

BOOK REVIEW

OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION IN ASIA, AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES IN A DIGITAL AGE

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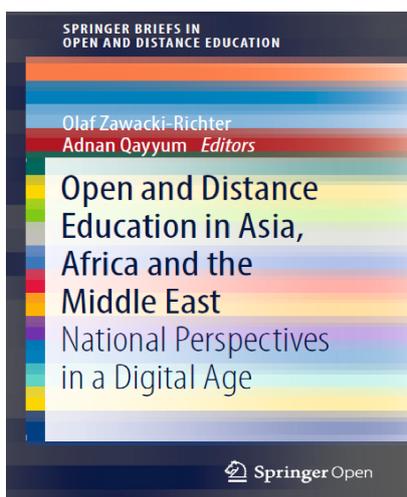
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INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have witnessed the digital transformation which affected society, economy and education as well. Especially higher education (HE) institutions are rapidly making some of their programs compatible with teaching at a distance. However, the digitalization of learning-teaching and proliferation of distance education systems of countries are not equal. The funding for distance education varies among countries, also starts for distance teaching practices.

REVIEW OF THE BOOK

As the second volume of exploration for distance education systems in the world, the book mainly aims to share open and distance education experiences of various countries, besides their approaches and investigate the relations among distance education and higher education. While in the first volume, distance education systems of Australia, Europe and America are compared, current book covers Asian, African and Middle East's. The book is structured as each chapter for the distance education system of the selected country and a relatively short chapter for the commentary of an expert from that country in order to provide different perspectives. The selected countries are China, India, Russia, South Africa, South Korea and Turkey.

In the first chapter, the editors introduce the aim and structure of the book. They mention the major questions which they investigated throughout the book. For example, these questions include the function of distance education within the national higher education system, major distance education institutions, history and past of distance education, etc.

Chapter two includes the development of distance higher education in China, especially recent online learning practices. Online higher education and ICT are implied as an important part of Chinese system. Since the 1940s, China has invested in distance education and developed it eventually. The authors explained that in

the last 17 years, the number of Internet users has increased from 22.5 million to 750 million in China. By 2014, Dalian University of Technology, Chongqing University, Beihang University, Jilin University and Central South University had been reported as the top of China in terms of online student number, which over 30,000 online students. Open University (OU) Network in China is the national lifelong learning platform and it is reported that following UNESCO "Education 2030" agenda, OU aims at "ensuring inclusive and equitable education". Interestingly, OU includes "CreditBank" for calculating formal and informal learning outcomes of students. Distance education, especially in terms of online education is expected to become widespread in the near future in China.

Chapter three includes the commentary for the second chapter. It is noted that Chapter two deals with the development of distance education in China, Chinese open university network and the future implications. The author stressed the informatized education plan of China. And in the near future, Internet use in education, namely blended learning practices, are expected to become widespread with the help of such action plans in higher education system of China.

Chapter four deals with Indian distance education system development. Starting with the 1960s, distance education as correspondence education has come into practice. In years, enrolment in open universities and open distance learning centers have increased dramatically. In India, three types of delivery in distance education are mentioned: traditional distance learning delivery, multimedia courseware and fully online delivery of programs.

Chapter five offers commentary on Indian wide range distance education institutions. The author mentions the confusion of institutions about which courses can or cannot be delivered at a distance. And he suggests the authorities to develop up-to-date policies for better distance education implementation in the framework of National Educational Policy.

Chapter six explains Russian distance education system which has different aspects from other systems of the countries at hand. There are three types of study at universities which are normal on-site study, regular evening courses with self-study, and self-study with some hours of on-site study. And these types of instructions can also be delivered via distance. The authors imply that half of the undergraduate students in Russia (approximately 5.2 million) enrolled in distance programs. And this is a huge number for many Western countries to be explored.

Chapter seven presents commentary on Russian distance education implementations. The author mentions the broad topics covered in Chapter six, ranging from historical development to statistical data. Also, it is implied that the management of distance education system is shifting to independent educators and university activists.

Chapter eight deals with distance education at South Africa. As it is mentioned, the evolution of distance education in South Africa is similar to the growth of Unisa which is one of the mega universities in the world. Also it is noted that rather than being a mainstream mode of instructional delivery at schools, distance education, particularly online learning aims to support traditional schooling in the context of South Africa.

Chapter nine includes commentary on South Africa chapter. The authors noticed that starting with Unisa, distance education programs began providing access to all racial groups and help them continue their education in an apartheid ideological context. Despite that positive support for education, only 15% of distance learners graduated from university, which makes distance education cost ineffective in terms of cost per graduate as the authors posit.

Chapter ten deals with South Korean distance education. Korea National Open University is reported as the first distance institution and it now offers many cyber and traditional universities. Recently, K-MOOCs (Korean MOOCs) are included in national education plans. And the focus of distance education is mainly on the purpose of lifelong education, adult education. The authors implied the rapid developments of distance education in South Korea along with lifelong learning, accessibility, and globalization issues to be considered for further practices.

Chapter eleven shows the commentary on the previous chapter and mentions the three Korean scholars' views on distance education in South Korea. The author claims that DE in Korea has not fulfilled its true potential

in lessening the gap between access to higher education and lifelong learning for both the advantaged and disadvantaged, in other words, he suggests the decision-makers provide lifelong learning for the socially marginalized and less-developed parts of the country as well as the others.

Chapter twelve explains the history and practices of distance education in Turkey. The authors notice the young population and the importance of accessing education. Open education and Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has different practices in Turkish context. ODL refers to learning at a distance formally or informally and constitutes an important part of higher education. ODL has diverse learners, however mainly the learners are adults who both study and work. The authors claim that in case the authorities overcome some professional, financial and infrastructural issues, the expansion of ODL will continue rapidly.

Chapter thirteen involves commentary on Turkey. The authors claim that online distance education can be a great opportunity especially for the disadvantaged group for continuing education. They point out the importance of acceptance, readiness, and active involvement of administrators, instructors, and learners. And they also suggest decision-makers making sure to carefully plan, build a sound technological infrastructure and provide high-quality content for offering better distance learning experiences.

Chapter fourteen refers to the state of open and distance education and is written by the editors. They imply that the distance education systems of the twelve countries which are covered in these book series do not represent the state of Open and Distance Education (ODE) in the world, but a large part of the world. The editors aim to compare and analyze ODE enrollments, the relationship of ODE with HE systems, important barriers, challenges and opportunities in these countries and so on.

“Open And Distance Education In Asia, Africa And The Middle East National Perspectives In A Digital Age” is a great book for especially distance learning researchers and policy-makers. It is quite helpful to describe, compare and discuss sample countries’ distance education practices especially in higher education in order to draw a big picture of the past, present and future of distance education all over the world.

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