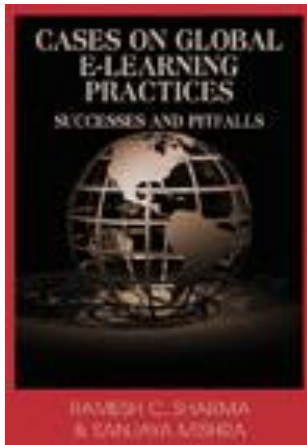# CASES ON GLOBAL E-LEARNING PRACTICES:
## Successes and Pitfalls

## Sharma, R. C., & Mishra, S. (Eds.). Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishing. (ISBN 1-59904-340-8)

**Reviewed by
Yavuz Akbulut
Anadolu University, TURKEY**

*"Cases on Global E-Learning Practices: Successes and Pitfalls"* look into the global practices of e-learning which has assumed a considerable role in the education sector recently. It is edited by Ramesh C. Sharma and Sanjaya Mishra from Indira Gandhi National Open University in New Delhi, India. It is published by Information Science Publishing, which is an imprint of Idea Group, an international publishing company specializing in research publications in the fields of technology, management and information science.

The book is consisted of 356 pages (+xiv) covering 23 articles. Articles are related to successes and failures of e-learning professionals. Practical experiences and research on e-learning are provided in the form of case studies by experts from all over the world. E-learning practitioners who are involved in the design, development and implementation of e-learning may find the book quite useful since it might back up their working knowledge on how to design appropriate instructional strategies for e-learning.

The book sheds light on the potential of e-learning in instruction through reader-friendly reviews followed by unique case studies. Case study approach is deliberately assumed since case studies have the potential to present authentic learning situations with a balance of both theory and practice. Both contributors and readers are encouraged to reflect on what, when, why and how an instructional endeavor has planned, designed and implemented. Such an approach seems to initiate continuous reflective thinking on the part of the authors.

Case studies in the book are presented in three sections, namely, cases on completely online learning systems, cases on blended online learning systems and cases on resource-based online learning systems each sheltering relevant articles. The introduction provides an overview of the e-learning concepts, theories and practices. It is emphasized that e-learning is a system based on technology and a new generation of distance education, which provides opportunity for both synchronous and asynchronous interaction among the stakeholders of the instruction process. The chapter also enlightens the readers in terms of the benefits of e-learning, design and development of e-learning systems and pedagogy of e-learning.

online version which involved students from Namibian teacher education programs and students from New Jersey. The aim is mentioned as giving all students a chance to interact with peers. Besides, students had the chance to explore differences and similarities between their education systems. Pitfalls and successes in meeting the objective of sustaining interaction are provided along with implications for internationalization efforts.

## Chapter 6: Delivery of a Social Science Online Program in India

The chapter provides a narrative of an engagement with the open and distance learning system which leads to launching an online learning package in 2001. The aim is to integrate various components of the multimedia in course development. Using the information technology tools leads students to communicate and interact more effectively. Besides, meeting the various needs of diverse learners became possible through the information technology tools.

Well-structured architecture of the program's website and its discussion board has been accepted by learners. The program generated an interest in the institution to launch further online programs of study.

## Chapter 7: Introducing Integrated E-Portfolio across Courses in a Postgraduate Program in Distance and Online Education

The chapter presents an analysis of important issues related to the development of an integrated e-portfolio application which was implemented at Massey University. The aim is to help students track evidence of skills they developed during their study period. The e-portfolio project helped students to demonstrate their own conceptual understanding and identify the connections across different papers they prepared. Based on the experiences of the study, administrative issues and considerations for future developments are discussed as well.

## Chapter 8: The Mediated Action of Educational Reform: An Inquiry into Collaborative Online Professional Development

The chapter describes and evaluates the online collaboration of four teachers in four different cities in Missouri; U.S. Teachers collaborated online to implement an online constructivist learning environment with a problem-based learning unit design. The design of the study is shaped through prior research on technology adoption innovations in the classroom, new constructivist-based learning theories and relevant principles of professional development. Methodology of cultural historical activity theory is used in order to collect and analyze relevant data to identify how effectively each teacher played their roles based on their goals for adopting the new innovations during the online collaborative professional development process. Authors successfully evaluated the effectiveness of the model and developed best-practice concepts for the online professional development programs.

## Chapter 9: VIPER (Voice Internet Protocol Extended Reach): An Evaluation of an Integrated Group VoiceIP Software Application for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

The chapter suggests that recent developments such as Internet conferencing and multipoint desktop conferencing may replace text-based and audio/video conferencing software. New Internet conferencing and multipoint desktop conferencing systems are claimed to have the ability to integrate interactive tools. They are considered more advantageous in terms of the cost in comparison to audio/video conferencing software. The author assesses an exploratory study of a multipoint desktop conferencing application called Voice Café in a business school setting. The academic application of the software is named VIPER which stands for

voice Internet protocol extended reach. VIPER has been evaluated through involving several undergraduate business studies students, through a dissertation support group, an MBA student group and faculty staff. The software's features, pedagogic aspects and how faculty and students considered its use have also been discussed. General views of both students and tutors who have used the system were positive. VIPER has proved to be a useful communication tool for both students and faculty.

## Chapter 10: Investigating Patterns of Cognitive and Interactive Acts in an Online Student Cooperative Program

In order to improve the employability skills of university students student cooperative programs have been increasingly used. Some higher education institutions started to offer such programs online. The study explores the implementation of a pilot program at Simon Fraser University, Canada. The transition from the face-to-face to the online version of the program has been explained adequately. Development and implementation of the online version have been discussed. To address the research questions of the study, participants' messages and focus group interviews were transcribed and analyzed. The pilot group found the online program an effective tool to support cooperation and develop employability skills.

Most participants believed that the program helped them to develop several skills such as problem defining and solving, planning and goal setting, interpersonal communication, self-assessment and peer-feedback skills. Several contributive recommendations regarding the packaging of the program have been presented as well.

### Section II: Cases on Blended Online Learning Systems

## Chapter 11: Learning Sport Management through Interaction with the Real World

The chapter describes the development of a course in sport administration. Eight sport organizations provided a variety of documents including real case studies which formed the basis of the learning activities. The documents and resources are provided to students through CD-ROMs. Students both interacted online and face-to-face. It is claimed that using real world scenarios increases students' motivation and improves the learning outcomes. Some crucial practices are recommended for practitioners who want to use case studies in their online teaching.

## Chapter 12: Experimentation and Challenge: Online Criminology at the University of Bologna

The chapter discusses the implementation of an online criminology course at the University of Bologna, Italy. Face-to-face lesson, online collaboration, resources available on the Internet and online and face-to-face teacher tutoring constituted the basic components of a well-designed and didactic program. Similar to other studies in the book, administrative issues and program evaluation are well-reported. Authors believe that students not only appreciated the utilitarian side of the online activity but they also become more capable of identifying e-learning's potential to be used in their professional life. Lessons learned from the practice are invaluable and should definitely be examined by those who are interested in e-learning practices.

## Chapter 13: Learning Computer Science over the Web: The ViSCoS Odyssey

The chapter first maintains that most of Finland's land consists of sparsely populated rural areas. Thus, it is difficult for institutions in these rural areas to offer advanced levels of computer science studies. In order to meet this demand, the University of Joensuu in Finland has designed an e-learning program called ViSCoS (Virtual Studies

of Computer Science) for students who are interested in computer science. The program allows students to study their first-year undergraduate computer science courses through the web. More than a hundred students enrolled in the program between 2000 and 2005. The formative development method with extensive action research orientation leads to the gradual development of the program. Authors also summarize their main experiences in developing and implementing the ViSCoS courses along with invaluable recommendations for best practice.

## Chapter 14: Fiji Implements Blended E-Learning as Appropriate Flexible Learning

The chapter focuses on an e-learning environment which promotes and adaptive approach toward e-learning. A sound theoretical model mentioning the interactive components of an e-learning environment is presented, which is believed to facilitate implementing an effective framework to support social aspects of human-computer interaction. Institutional and national context of the learning program have been presented followed by a brief description of organization offering the program. A zoom-lens approach is presented which is used to encourage students' experiential learning. Several alternative instructional strategies are also mentioned to be used without computers when Internet becomes unstable. The author further mentions her positive and negative experiences regarding the program.

## Chapter 15: Project-Based Learning in Chemical Engineering Education Using Distance Education Tools

The chapter exhibits an experience of implementing project-based learning practices in chemical engineering education through utilizing distance education tools. Project-based learning is claimed to develop several invaluable skills along with technical ones, such as cooperation, communication, involvement, construction of knowledge, decision making and problem solving. These skills are supported through distance education tools in the study. The virtual environment supported student materials for the project development, facilitated communication and monitored student activity as well. The course organization is well reported along with the methodology applied. Valuable comments regarding the professor and student evaluations about the methodology of the program are presented. Positive aspects of motivation and interactivity observed in all participants are reported as well.

## Chapter 16: The "Pastoral" in Virtual Spaces: A Tale of Two Systems, and How E-Learning Practitioners Re-Make Them

In the study, two online undergraduate media and communications projects are examined and compared. One of the programs was implemented in Australia between the years 1999-2003 while the other one was implemented in New Zealand between 2004 and 2005. Background and contexts of the projects are presented first. Academic and administrative issues regarding both programs are mentioned along with a coherent comparison of the two. Programs are compared in terms of networking and collaboration as well. The chapter ends with valuable comments regarding the lessons learned from the endeavors along with best practice recommendations.

## Chapter 17: Using Scenario-Based Learning for E-Learning in Vocational Education

The study reports a multimedia Web-based scenario-learning package which is prepared for students of an engineering course. The package simulates a scenario which is close to students' learning and future working environments. The scenario helps learners to virtually experience how the real work environment should be. The pilot study which is presented along with a brief and useful methodology reveals that all students gave positive feedback to the scenario-based learning package.

Importance of animation, video, interactive elements and sound effects for the package along with further development suggestions are discussed in line with the comments of the participants.

## Chapter 18: An E-Workshop Model for Teacher Training

In the chapter, e-learning is claimed to play a crucial role in teacher training. Both e-learning and teacher training are presented as constantly changing domains integration of which might create several problems. In this respect, the study focuses on a teacher training model in an e-workshop form. Positive factors regarding the implication of the e-workshop model are presented along with several suggestions regarding the domains of teacher training and e-learning.

## Section III: Cases on Resource-Based Online Learning Systems

## Chapter 19: Creating a Multimedia Instructional Product for Medical School Students

In the study, it is maintained that most medical school textbooks do not address pain management adequately. An online textbook called TOP MED has been created in order to address the need. Besides, the textbook is believed to serve as an introductory book for pain management. The process of designing and producing the textbook is described by the author.

Content design of the book is well described with references to expert selection, content review, learning points, preparation of the storyboard and scriptwriting. System design is discussed along with technical requirements, user interface design and template creation. Production stage is discussed, valuable information regarding the client handover is provided, and actions that can be identified as best practices in the process are mentioned.

## Chapter 20: Hard Fun: A Case Study on a Community Problem Solving Learning Resource

The study describes the academic issues and logistics of a learning resource called Hard Fun, which is claimed to immerse students in authentic learning environments through community problem solving. Institutional and student frameworks for the learning resource are well discussed. The importance of keeping students on tasks is mentioned. Than, three critical components of the learning resource are discussed. Intrinsic motivation and cognitive engagement supported by civic engagement are considered keys to the success of the learning resource. The resource allowed learners to pursue personally relevant knowledge in their residential communities. The author further mentions that technology could be used effectively to increase intellectual self-esteem and digital literacy through allowing learners to create in Web environments.

## Chapter 21: ESPORT Demonstration Project, Canada

In the chapter, the purpose, processes and effects of an e-learning employment readiness system called ESPORT (Essential Skills Portfolio) are described. ESPORT is intended for adults with a high school education or less. It is currently being piloted in Canada. The system assists users to choose an occupation, evaluate their skills regarding the selected occupation, determine and ameliorate insufficient skills and prepare a résumé for their prospective employers. The piloting process is well-reported along with information on ESPORT's design, delivery and implementation. The practice carries the properties of a critical reflection process through which the project's components and the evaluation design have changed, which helped researchers to address pedagogical issues more effectively.

**Chapter 22: EBS E-Learning and Social Integrity**

The study introduces the Educational Broadcasting System (EBS) e-learning which has been established by the Korean government. The system is particularly developed for high school seniors who are about to enter the Korean college entrance exam. Successes and pitfalls regarding the system are discussed. Particularly the program evaluation is discussed effectively with reference to several statistics, cost reduction effects, social integrity effects and the systems' potential to support public education. Finally, invaluable implications for similar prospective endeavors are provided.

**Chapter 23: Case Studies on Learners and Instructors in an E-Learning Ecosystem**

In the paper, authors present e-learning as a multifaceted ideology which is interpreted as a learning ecosystem where knowledge is constructed, analyzed and delivered to members of the system. Characteristics of a learning ecosystem are mentioned with reference to the nature of interactions and the flow of information across learning activities. Population of the ecosystem is introduced to the reader. Then, several case studies within an e-learning ecosystem in higher education are presented in terms of the learner subsystem and the instructor subsystem. The need to support learners during the activities and engaging learners in their own learning are mentioned as critical issues. The importance of increasing the quality of the learning experience is discussed as well.

**CONCLUSION**

In this review, summaries of the chapters are provided superficially. Practitioners who are interested in the design, development and implication of e-learning should definitely look through the chapters carefully since chapters involve unique and invaluable recommendations all of which are based on relevant theoretical framework and reflective practice.

The book properly serves to the objective of providing learning opportunities through a set of case studies on e-learning application in different contexts.
Practical experience and research-based information have been synthesized meticulously in almost all chapters. Except for slight deviations from the accepted format of the book and except for slight ambiguities stemming from language use, most parts are reader friendly. Moreover, the readers are able to locate relevant information checking specific headings and abstracts all of which are organized effectively. Thus, the book might also serve as a reference book to be used whenever and wherever it is necessary to ameliorate reflection in action. The conclusion section of the book is particularly helpful in understanding the guidelines on how to plan, design and implement e-learning. Besides, the section groups the guidelines into six subcategories each one sheltering insightful reflections.

Practitioners who are interested in e-learning practices will be able to find invaluable information in this book all of which results from reflective practice. Thus, the book might really help the readers gain insights into what makes an e-learning endeavor effective along with successes and pitfalls regarding practices in question.