

BOOK REVIEW

ONLINE POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION: RE-IMAGINING OPENNESS, DISTANCE AND INTERACTION

Edited by Katharine Stapleford and Kyungmee Lee

Rangga Alif FARESTA

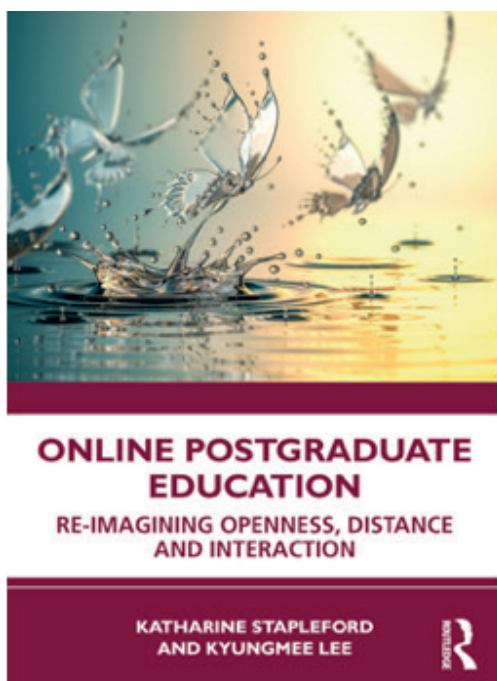
ORCID: 0009-0005-6535-2300

Faculty of Education

Monash University

Melbourne, AUSTRALIA

ISBN	978-0367490249
Publication Date	January, 2024
Publication Formats	e-Book
Publisher	Routledge



INTRODUCTION

“Online Postgraduate Education: Re-imagining Openness, Distance, and Interaction,” authored by Katharine Stapleford and Kyungmee Lee, is an insightful exploration into the evolving landscape of postgraduate education facilitated by online platforms. The book delves into the themes of openness, distance, and interaction, presenting a comprehensive analysis of how these elements are being redefined in the context of online education. By addressing both theoretical perspectives and practical implementations, Stapleford and Lee offer a valuable resource for educators, administrators, and policymakers seeking to understand and improve online postgraduate education.

BOOK REVIEW

The book is structured into several parts, each focusing on different aspects of online postgraduate education. Stapleford and Lee begin with an overview of the historical context of distance education, highlighting the technological advancements that have transformed this field. This section sets the stage for a deeper exploration of the themes of openness, distance, and interaction.

Openness in Education

In the first part, the authors discuss the concept of openness in education. They explore how traditional boundaries of higher education are being challenged by online platforms that offer greater accessibility and flexibility. The discussion is enriched by case studies that illustrate the practical implications of openness, such as the implementation of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and open educational resources (OERs). However, while the authors successfully highlight the democratizing potential of openness, there is a notable absence of critical analysis regarding the quality and academic rigor in open educational environments. MOOCs and OERs often suffer from high dropout rates and inconsistent quality. A deeper investigation into how institutions can ensure and maintain high standards while expanding access would strengthen this section. Furthermore, the book could discuss the sustainability of such open models, considering the financial and institutional support required.

A significant strength of this section is its ability to present a balanced view of openness. The authors commend the democratization of education through online platforms, acknowledging the vast potential for increasing access to higher education globally. However, they also critically evaluate the challenges, such as the variability in the quality of MOOCs and the potential for a dilution of academic standards. The case studies provide concrete examples that ground the theoretical discussions in real-world scenarios, offering readers a practical understanding of the issues at hand.

Distance in Education

The second part of the book focuses on distance, emphasizing how online education has redefined the notion of physical and temporal separation between students and institutions. The authors explore various models of distance education, from asynchronous learning environments to real-time virtual classrooms. They highlight the importance of creating a sense of community and belonging among online learners, despite the physical distance. While the authors effectively emphasize the importance of community and interaction in distance learning, they could have addressed the diverse technological capabilities and digital literacy levels of students. The book could benefit from more in-depth discussions on strategies to bridge the digital divide and ensure equitable access to online learning tools. Additionally, the psychological impacts of isolation in online learning are an important aspect that warrants more exploration, with suggestions on methods to mitigate these effects.

One of the book's strengths is its detailed examination of different models of distance education. Stapleford and Lee provide a thorough analysis of asynchronous and synchronous learning environments, highlighting the advantages and challenges of each. For instance, asynchronous learning allows for greater flexibility, enabling students to engage with the material at their own pace. However, it can also lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection (Provenzi & Tronick, 2020). On the other hand, synchronous learning fosters real-time interaction and community building but may be less flexible for students in different time zones or with varying schedules. The authors' ability to present these nuances enhances the reader's understanding of the complexities involved in designing effective online learning experiences.

Interaction in Online Education

Interaction is the central theme of the third part, where the authors delve into the dynamics of online communication and collaboration. They discuss the role of technology in facilitating interaction, including the use of discussion forums, video conferencing, and social media. The book provides practical strategies for enhancing student engagement and participation in online courses. However, while the authors provide valuable strategies for enhancing interaction, there is a need for a more critical examination of the psychological and social aspects of online communication. Issues such as the lack of non-verbal cues and the impact of online anonymity on student behavior are underexplored.

Additionally, the book could discuss more about the training and support required for instructors to effectively facilitate online interactions. The role of instructor presence in maintaining student engagement and ensuring academic integrity is crucial and warrants deeper analysis.

Stapleford and Lee excel in their discussion of the technological tools that can enhance interaction in online education. They provide a comprehensive overview of various platforms and tools, such as learning management systems, video conferencing software, and collaborative tools like Google Docs. The practical tips and strategies offered for fostering interaction are particularly valuable for practitioners looking to improve student engagement in their courses. However, the book could benefit from a more detailed exploration of the challenges instructors face in adapting to these tools and the support they need to use them effectively. Additionally, a discussion on best practices for maintaining academic integrity and managing online interactions would add depth to this section.

Societal and Ethical Dimensions

Throughout the book, the authors maintain a critical perspective, questioning the assumptions and implications of online postgraduate education. They highlight issues such as the digital divide, equity, and the commercialization of education, urging readers to consider the broader societal and ethical dimensions of online learning. This critical lens adds depth to the discussion and encourages readers to think beyond the immediate benefits and challenges of online education. However, some sections could benefit from more concrete solutions or recommendations for addressing the highlighted issues. The discussion on commercialization, for instance, could be expanded with more examples and potential policies to mitigate its negative effects. The authors could also explore the ethical implications of data privacy and surveillance in online education more thoroughly.

A notable strength of this section is the authors' willingness to tackle difficult and often overlooked issues in online education. The discussion on the digital divide, for example, is particularly relevant in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated existing inequalities in access to technology and the internet. Stapleford and Lee effectively highlight the importance of addressing these disparities to ensure that online education is accessible to all students, regardless of their socio-economic background. Their critical examination of the commercialization of education is also commendable, as it raises important questions about the motivations and interests driving the expansion of online learning.

“Online Postgraduate Education: Re-imagining Openness, Distance, and Interaction” is a compelling and timely contribution to the field of education. The book's strength lies in its comprehensive analysis and critical perspective, which provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities of online education. Stapleford and Lee's thorough examination of the themes of openness, distance, and interaction offers valuable insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers. The book is particularly relevant for those involved in designing and implementing online postgraduate programs. Its practical recommendations and case studies provide actionable strategies for enhancing the quality and effectiveness of online education. Additionally, the critical discussions on equity and access make it a valuable resource for those interested in addressing the broader societal implications of online learning. The book's strength also lies in its balanced approach, acknowledging both the potential and the pitfalls of online education, thereby providing a realistic and pragmatic view of the field. By integrating theoretical perspectives with practical insights, Stapleford and Lee offer a well-rounded resource that is both informative and thought-provoking.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, “Online Postgraduate Education: Re-imagining Openness, Distance, and Interaction” by Katharine Stapleford and Kyungmee Lee is a must-read for anyone involved in the field of education. The book offers a comprehensive and critical analysis of the evolving landscape of online postgraduate education, providing valuable insights and practical recommendations. By addressing the themes of openness, distance, and interaction, Stapleford and Lee present a holistic view of online education, making it a valuable resource for educators, administrators, and policymakers. The book's blend of theoretical exploration and practical advice ensures it will be an important tool for those seeking to navigate and improve the domain of online postgraduate education. The strengths of the book lie in its balanced approach, thorough analysis, and critical perspective, making it an essential read for anyone interested in the future of higher education.

BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of AUTHOR



Rangga Alif FARESTA is a postgraduate student at the Faculty of Education in Master of Digital Learning, at Monash University. Before taking his master's degree, he was a Monitoring and Evaluation Officer at Ruangguru that focused on using data to Monitor and Evaluate students' performance. His research interest is integrating Learning Analytics within STEM education into classroom settings to provide students with fit interventions based on their preferences. Using Data-Based Decision Making to make an impactful learning journey for students.

Rangga Alif FARESTA
Digital Learning, Faculty of Education
Address: Monash University, Melbourne, Australia
Email: rangga211297@gmail.com

REFERENCES

- Provenzi, L., & Tronick, E. (2020). The power of disconnection during the COVID-19 emergency: From isolation to reparation. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice and Policy*, 12(S1). <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000619>
- Stapleford, K., Lee, K. (Eds.) (2024). *Online postgraduate education: Re-imagining openness, distance and interaction*. Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge.