Book Review:

Online and Distance Education for a Connected World

Edited by Linda Amrane-Cooper, David Baume, Stephen Brown, Stylianos Hatzipanagos, Philip Powell, Sarah Sherman and Alan Tait. London: University College Press, 2023, ISBN: 978-1-80008-480-3, 448pp.

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Open and distance learning is a relatively young area of research within higher education studies. Concerted investigations into the emergent field of open, distance and online learning are just emerging and there are very few publications that addresses various concerns in this field. "Online and Distance Education for a Connected World," edited by Linda Amrane-Cooper, David Baume, Stephen Brown, Stylianos Hatzipanagos, Philip Powell, Sarah Sherman, and Alan Tait, is a remarkable collection of essays that delves into the rapidly expanding realm of online and distance education. The book brings together an ensemble of esteemed scholars and practitioners, offering what appears to be a multidisciplinary perspective on the challenges, opportunities, and best practices associated with digital learning. With the rise of technology and the internet, education has transcended traditional boundaries, and this book seeks to explore the interconnectedness of the global education landscape in the digital age. More on this in a short while. The book comprise twenty main chapters organised into four sections.

The first section, which sets the scene for this handy publication consists of a preface, a chapter on the Centre for Online and Distance Education (CODE) and an extensive introduction by Stephen Brown provocatively titled: Online, Distance and Blended. It's all just education. The section provides a comprehensive overview of online and distance education's historical context and evolution. Apart from exploring the historical evolution of the University of London's external degree system, the first section also attempts to unpack

the definitional imperatives and effectiveness of the concept of distance education. Brown's chapter outlines the technological advancements that have revolutionised learning, paving the way for a connected world. He delved into the different modes of online learning, such as synchronous and asynchronous learning, and discuss their impact on learners and educators. By analyzing the growth and trends of distance education, this chapter provides a perspective for understanding the current state of the field.

The second Section of the book, which is labelled Section 1 focuses on Planning Distance Education and comprises six discrete chapters each of which addresses a key component of the operation of distance learning systems. The Student Voice by Pete Cannell and Julie Voce; Exploring digital learning by J. Simon Rofe; Marketing digital education for an inclusive society by Endrit Kromidha and Benedetta Cappellini; Supporting Employability by David Winter; Strategic models for distance education by Philip Powell, Mary Stiasny and Michael Davis; Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria: a case study by Stephen Brown and David Baume. A highlight of this collection is the exploration of pedagogical approaches in online education. The chapters in this section address the misconception that online learning is a mere replication of traditional classroom teaching. It emphasizes the importance of adopting learner-centered approaches and designing courses that cater to the unique needs of online learners. The authors delve into constructivist pedagogy, problem-based learning, and collaborative learning, showcasing how these methodologies can be effectively applied in a virtual environment.

The main issue with this section of the book is the chapter on Nigeria. At first glance, it seems surprising that Nigeria is the only country case study in the entire publication. More surprising is the fact that the chapter only made a passing mention of the National Open University of Nigeria and ignores the role of NOUN in the development of open and distance learning in Nigeria. The section on Capacity building for ODL fails to acknowledge the various training workshops and capacity development initiatives that the Federal Ministry of Education and the National Open University had delivered on open and distance learning for all dual-mode distance education institutions in Nigeria. Also missing is an indication of the activities of the Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL), established by NOUN in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning Canada and has played a significant role in expanding skills development in ODL in Nigeria and the rest of Commonwealth West Africa.

The third section of the book titled: Doing distance education, comprise ten chapters. Course design, pedagogy and staff development by David Baume and Matthew Philipott; Interactive Social learbing and fostering learning Communities by Ayona Silva-Fletcher and Christine Thuranira-Mckeever; The Icarus simulation tool: a case study by Lynsie Chew and Alan Parkinson; Digitally supported assessment by Leo Haveman , Simon Katan, Edward Anstead, Marco Gillies, Joanna Stroud and Sarah Shrman; Taking Assessment Online- systems, issues and practices: a case study by Linda Amrane-cooper, David Baume, Stylianos Hatzipanagos, Gwyneth Hughes and Alan Tait; Inclusive Practice by Shoshi Ish-Horoiwcz, Diana Maniati, Nicholas Charlton, Danielle Johnstone, Beatrice Hyams, Sarah Sherman, and Sarah Gonnet; Retention and success: approaches and tools for making a difference Gyneth Hughes and Joanne Harris; MOOCs for public health: a case study by sally parsley and Daksha Patel; Practicing open education by Darsha Patel, Sally Parsley, Pete Cannell and Leo Havemann; Buidling the online linrary by Matthew Philpott, Sandra Tury and Shoshi Ish-Horowicz

A central concern in online education is learner support and engagement. The chapters under this section delves into the challenges faced by learners in online settings and provides strategies to overcome them. The authors discuss the significance of establishing a supportive learning community, incorporating peer interactions, and offering personalised feedback to enhance the learning experience. The chapters also explore the role of tutors and mentors in fostering learner motivation and success. The notion of assessment as a crucial aspect of education, and the unique opportunities and challenges offered by the digital landscape in this regard are also examined. This section critically analyses the various assessment methods used in online learning, such as formative and summative assessments, e-portfolios, and automated grading systems. It addresses the issue of academic integrity and discusses strategies to prevent cheating in online assessments. Moreover, the authors emphasise the importance of aligning assessment with learning outcomes and promoting authentic evaluation practices. Technology plays a pivotal role in the online learning experience. The section chapters examine some of the latest technological innovations that have transformed education, such as learning management systems, adaptive learning platforms, and immersive virtual environments. It evaluates the potential of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, to revolutionize teaching and learning in the future. Another area pf critical importance examined in this publication is the imperative of creating inclusive and diverse online learning environments. The authors highlight the significance of cultural sensitivity and accessibility in designing online courses. They discuss the challenges faced by marginalised learners and offer solutions to

bridge the digital divide. Furthermore, the chapter explores the role of open educational resources (OER) in promoting equitable access to education.

The fourth and final section of the publication titled: Researching and evaluating distance education comprise three chapters. Academic development, research and practice in online and distance education by David Baume; Monitoring and evaluating online and distance education by David Baume and Designing the future by Stephen Brown. The chapters focus on issues of research and evaluation and lays emphasis on the fact that ensuring the quality of online education is of paramount importance, and this chapter delves into the best practices and frameworks for quality assurance. The authors discuss the Quality Matters rubric and its application in evaluating online courses. They also explore the concept of continuous improvement in the context of online education and advocate for a culture of evidence-based practices to enhance the overall quality of digital learning. With the advent of online education, geographic barriers are becoming less significant. This chapter presents diverse case studies and experiences from different parts of the world. It examines the impact of cultural context and local practices on the adoption of online education in various regions. By showcasing successful global initiatives, the chapter inspires educators to embrace the global interconnectedness of education. The book concludes with an exploration of the prospects of online and distance education. The authors speculate on the potential impact of emerging technologies and changing societal needs on the evolution of education. They discuss the concept of lifelong learning and the role of online education in addressing future challenges, such as reskilling and upskilling the workforce.

"Online and Distance Education for a Connected World" appears to be an authoritative and timely collection that provides a comprehensive understanding of the evolving landscape of online education. The editors and contributors have succeeded in presenting a cohesive exploration of the challenges, opportunities, and best practices associated with digital learning. The book's multidisciplinary approach enriches the discussions, making it an invaluable resource for educators, administrators, and researchers alike.
Throughout the book, the authors emphasise the importance of learner-centeredness, inclusivity, and technological integration to enhance the quality of online education. By showcasing diverse case studies and global perspectives, the book inspires educators to embrace the interconnectedness of education in the digital age.
However, it would have been beneficial to include more in-depth country case studies and examples of successful online education initiatives to further illustrate the concepts discussed. The book could also have benefitted from

perspectives from other countries outside of the United Kingdom. All the authors of the chapters are based in or have relations with institutions, agencies and organisations in the United Kingdom, leaving out vast swathes of African, American and Asian perspectives on an important topic – online and distance education for a connected world. Nevertheless, the book remains a seminal work that illuminates the path towards a connected world of education, and it will undoubtedly become a foundational resource for practitioners and researchers in the emerging field of open, distance and online learning specifically and all those engaged in shaping the future of learning generally.