the engagement challenges. It identified that AIM newsletter sits very comfortably within the research on motivational theory and motivational design and that "student motivation is a major ingredient in keeping students engaged" (Bonk & Khoo, 2014; DeVito, 2012; Guyan, 2013; Hartnett et al., 2011; Hogle, 2017;

Keller, 2008; Moore, 1980; Muilenburg & Berg, 2005; Salmon, 2004; Simpson, 2008a, 2008b, 2012; Stravredes, 2011).

John Keller's 1983 Instructional Materials Motivation Survey (IMMS) was used to evaluate learners' motivational perceptions of AIM newsletter. IMMS was designed to measure the motivational characteristics of Keller's 1983 Instructional Model of Motivation, also known as the ARCS model. Keller's ARCS model promotes and sustains learner motivation throughout their study. ARCS is an acronym derived from the strategies used to ensure continued learner motivation: attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction. The ARCS model has been well developed and was validated more than 30 years ago, so it is not surprising that the model has been used in widely different contexts (e.g., face-to-face classes as well as online environments) by researchers from many countries (Li & Keller, 2018).

Online teaching environment

"The Economic Environment" ("the course") is a first-year undergraduate compulsory business paper offered by Open Polytechnic of New Zealand in all trimesters. The course is delivered and accessed online via the Learning Management System (LMS), iQualify—the platform used for Open Polytechnic courses. Interactions with the course leader are via asynchronous posting on talk channels. Learners are subscribed to Announcements posted by the authors. Most learners are located in New Zealand and are studying for a Bachelor of Business. During this investigation, approximately 75% were female and 90% were 25 years and older. Fifteen percent were Māori, 11% were Pasifika, and 74% were non-Māori or non-Pasifika. The course is assessed through six multiple-choice quizzes and two summative assessments.

Online teaching challenges

Nash (2014) identified the challenges of teaching in an online environment that brought about the development of AIM newsletter. These challenges included increased demand for relevance and currency of the course, and increased workloads due to lower staff numbers and higher learner:lecturer ratio.

There has been a growing demand from learners and stakeholders for links between the theory taught in economics and current real-world relevance and applications in the economy. This was highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic when there was an increased interest in how COVID affected the economy; this has continued during the post-COVID period with a particular focus on the official cash rate, interest rates, and inflation. There was also an increase in economic commentary and online economic resources (video clips, articles, tweets, and blogs). AIM newsletter connects to these rich resources via hyperlinks to engage and enlighten the learner every week.

In a face-to-face synchronous learning environment, the course leader can easily select the latest news, video clips, or films to discuss economic theory and the current economy in the lecture or class—identifying how political or social decisions impact the economy and whether they are based on sound economic theory. However, the researchers consider that, in an online environment that uses asynchronous forms of communication, there are additional challenges and processes to ensure the online learning material (guide) is up to date, relevant, and topical.

The two main challenges involved in updating online course material are time and staff availability. It takes time to write, develop, and upload new learning resources and readings for an online course. Depending on the size of the change, staff levels (the availability of both academic staff and production staff) and the urgency of the change, the process can take between several days and many months (sometimes after the trimester has been completed). By the time

the update has been actioned, learners may have moved onto another topic, or the addition may have been superseded by new data and commentary and be no longer relevant or interesting for the learner. AIM newsletter provides relevant updates, clarification, and support material for the learners, either weekly or as required.

The AIM newsletter

The word AIM from AIM newsletter is an acronym in which “A” stands for “Academic content”, “I” stands for “Information for the course” and “M” stands for “Motivation”. AIM newsletter is a key component in the online delivery of the course.

A = Academic content

AIM newsletter uses a mix of media to provide relevant academic content linking weekly topics and theory to current economic issues. It uses blogs, news articles, opinion pieces, YouTube clips, and government statistics and commentary from both New Zealand and overseas. Hyperlinks may also provide clarity on specific topics and/or extend learners’ knowledge.

I = Information for the course

To ensure that all learners, particularly those new to online learning and the iQualify learning platform, have equal access to Open Polytechnic and course requirements, AIM newsletter highlights and provides a variety of important links. Nash (2014) saw course information as key to ensuring that learners do not waste valuable learning time on administrative searches and emails that might ultimately demotivate them during their studies. Examples of material in Information for the course include key dates, hyperlinks to the application form for an extension and special consideration, information on when assessments would be returned, and how to access feedback. In addition, study tasks for the week ahead are highlighted along with key economic terminology, to keep learners on track to succeed in their studies.

M = Motivation

Motivational material is the last element in AIM newsletter. Motivational content includes personal experience, connecting events, famous quotes about struggles and success in a variety of fields, and previous learners’ experience with motivation.

As recognised by Nash (2014), creating AIM newsletter takes approximately 2–3 hours per week, depending on the “size and detail of learner discussions on the previous topic, the availability of relevant media content, and other work commitments” (p. 51). Nash also noted that AIM newsletters have resulted in “a reduction of 70% in administrative questions from learners asking same or similar questions, and thus less time is spent on composing and responding to administrative emails; and this must apply to both author and learner”, thus reducing workload.

AIM newsletter proactively opens a dialogue with the learner at the beginning of the trimester and provides connection points to continue the conversations each week. Information for the course is included via appropriate hyperlinks to ensure all learners are informed and have access to relevant and timely information in one place, whether they be new or returning learners to Open Polytechnic or the iQualify platform.

AIM newsletter is sent via the Announcement channel of iQualify as a one-page PDF (see Appendix A). iQualify does not offer sufficient formatting options for it to be posted directly in the LMS. AIM newsletter is presented in boxes and columns with bolded headings, directly followed by information, allowing the reader to skim and then read areas of interest in detail” (p. 48). The tone is informal to connect with the learner. Comic sans font is used throughout AIM newsletter, with key words highlighted to provide better readability for learners on the dyslexia scale. This is consistent with advice from the British Dyslexia Association (2022).

AIM newsletter is posted at the beginning of the week to set the scene of what is going to be covered in the following week, and it ties into the Study Plan set out at the beginning of the trimester. AIM newsletter is a flexible, re-useable product; the previous trimester forms the basis for future offerings and the template has been adapted successfully for other courses within Open Polytechnic. AIM's newsletter design and application is based on motivational learning theory and draws on concepts from Keller's ARCS model (Keller, 2010). Thaler and Sunstein (2009) suggested that encouraging behaviour through nudging is one of the most effective ways to bring about change. AIM newsletter itself is not a nudge; however, the layout, content, hyperlinks, and information in the newsletter are nudges, and are designed to increase engagement and motivation in the course.

Keller's ARCS model

John Keller, an American educational psychologist stated:

... we can say that in order to have motivated learners, their curiosity must be aroused and sustained; the instruction must be perceived to be relevant to personal values or instrumental to accomplishing desired goals, they must have personal conviction that they will be able to succeed; and the consequences of the learning experience must be consistent with the personal incentives of the learner. (2008, p. 178)

Keller (1983) argued that existing approaches and models, such as the behaviourist and cognitive approaches to instructional design, relied too heavily on external stimuli. He believed that more attention needed to focus on what motivates learners. In response, Keller developed his 1983 Instructional Model of Motivation, also known as the ARCS model. ARCS is designed to promote and sustain the motivation of learners throughout their course (Keller, 2010).

Fig. 1 shows the strategies of ARCS that ensure continued learner motivation.

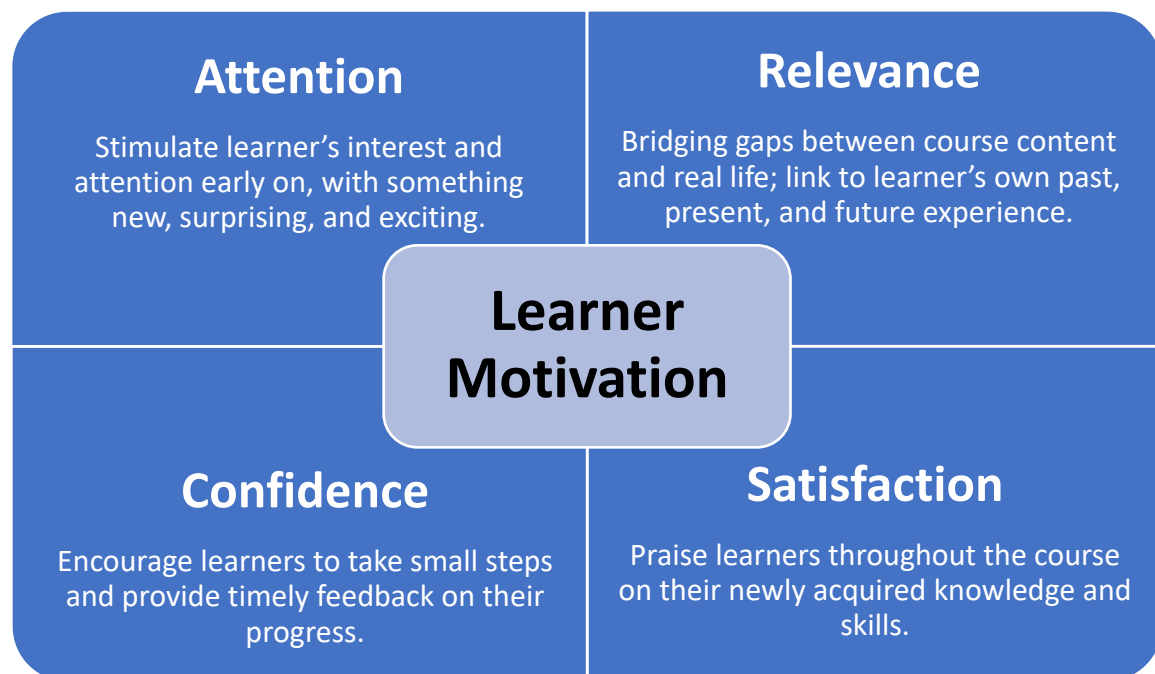


Figure 1 Keller's 1983 ARCS model

Note: Figure created by the authors as an interpretation of Keller's textual model (Keller, 2010).

Keller based his ARCS motivational model of instructional design on a combination of theories, including but not limited to: Bandura's self-efficacy (1977), Berlyne's curiosity and arousal (1965), Maslow's needs hierarchy (1954), McClland's achievement motivation (1976), Rotter's locus of control (1975), and Seligman's learned helplessness (1975) to substantiate motivating factors for learners (Shellnut, 1998, p. 4). Malik (2014) and Kurt (2021) noted the ARCS model is also based on Tolman's and Lewin's expectancy-value theory (1964), which presumes that people are motivated to learn if there is value in the knowledge presented and if there is an optimistic expectation for success.

Instructional designers, teachers, and facilitators can use ARCS to develop engaging learning material, activities, and resources that motivate learners (Hogle, 2017). The ARCS model, although initially designed for a classroom environment, has also been successfully adapted for the online and distance learning environment.

Attention

The first element of the ARCS model of motivation is *attention*. This refers to the learner's interest. Before any learning can take place online or in the classroom, the instructional designer must gain the learner's interest and attention (Kurt 2021). Presenting new and exciting things sustains meaningful learning throughout the course. For example, the learner's attention can be obtained by surprise, doubt, or disbelief. Learners' curiosity can be stimulated by the need to solve challenging problems.

AIM newsletter employs a variety of methods that aim to grab learners' interest, excitement, and attention. For example, visual aids, including pictures and diagrams are included, key written material is presented in boxes, and the font is Comic Sans to increase readability.

Relevance

The second element of the ARCS model of motivation is *relevance*. This element links learners' knowledge and experiences to the course material. For something to be of interest and sustain the attention of the learner it must be relevant. Daily news articles, analogies or stories can be used to create relevance. These linked examples provide learners with a sense of connection to the course material that keeps them motivated. Learners also realise that they are expanding on their own knowledge base, creating relevance.

Current and relevant economic podcasts, blogs, YouTube clips, and articles are included in AIM newsletter under the heading "What is in the news?" Interesting but not compulsory news items enable course material to stay current and relevant to learners. This is a key requirement for all courses.

Confidence

The third element of the ARCS model of motivation is *confidence*. This element encourages learners to take small steps and provides learners with timely constructive feedback on progress. Constructive feedback is essential for encouraging learners to proceed with confidence (Pappas, 2015). Constructive feedback also reinforces positive behaviour and skills. Learners will grow in confidence and motivation with each success.

Each week, AIM newsletter details where learners should have progressed in the course. Key dates, such as due dates for assessments, extensions, special consideration, and quizzes are highlighted. What will be covered in the week ahead is signposted. Headline stories, such as the achievements of famous people and past learners are used as inspiration for current learners to make choices and maintain momentum in their studies, and to nudge them towards the desired behaviour of engaging and finding connections between their learning materials and their daily

lives. Identifying appropriate support via hyperlinks also provides learners with confidence should outside constraints negatively affect their studies.

Satisfaction

The last element of Keller's ARCS model of motivation is *satisfaction*. Learners should be proud of, and satisfied with, their achievements throughout the course. This element is about encouraging and supporting the learner's fundamental enjoyment of education and praising their understanding and application of their newly acquired knowledge and skills for real life. This can be achieved, for example, through engagement in real problem-solving activities that add value to the learning process.

Being successful in achieving the first three motivational goals (attention, relevance, and confidence) results in people being motivated to learn. To have a continuing desire to learn, people must be satisfied with the process or results of their learning experience (Keller, 2010, as cited in Loorbach, 2015). This is also supported by Keller and Suzuki (2004)—the first three conditions are necessary to establish the motivation to learn, and the fourth, satisfaction, is necessary for learners to have positive feelings about their learning experience.

AIM newsletter encourages and supports learners on their journey. Keller (2010, p. 190) listed approaches for continued learner motivation (e.g., how learners can continue to pursue their interest in the topic). Throughout the trimester, recommendations are made via AIM newsletter as to a variety of resources for further reference and investigation (including websites, blogs, podcasts, and movies). The great philosopher and educationalist John Dewey (1933, p. 78) posits: "We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflection on experience". AIM also encourages learners to reflect on their studies throughout the course and evaluate the what, how, and why questions, thus enabling them to learn from their current studies and apply this knowledge in their future endeavours.

Keller's IMMS

In 1983 Keller designed his Instructional Materials Motivation Survey (IMMS), which measures the motivational characteristics of each element of the ARCS model. It can be used with print-based self-directed learning, computer-based courses, or online courses that are primarily self-directed (Keller 2010, p. 277), such as the online AIM newsletter. The survey consists of 36 statement questions (12 relating to attention, 9 to relevance, 9 to confidence, and 6 to satisfaction). The primary reasons for the disproportionate number of statement questions in attention and satisfaction are that the satisfaction element of the ARCS model does not have as many points of connection to the instructional material as the others (Keller 2010, p. 282). Ten of the 36 questions are reverse-based statement questions. Reverse-based statement questions ensure more detailed measurement of attitude or opinion. They keep respondents from answering carelessly and help to correct for agreement bias.

Response scale

Keller (2010, p. 282) employed a five-point psychometric response scale. The scale measures the level of agreement with each motivational statement question: (1) Not true; (2) Slightly true; (3) Moderately true; (4) Mostly true; and (5) Very true. The response rate scale ranges from 1 to 5.

Individual ARCS element scores or a total score can be used to measure learner motivation. The minimum total score for the survey is 36 and the maximum total score is 175 with a mid-point of 105. Note, the minimums, maximums, and midpoints for each ARCS element vary because they do not all have the same number of questions.

An alternative scoring method is the average score. This converts totals into a score ranging from 1 to 5. This method is useful when comparing the scores of the unequal number of statement questions across the ARCS elements. As shown in Table 1, the average score for each ARCS element can then be assessed for its motivational level from a low level to a high level of learner motivation (Hung & Hew, 2016). Note that answers to reverse-based questions are inverted before they are added to the total (that is, 5=1, 4=2, 3=3, 2=4, and 1=5).

Table 1 Range of motivational level

Motivational level	Scores
High level	4.00-5.00
Upper medium level	3.50-3.99
Medium level	3.00-3.49
Low level	< 3.00

Application of Keller’s IMMS: AIM newsletter

The researchers used Keller’s IMMS to assess learners’ motivational perception of the AIM newsletter. Keller (2010, p. 277) allows for adaptation to his IMMS to fit specific situations. Researchers can change default words but not the substance of the questions. The substance of each question is based on specific attributes of motivation. For example, default phrases such as “this course” or “this lesson” have been changed to “this AIM newsletter” to fit the specifics of this research.

As shown in Appendix B, AIM newsletter IMMS questions adapted 34 of Keller’s original 36 ARCS questions (12 relating to attention, 9 to relevance, 8 to confidence, and 5 to satisfaction) with two questions (one for confidence and one for satisfaction) not assessed because they relate specifically to assessment feedback that is not covered by AIM newsletters. An open-ended question for learners to make further comments was added. The open-ended question was “Do you have any other comments?”

Survey Monkey was used to survey 201 past learners in the course. The survey was conducted over three trimesters of 2020–2021 and took place in week 12 of each trimester. The survey was opened for 2 weeks for learners to reply. Automatic reminders after days 5 and 10 were sent to learners who had not replied to the survey. “Thank you” emails were sent to learners who had replied. A total of 29 learners responded to the survey, a 14.5% response rate. Although the response rate was lower than expected (it ran in a period when COVID-19 was unfortunately at its most formidable), it is still considered to be statistically acceptable.

The default Survey Monkey five-point psychometric response scale was used. The layout of the questions (Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Agree; and Strongly agree) was approved by both the Research and Ethics Committees of Open Polytechnic. This was a different order to the original IMMS which had Strongly agree followed by Agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree; and Strongly disagree. At least one learner found this format unhelpful and stated this in the open-ended comments:

I feel the options should start from strongly agree to strongly disagree. As there are chances for some learners not paying attention to words and start assuming options from best to worst.

However, open-ended comments did match feedback to 34 of Keller’s questions. The average score was employed to measure learner motivation of AIM newsletter for each ARCS element.

Learners’ participation was confidential and anonymous so results could not be tied to individual learner records. This was a requirement to gain Ethics Committee approval as members were concerned that information could be connected to individual Māori and Pasifika learners and could contravene ethical standards or practices.

AIM survey results

Scale reliability

A scale reliability test was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the AIM survey; that is, how closely related the 34 survey questions were as a group. Cronbach Alpha, developed by Lee Cronbach in 1951, measures the internal consistency of a test or scale; it is expressed as a number between 0 and 1 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). A Cronbach Alpha value of 0.7 or higher indicates an acceptable internal consistency of results.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was conducted in Excel to calculate Cronbach Alpha (Huang & Hew, 2016). The overall reliability of all the scales (34 ARCS questions) measured by Cronbach Alpha was 0.93 (n=28 on 34 items). This indicates very high reliability of the IMMS results, especially given two questions (one confidence and one satisfaction) were not assessed, and one student did not answer all the questions.

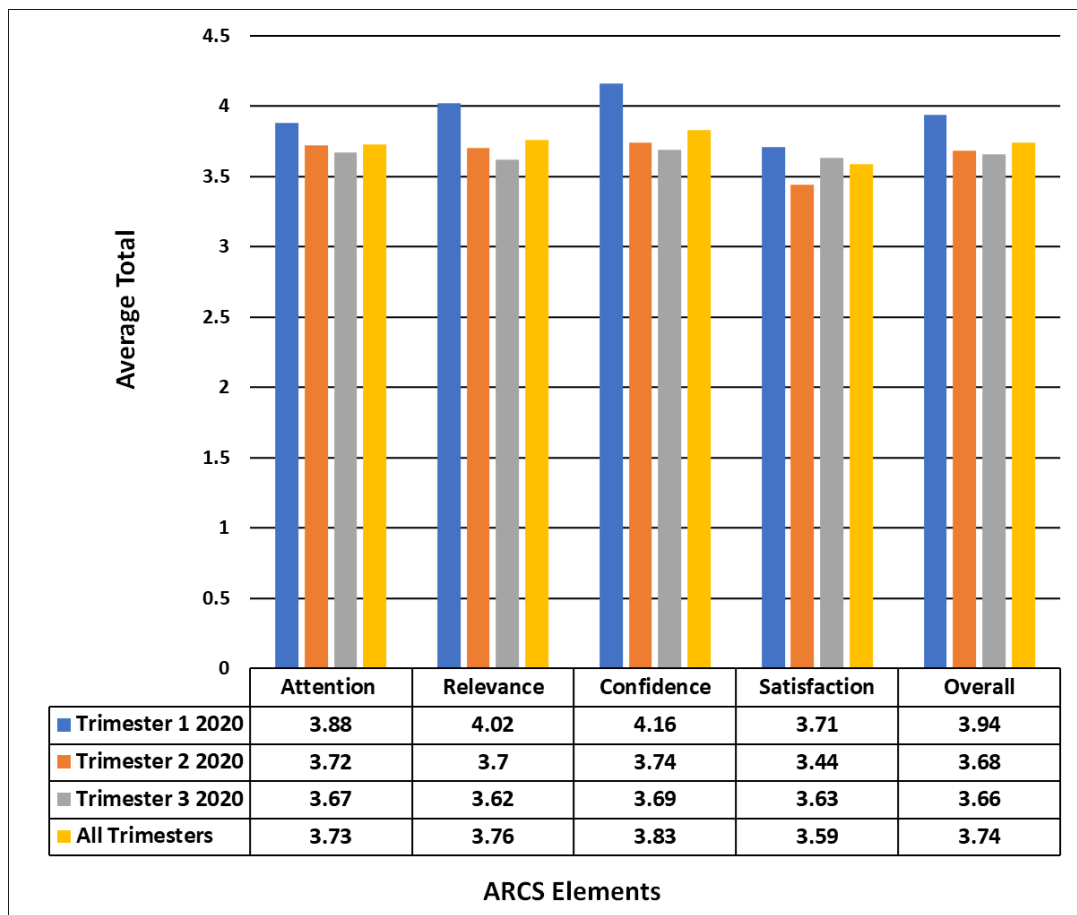


Figure 2 AIM newsletter IMMS results: Overall motivational scores

The far-right column in Fig. 2 shows the overall learner motivational scores for each trimester surveyed, with scores ranging from 3.66 to 3.94. The overall ARCS motivational scores of all learners who responded were calculated to be 3.74.

Quantitative results: Attention

Figure 2 shows that motivational scores across the trimesters for attention ranged from a high of 3.88 to a low of 3.67. The average score for all learners who responded was 3.73. This very good score indicates AIM newsletters do capture learners' attention, helping to sustain learner motivation and engagement throughout the course.

As seen in Appendix B, the highest attention score was question 11 with 3.89:

The quality of the writing (layout and font) of the AIM Newsletters helped to hold my attention.

Other questions that scored high were questions 8 and 20, with 3.82 and 3.86 respectively:

These AIM newsletters are eye-catching.

The AIM newsletters had things that stimulated my curiosity.

The high scores indicate how critical AIM newsletter is in grabbing learners' interest, excitement, and attention early on and sustaining it throughout the course for meaningful learning to take place.

The lowest attention score was for question 22 with 3.36:

The amount of repetition in AIM newsletters caused me to get bored sometimes.

The nature of the AIM newsletter does lead to some repetition, especially when highlighting key dates, such as due dates for assessments, extensions, and withdrawal.

Qualitative feedback: Attention

The open-ended comments from learners suggest the importance of grabbing the attention of learners and connecting with learners regularly.

As a distance student, the most important thing communicated in newsletters was that the lecturer cared for me & my study.

The greatest motivator for any student is when you genuinely care & are able to communicate this. A weekly newsletter is essential in this respect.

I enjoyed reading the newsletters. It made me aware how far behind I was with my readings . . .”

One learner noted that the “newsletter could be improved” and another saw AIM “was useful in correcting the . . . course”.

Quantitative results: Relevance

Figure 2 shows motivational scores across the trimesters for relevance ranged from a high of 4.02 to a low of 3.62. The average score for all learners who responded was 3.76. This was a very good result, supporting weekly AIM newsletters as being relevant to learners' motivation.

As shown in Appendix B, question 31 scored highest with 4.11:

The content of AIM newsletters will be useful to me.

Another question that scored high was question 16 with 3.93:

The content of AIM newsletters was relevant to my interests.

The lowest relevance score was for question 18 with 3.43.

There are explanations or examples of how people use the knowledge in AIM newsletters.

The scores highlight the importance of establishing relevant learning content and connections. For example, analogies and stories from the daily news help to create learner connections. They establish content that connects new information with existing experience. They also help learners to expand their knowledge base, keeping them motivated. Question 18 does highlight the potential for more examples and greater explanations, especially for more complex economic theories and concepts as the course progresses.

Qualitative feedback: Relevance

The importance of ensuring the content was relevant was also included in the learners' comments:

The content was broken down into separate bite-sized boxes. The content itself was great, always relevant.

The newsletter helped remind me . . . that my studies were relevant to the world today.

Learners also appreciated the topical and highly relevant hyperlinks that connected economic theory with current events:

I really like the hyperlinks to current events and further information. This topic was very relevant to study at the current time with the effects that Covid-19 is having on the economic climate. It was good to see the tutor's use of linking the subject to current events.

. . . also has some good hyperlink reads

. . . the reads were also very interesting

It would be good if the CM's were as sound as the Aim newsletters!

The content was broken into bite sized boxes. The content itself was great, always relevant.

However, some learners considered there were too many hyperlinks:

The number of hyperlinks should be limited so that I do not have too much pressure to read all contents including the links.

. . . too much information with a small and sometimes mixed fonts in one page.

Subsequently, the section entitled "What is in the news?" was updated to read "What is in the news? Interesting but not compulsory news items". Learners' feedback resulted in hyperlinks being limited to a maximum of five news items.

Quantitative results: Confidence

Figure 2 shows that motivational scores across the trimesters for confidence ranged from a high of 4.16 to a low 3.69. The average score for all learners was 3.83 (the highest score for all the ARCS elements). As shown in Appendix B, fourth column, question 1 scored the highest of all 34 questions with 4.28.

When I first looked at an AIM newsletter, I had the impression that it would be easy for me to read.

The second highest question of the survey was question 4 with 4.10:

After reading the AIM newsletter, I felt confident that I knew what I was supposed to learn for the week.

Scores like these highlight the importance of delivering AIM newsletters weekly. They do help sustain motivation and engagement throughout the course, and they instill learners with confidence that they can apply new skills and knowledge. AIM newsletter establishes clear goals in addition to providing guidance and feedback to learners.

The lowest confidence score was for question 7 with 3.50:

Many of the AIM newsletters had so much information that it was hard to pick out and remember the important points.

This relates to Attention question 22 about the amount of repetition in AIM newsletters. Highlighting key information, such as due dates for assessments, extensions, and withdrawal, can result in a proliferation of similar information from week to week.

Qualitative feedback: Confidence

Open-ended comments suggest that learners gained confidence by reading AIM newsletters.

It's good to have the newsletter to make sure I'm on track and any additional info to help me along.

The single page was also great. I don't know that I would read more than one page most days.

Quantitative results: Satisfaction

Figure 2 shows that motivational scores across the trimesters for satisfaction ranged from a high of 3.71 to a low of 3.44. The average score for all learners who responded was 3.59 (the lowest score for all the ARCS elements).

As shown in Appendix B, question 34 scored the highest points with 3.86:

It was a pleasure to read such a well-designed AIM newsletter.

The second-highest question of the survey was question 21 with 3.78:

I really enjoyed reading the AIM newsletters.

These responses highlight the importance of well-designed AIM newsletters. Nurturing fundamental enjoyment of learning helps sustain learners' motivation and engagement throughout the course.

The lowest satisfaction score was question 14 with 3.25:

I enjoyed reading the AIM newsletters so much that I would like to know more about economics.

This response needs context—"The Economic Environment" is a stand-alone compulsory paper in the Bachelor of Business. Most Bachelor of Business learners major in either management or accounting, there is no economics major. This is most likely to affect learners' desire to continue studies in economics.

Qualitative feedback: Satisfaction

General comments by learners showed overall satisfaction with the AIM newsletter.

The posting of a weekly AIM newsletter created a positive learning experience that helped to keep learners engaged and motivated throughout the course.

When I saw my first AIM newsletter, I was underwhelmed. It did not feel professional to me. It looked like it had been put together in the late 1990's and Comic Sans-style fonts are usually used for children. HOWEVER, as the weeks progressed, I really came to love the simplicity of the design. The fact that it seemed prepared by a real person (not a flashy digital design/marketing team) made me feel more connected to the course. It's difficult to feel that you're doing your study by yourself with distance learning, even if you know you aren't.

This newsletter helped remind me weekly that I was not alone, that there was a game plan, that my studies were relevant to the world today and that there was a real human on the other side of the screen.

The newsletters were handy, though I often read two or three at once . . . Overall though it was nice to have well written informative content.

I didn't manage to stay on top of reading them each week like I would have liked due to various other things happening but I really valued them being available.

I enjoyed looking at the AIM newsletters every week.

Love the AIM newsletters.

Please don't stop making this.

Conclusion

Engaging and keeping learners motivated in online studies are vital for all educators. AIM newsletter was designed to reduce the transactional distance in online learning and to motivate learners to engage and stay committed in an online economics course. The authors consider the benefits accrued from producing weekly AIM newsletters (including personal satisfaction and the reduction in the time required to reply to administration questions from learners) are greater than the cost of production.

Analysis and feedback from learners have established AIM newsletter as a successful tool in delivery of the online course. The quantitative scores calculated and presented in Fig. 2 validate its use to help learners stay motivated and engaged throughout the course. Qualitative feedback from the open-ended questions underscores the need to provide proactive, regular, and relevant online communication with learners. In the delivery of online education, AIM newsletter is an excellent case study of motivational design theory in practice. Overall, our learners consider AIM newsletter has attracted their attention, provided relevant links between theory and current world examples, linked their own experiences, increased their confidence in the course, and provided overall satisfaction of their learning experience.

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Appendix A: AIM newsletter—Week 15

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AIM newsletter Week 15

Trimester 1 2020

Kia ora, I trust you all had a great weekend and found some time to relax and reflect on how your studies are going.



During the weekend I watched the last couple of "Last Dance" episodes; the ESPN series on Netflix about Michael Jordan (MJ). I am not a big basketball fan; however, I was interested in this the amazing athlete and the background stories of team members. MJ was not only incredibly talented, had a huge work ethic, loved what he was doing; he was also very positive about himself and focused on achieving.

Some of MJ quotes include: "If you do the work, you get rewarded. There are no shortcuts in life", and "I can accept failure, everyone fails at something. But I can't accept not trying", "I know fear is an obstacle for some people, but it is an illusion to me. Failure always made me try harder next time." These quotes are also relevant to studying. Remember, be positive with your study, focus on achieving what you want (to successfully complete this course) and do the work. If you have any questions regarding the course or Assignment 2, post them on the Talk channels or email me directly. There is no such thing as a dumb question. I am here to help you succeed.

Week 15: Module 6, continue working on Assignment 2

Study tasks

This week you should continue to work on Module 6. You will find some excellent activities to attempt and then receive our feedback.

In this course we started with Microeconomics and looked at consumers, markets and then moved onto government and market failure. From Module 4 we have reviewed Macroeconomics, the NZ economy e.g. unemployment, CPI, monetary policy and external trade to name a few. It is very important to remember that all sections of the economy are interrelated. What happens in one area impacts the whole economy.

What is in the news?

[The New Zealand foods made overseas](#)
[Reports Covid-19 weakened in Italy](#)
[Lessons from Covid19](#) Joseph Stiglitz

Assignment 2 due Thursday 18 June

Extensions If you need more time see [Extensions](#) if you require additional time then apply again for an additional 3 days until **Sunday 28 June**. Once the trimester and examinations are completed we are unable to accept assignment submissions. Extension requests must be made via My Open Polytechnic.

Special consideration requests: Covid19 option has now been removed however apply under Trauma. Submit an [Application for Special Consideration](#), along with supporting documentary evidence and sufficient detail so Academic Registry can help you get what you need to successfully complete.

Last day for Quizzes 16 June

The last day for completing all the assessed quizzes is 16 June. This is non-negotiable; the system will simply shut you out after this date. Make sure you have completed all 6 assessed quizzes by 16 June! As previously mentioned by missing one quiz this could be the difference between passing and failing this course.

IT maintenance

From 4pm 5 June - 2pm 6 June some services will be unavailable. See <http://bit.ly/2R16hhd> for more detailed information.

Appendix B: AIM newsletter survey questions

Adapted from Keller's Instructional Materials Motivation Survey (IMMS), (Keller, 2010).

Attention (12 questions)	
A+	Q2. There was something interesting at the beginning of the AIM newsletter that got my attention.
A+	Q8. These AIM newsletters are eye-catching.
A+	Q11. The quality of the writing (layout and font) of the AIM newsletters helped to hold my attention.
A-	Q12. The AIM newsletters were so abstract that it was hard to keep my attention on it.
A-	Q15. The AIM newsletters format looked dry and unappealing.
A+	Q17. The way the information of the AIM newsletters was arranged (for example, style, font, format, and pictures in boxes) helped keep my attention.
A+	Q20. The AIM newsletters had things that stimulated my curiosity.
A-	Q22. The amount of repetition in AIM newsletters caused me to get bored sometimes.
A+	Q24. I learned some things that were surprising or unexpected.
A+	Q26. The variety of reading passages, exercises, and illustrations, within the AIM newsletters helped keep my attention.
A-	Q27. The style of AIM newsletters is boring.
A-	Q29. There are so many words per each AIM newsletter that it was irritating.
Relevance (9 questions)	
R+	Q6. It is clear to me how the content of the AIM newsletters related to things I already know.
R+	Q9. There were stories, pictures, or examples that showed me how the AIM newsletters could be important to some people.
R+	Q10. It was important to me to read the whole of the AIM newsletter.
R+	Q16. The content of AIM newsletters was relevant to my interests.
R+	Q18. There are explanations or examples of how people use the knowledge in AIM newsletters.
R+	Q23. The content and style of writing of the AIM newsletters convey the impression that its content is worth knowing.
R-	Q25. The AIM newsletters were not relevant to my needs because I already knew most of it.
R+	Q28. I could relate the content of the AIM newsletters to things I have seen, done, or thought about in my own life.
R+	Q31. The content of AIM newsletters will be useful to me.
Confidence (8 questions)	
C+	Q1. When I first looked at an AIM newsletter, I had the impression that it would be easy for me to read.
C-	Q3. The AIM newsletter material was more difficult to understand than I would like for it to be.
C+	Q4. After reading the AIM newsletter, I felt confident that I knew what I was supposed to learn for the week.
C-	Q7. Many of the AIM newsletters had so much information that it was hard to pick out and remember the important points.
C+	Q13. As I read the AIM newsletters, I was confident that I could learn the content.
C-	Q19. The tasks (for example, clicking hyperlinks and following suggested readings) in the AIM newsletters were too difficult.
C-	Q32. I could not really understand quite a bit of the material in AIM newsletters.

C+	Q33. The good organisation of the AIM newsletters content helped me be confident that I would read this material.
Satisfaction (5 questions)	
S+	Q5. Completing the tasks (for example, clicking hyperlinks and following suggested readings) gave me a satisfying feeling of accomplishment.
S+	Q14. I enjoyed reading the AIM newsletters so much that I would like to know more about economics.
S+	Q21. I really enjoyed reading the AIM newsletters.
S+	Q30. It felt good to successfully read through the AIM newsletters.
S+	Q34. It was a pleasure to read such a well-designed AIM newsletter.

Key: + and - indicate positive or negative statement questions.

Biographical notes

Andy Kenah

andy.kenah@openpolytechnic.ac.nz

Andy Kenah is a senior academic staff member at Open Polytechnic of New Zealand. He holds a Master of Business Studies from Massey University and is a Fellow of the Financial Services Institute of Australasia. Andy has been involved in distance education for over 20 years as a facilitator and programme leader, online learner, and researcher. His research interests include online teaching and training, learner motivation, and support.

Catherine Nash

nascat@xtra.co.nz

Catherine Nash has been a senior academic staff member, Business Management, Open Polytechnic of New Zealand. She holds a Bachelor of Arts from Victoria University and is a member of the New Zealand Association of Economists. Catherine has been involved in distance education for over 20 years as facilitator of economics and business courses, online learner, and researcher. Her research interests include enhancing learner engagement and motivation in an e-learning environment.

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