Preface

INTRODUCTION

The integration of communication technologies and Internet continues to create opportunity for organizations, institutions, and others to find novel use for specific technologies. Thus individuals and organizations or groups continue to integrate these technology into their activities and corporate practices. One of the key benefits of such integration includes increased use of information communication technology in learning and curriculum which is otherwise refer to as electronic leaning and more succinctly referred to as e-learning.

E-Learning, which involves knowledge dissemination and acquisition with the aid of communication technology or electronic medium, is fast becoming the norm in training and education in the global and information economy. One of the reason is to foster and create competent global work force. We all either work in an institution of higher learning or organizations instituting e-learning to disseminate learning contents and modules for training students and learners. From a related standpoint is the need and requirement for continued education and training for employees. This training requirement often circumvents traditional college training that requires participants to be in a specific location in order to access and participate in learning. Olaniran (2007a) contends that we do not have to look very far to see increase growth in Online Universities (e.g., AIU Online, Capella University, Devry University, Kaplan University, University of Phoenix, Walden University, and Westwood College Online) all of who are thriving and attractive to corporate travelers, non-traditional students, and expatriates.

Furthermore, the major draw of e-learning and important advantage is cost savings. However for e-learning to produce concrete results, there needs to be a way to account for effectiveness of the learning process. Nevertheless, effectiveness of e-learning cannot be adequately assessed without regards to the contextual environments where it is taken place. Therefore, in a global information economy with e-learning, we are either contributors, consumers, or both. Within this process, effective communication and content delivery is essential to the success of e-learning. However, one area that is crucial to such effectiveness is attention to the context (e.g., culture, learning styles, and preferences). Some teachers or consumers of e-learning found out the hard way that inattention to this issue creates pitfalls, while others simply ignore the idea altogether. On the other hand, attention to specific user contexts can make the difference toward successful e-learning experiences for all concern. It is in this regards that case studies appear to be appropriate and beneficial for informing publics, learners, teachers, and practitioners on how to avoid common pitfalls of e-learning while enhancing the possibility of success in deployment of e-learning and the technologies that powers them.

It is important to look at case study and its appropriateness as pedagogical method. A case study involves an examination of a single group, incidents, and or community (Green, 2003). A case study approach is popular in the social sciences because contrary to experiment or survey method, case study
approach does not follow a rigid set of protocol but rather offers a way to observe data or information in their natural environment. For instance, case study approach allows individuals to take an in-depth look at events in a way that allows researcher to have a better understanding of the event and also to identify a new course of direction for future research. For practitioners however, a case study approach offers a general direction for putting in place safeguard mechanism to ensure successful practices or to learn from others mistakes. Methodologically, case study approach offers a way to generate new theories and even test specific hypothesis (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While case study as a methodological approach can be restrictive to data collection in a particular context, it can also be broad in the sense that it can serve as way of exploring events and their occurrence over a period of time. In other words Case study can be both introspective and retrospective sense-making (see, Weick, 1995). As such, the approach taken in this collection is a broad one that cast its nets around both. For instance the collections include specific instance of cases that looks at particular e-learning context and then evaluate outcomes for both learners and instructors. On the other hand, there are those collections that cast a wider net and offer a broad look at aftermath of incorporating ICT for e-learning. In either case, all contributions provide readers with useful implications on moving forward while avoiding major pitfalls for individuals and readers as they plan on deploying or embracing e-learning.

The main goal of the book is to offer assessment of e-learning with the hope of offering ideas in terms of practical guide and points of good practices, while addressing potential pitfalls to avoid. Therefore, organizations, practitioners, and individuals alike should be aware of what constitutes good and effective e-learning practices and how to design them for specific contexts and audiences in the global information economy. At the same time, the collections within the book strive to address the issues of different divides that affects e-learning in the economically developed and the less economically developed world. As such, the book calls for maintaining open access to e-learning architecture platforms in less economically developed countries where computer access is sporadic at best, but mobile device penetration is in the uptrend. However, the way forward in e-learning involves the idea of open access while maintaining or not sacrificing privacy and security is a must. While few understand the challenges with e-learning and the related communication factors that affect it, such understanding is a necessity for individuals and organizations to better invoke or implement successful e-learning in the global information age and economy. For this reason, collections of case studies in e-learning whether successful or not offer a way that can reveal communication practices that can benefit instructors, learners, and vendors in the current information and global economy.

The collections in this series are therefore divided into four major categories including: Innovative uses of e-learning, Addressing various divides in e-learning, user centered focus in e-learning, special considerations in e-learning and development. These four categories appear to be good taxonomy scheme for making sense out of the idiosyncratic collections represented in the book. As such, they offer readers and practitioners alike to make sense and efficiently follow along. The next section provides a brief description or synopsis of each case and identifies their unique contribution to the book and e-learning as a whole.

**CHAPTER SYNOPSIS**

The first section **Innovative uses of e-learning** offers readers insights on creative approaches for e-learning and a way for identifying how best to apply or introduce e-learning in knowledge awareness and dissemination. Individual will walk away with idea of good points of practice to address in the process and deployment of e-learning. This particular section opens with “Virtual Structures and Col-
laborative Processes to Enhance Teaching and Learning Across Dispersed Sites” by Ken Stevens. Ken addresses the challenges facing students in different countries and how the problem is exacerbated by lack of adequate resources to offer educational opportunities for students in small schools especially those located in rural communities. In his work he points to the fact that sometimes government or social structure cannot justify commitment of prohibitive resources to provide teachers in the schools because there few students in the schools to start with. As a result, he explores the use of virtual structures in particular e-learning in both Canada and New Zealand schools. He argues that this method allow senior students to access similar curriculum other than those in core area of studies as those students that reside in metropolitan areas. As a result, senior students from rural schools do not have to leave their communities to attend larger schools in urban centres for them to complete their high school educations in order to have opportunity to participate in post-secondary education. According to the chapter, the author argue that the e-learning initiatives in both New Zealand and Atlantic Canada allowed creation of virtual structures that support collaborative teaching and learning that challenge the educational significance of school sizes and their locations.

The next chapter is “Development and Evaluation of a Generic Re-Purposable E-Learning Object on Data Analysis” by Griffiths and Craven. The case study identified the contextual drivers for the re-purposable e-learning objects. The authors discuss the approach leading to the development of the “Analyse This!!!” which was created to foster student diversity and use of pedagogical theories and e-learning. In the case, the authors describe how they identified the need for a generic learning object following interaction with stakeholders (staff at Manchester Metropolitan University and students). They discuss the importance of using feedback from stakeholder groups to refine and improve the learning object, and how important decisions came about in the final delivery - as a generic and re-purposable e-learning object with the possibility of delivery on mobile devices.

The next chapter is “Getting Teachers to Use New Technology by Just Giving Them Time” by Haydn and Barton. The case reports on a UK project which was designed to explore innovative ways of getting teachers to develop their use new technology in teaching. It focuses on the need to provide adequate support for teachers in terms of time to study and explore ICT potential and a forum to discuss their respective concerns. The authors suggest that these criteria may be more effective than prescribing to do list or required competencies and offering generic training.

Next is the chapter “Dealing with Affective Needs in E-Learning: Contrasting Two Cases, in Two Cultures” by Cowan and Chiu. The authors contrast two cases, in two different cultures. Both authors facilitate e-learning using eastern and western cultural philosophies. One area of similarity that they found is that in both cultural contexts meeting affective needs of learners in online environment is important and thus, offers implications from this standpoint.

The concluding chapter in this section is “A Cyber-Apple for the Teacher: A Case Study for Anti-Hegemonic Adult Education Practices” by Federman and Laiken. First, the author examined the idea of hegemony its mechanism in contemporary pedagogical technologies. Second, they discuss how hegemony is maintained or sustained. Finally, they offer a case that demonstrate how intellectuals can reconstruct the cyber-education environment in order to challenge the entrenched power in academic environment, and foster effective adult education principles. Specifically, the case explore how years of research on how adults learn can be applied to the use of technology and e-learning in a way that fosters dynamic, personal, and collaborative learning in adult education as the one offered in traditional classroom context with the physical presence of instructors.

The second section - Addressing Various Divides in E-Learning, acknowledges the different divides that faces e-learning and its use across contexts. Typically, when speaking of divides one looks at the haves and the have-nots and accessibility to technologies and e-learning. Here in this section, one finds
out that the divide includes, culture, access, competency, among others, that is crucial to implementing successful e-learning. The section opens with “Cultural Implications of E-Learning Access (& Divides): Teaching an Intercultural Communication Course Online” by Cheong and Martin. The authors present a case study of developing and teaching an intercultural communication (IC) course online. They discuss a broadened and recursive model of cultural access and divides in E-learning. They present how the IC course attempts to address multiple pathways for E-learning access, including motivation, material, skills and usage access. They then describe the successes and challenges of meeting the goals of e-learning access with specific examples of the content, activities, assignments, pedagogical strategies, and student assessment in the e-learning course.

The next chapter in this section is the “Application of VoiceXML in E-Learning Systems” by Azeta, Ayo, Atayero and Ikhu-Omoregbe. They look at the application of Voice based e-learning systems (VoiceXML) to address the needs of blind students in a less economically developed country and an environment where the blinds are often left out either because the government could not afford or fail to commit resources to their learning needs. The authors as a case study offer a prototype voice-based e-Learning application for course registration and examination for the blind. They then present the outcome of the usability evaluation. They conclude that the voice-based e-Learning technology will improve accessibility to education, including distance learning for learners who are visually impaired in the school for the blind.

The next case is “Technophobe to Technophile: Entering the Internet Culture” by Anderson-Mejias. The case explores how 16 fearful learners became confident and successful through the instructor’s taking time for preparing and establishing sense of achievement using the technology, and fostering interconnections with peers to demonstrate the usefulness of the virtual class over the face-to-face class. The author hopes that the principles found can help educators to prepare their traditional students for the culture of virtual learning environments, thus, expanding options while addressing university administrative concerns about student retention.

Next case is “E-Training Support Program for Regional and Local Development” by Syrris and Tsobanopoulou. In this case study, they analyze the technological, cultural, and social issues involved in an online distance training program implemented to address the needs of agricultural, unemployed, and low-salary workers. Their distance consulting focuses on development of entrepreneurial skills and personal training using mobile satellite videoconferencing for training. The essence of their case is intervention for employment purposes and bridging geographical and technological distances.

The last contribution in this section is “The E-Learning Puzzle in Turkey: Déjà Vu?” by Ozdemir. As indicated earlier, this is not a traditional case study per se, but it offers a closer look at how government in this case Turkey implement technology to support e-learning effort. It points to the common pitfalls that face e-learning especially when resources are scarce and the deployment decision is made as a quick fix. This contribution offers a way to avoid similar challenges for those who care to heed the advice.

The third section addresses the notion of User Centered Focus in E-learning. In this section, the emphasis is on how to meet users and learners needs in e-learning environments. The section opens with a case on “Users’ Satisfaction with E-Learning: A Case Study of the University of Botswana” by Tella. The case study draws from 415 undergraduate students’ experience with e-learning at university of Botswana. Satisfaction was measured from the standpoint of outcome variables such as: Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, system quality, content quality teaching, and learning effectiveness. However, the author points to Challenges emanating from technology as well as recommendations for dealing with them.

The chapter is “A Case Study Analysis of the Use of Online vs. Proctored Final Exams in Online Classes” by Gold. The author focuses on the issue of security and integrity of online exams when
compared to traditional exams. The effort includes analysis of 100 online courses and 1800 students. The author suggests measures for processes and procedures to allow online exams to be comparable to instructor proctored examination.

The next contribution in this section is Perez’s “Sharing Insights: Teachers’ problems and accomplishment...”. The case study focuses on groups of teachers’ postings and interactions about their online teaching. She points to problems relating to misappropriation of technologies by learners, course management and administrative issues. Through her analysis, she addresses technological, organizational, and cultural issues that accompany online teaching and e-learning, and offer recommendations for how institution and the individual teachers can address them.

The next chapter is by Hewett and Graham and addresses “The Effects of E-Learning on African-American Males: Three Cases Studies”. The authors focus on e-learning use for meeting certain student ethnic group in a rural secondary school. The students experiences prior to, during, and post e-learning were showcased. The case also offers lesson learned from the implementation of the e-learning program.

The last case in this section by Wegmann looked at “Cross Talk Online”. Author explored the complex nature of asynchronous e-learning platform in e-learning looking at a single student. It analyzed the student’s interactions with peers, and uses these interactions to provide ways that online instructors can structure courses to create engaging online discourse. Additionally, it suggests that students and instructors who assume a connected stance show a depth of learning within the computer-mediated learning environment.

The last section deals with Special Considerations in E-Learning and Development. In this section, attempt is made to address concerns in e-learning application or use. The section opens with contribution from Rodgers “Building Quality Assessment”. The case shows how a long-term, campus-wide effort balanced technological, pedagogical, financial, and political considerations to develop and implement a system for online course and develop quality assessment. The case details how the committee charged with creating the system arrived at a solution that account for course design and instructor performance. As a result of the effort, the institution now has in place a tool for improving the quality of its online courses. Recommendations are offered accordingly.

The next case by Jakubowicz is “Case Study of the CUForum @ CUHK”. The case focuses on the benefits of an online learning environment at a university in Hong Kong. The findings reveal important learning style preferences. Specifically, Chinese-speaking learners’ online interactions were found to include cognitive, affective and social, and hence claimed that interactivity is key an online learning environment.

The next chapter by Shambaugh explores “Using Activity Theory to Guide E-Learning Initiatives”. The case showcases how activity theory can be used as a tool to help educators understand the issues in deploying online learning programs. The central tenet of the case was a guide on how activity theory can be used to represent overlapping goals of faculty, students, and administrators, and to understand the contextual issues of different roles for putting academic programs online.

Next is a case by Gannon Cook and Crawford on “Addressing Online Student Learning Environments and Socialization Through Developmental Research”. The authors in this case study focused on developing expansive e-learning environment for adult learners and their socio-cultural environments as well as a call for targeted content materials. The study identified the strengths and potential weaknesses of the online course employed in the study.

The last chapter in this section is by Juan, Faulin, Fonseca, Steegmann, Pla, Rodriguez, and Trenholm. They explored teaching of statistics and operations research online and in a purely online University. In spite of its specific subject use, they offered that online courses offer comparable benefits to traditional face-
to-face instruction. Based on their experiences with these courses, they shared their insights for fostering success and on how to design and develop successful online courses in these knowledge areas.

CONCLUSION

With the eclectic collections of cases and the title of the book as cases on successful E-Learning Practices. One thing that is certain is that while all the cases offer useful implementation strategies e-learning is not void of challenges and problems. However, with careful consideration, the experience can be worthwhile and offer learners and practitioners unique opportunity to think outside the general norm of a way to deliver and acquire knowledge via computer and other technology-mediated e-learning environments. There is more to do in this specific learning domain. It is hoped that this book is a step in the right direction for those already using or contemplating the use of e-learning.

REFERENCES


