The age of distance learning and new forms of e-learning is here. The rate at which a variety of institutions are entering the distance learning arena is increasing rapidly. In spite of the increased popularity and presence of online learning opportunities, however, many researchers and practitioners are decrying the lack of a research-validated framework to guide their design. Other researchers and practitioners point out that what works in effective traditional learning environments may or may not work in online environments ... Educators, researchers, and policymakers continue to argue for updated learning and schooling models and the increased use of new and emerging electronic learning (e-learning) technologies that can better prepare students for an increasingly global, changing, and complex world. (McCombs & Vakili, 2005, p. 1582)

“E-learning,” sometimes referred to as online learning, Web-based learning, distance learning, and technology-based learning, is a concept that has garnered significant global attention; the importance of e-learning is therefore universal (Waight, Willging, & Wentling, 2004).

This publication, Online Education for Lifelong Learning, seeks to capture critical dynamics and challenges in the context of online education for lifelong learning. Higher education is particularly exploring the new possibilities offered by open and distance learning. Indeed open and distance learning is not limited to adult continuing education but is considered a frontier created by online-learning communities to enhance access to and success in higher education.

All learners, in the electronic information age of today, as reviewed by McGrath (2004), need the following four sets of skills so that they can successfully negotiate the 21st century:
1. **Digital-age literacy** (basic, scientific, economic, and technological literature; visual and information literacies; and multicultural literacy and global awareness);

2. **Inventive thinking** (adaptability, managing complexity, and self-direction; curiosity, creativity, and risk taking; and high-order thinking and sound reasoning);

3. **Effective communication** (teaming, collaboration, and interpersonal skills; personal, social, and civic responsibility; and interactive communication); and

4. **High productivity** (prioritizing, planning, and managing for results; effective use of real-world tools; and ability to produce relevant and high-quality products).

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**Online Distance Learning Environments**

The institutional or organizational structure of higher education is changing to emphasize academic accountability, competency outcomes, outsourcing, content standardizing, and adaptation to learner-consumer demands (Howell, Williams, & Lindsay, 2004): “funding challenges are increasing with fewer resources to meet expanding *lifelong-learning* demands. Distance education is becoming more abundant, especially online, and location independent, increasing the need for effective course-management systems and teaching strategies that utilize technology” (p. 16). As noted earlier, the higher education community is finding itself on the edge of a new era of online learning. Online learning has been promoted as being more cost effective and convenient than traditional educational environments as well as providing opportunities for more learners to continue their education (Richardson & Swan, 2003).

Allowing students to participate regardless of geographic location, independent of time and place, online education has progressed to the point where students no longer need to be able to meet face-to-face in order to complete a degree program or a course. Richardson and Swan further identify six specific advantages offered by online learning environments:

1. **Convenience and flexibility** are offered by “anytime, anyplace, anywhere.”

2. **Accessibility** means that students have access to courses and course materials “24 hours a day” (time independent), regardless of location (place-independent), making them far more convenient than the traditional educational experience.
3. Asynchronous learning allows students to reflect upon the materials and their responses before responding, unlike traditional classrooms.

4. Students can work at their own pace, which is especially important for non-native speakers.

5. The ability of personal identities to remain concealed means that all students, regardless of race, sex, disability, or appearance are on equal ground.

6. With the option of multiple representations of a concept embedded in an online course, students can store and retrieve information more effectively.

Richardson and Swan, at the same time, make it clear that (1) Web-based or online learning environments are not as effective as traditional learning environments because of the lack of face-to-face interactions or rapport, and that (2) students taking online courses feel disconnected from other classmates because of the lack of facial and vocal expressions and other features common to traditional classroom environments including direct communication and feedback.

**Challenges of Online Instruction**

It is true that adequate feedback assists both the instructor and students in improving the quality of e-learning, primary because online education instructors are required to be a facilitator, guide, mentor, and coach rather than an authoritative source of knowledge (Lawhon & Ennis-Cole, 2005). The use of distance learning technologies for delivering courses in higher education has thus challenged faculty to reconsider their firmly rooted concepts of “instruction.” In other words, as many faculty members are just now emerging from an excessive dependence on the lecture method, new challenges to completely reassess how instruction will be conceptualized are arriving at the main gates of college and university campuses (Travis & Price, 2005).

Another challenge for faculty members is to promote individual teaching strategies and to find ways for technology to enhance the student’s ability to read, write, reflect, and synthesize course materials; that is to say, instructors who are successful in mentoring student-teacher communications utilize a variety of techniques or materials to create a more positive online learning environment (Lawhon & Ennis-Cole, 2005). The most daunting challenge for distance education faculty may be the extensive increase in time that faculty must commit to course preparation, grading and feedback, and interaction and rapport (Travis & Price, 2005). Additionally, it should be noted that libraries (which become identified as sites for lifelong literacy and are committed to education, especially to lifelong learning) have expanded their functions. Such functions include the following: (1) helping individuals learn
to write and to use communication technologies and helping them learn to read “visually”; and (2) providing alternative learning sites for specific populations (Yancey, 2005).

Higher education today must combine its traditional roles of extending the boundaries of knowledge and passing on that knowledge to students with a commitment to make higher learning available to all through massively extended university outreach and the provision of opportunities for mass higher education through using media, educational technologies, libraries, and distance education (Dodds, 2003). Further, higher education must be understood as a “globalizing process” because, derived from Cobb’s (1999) notion that an educated populace is a vital resource for national growth and development in a global economy, an important task of institutions of higher learning is to assist students in participating in the global economy.

It should be further emphasized that American higher education has changed with regard to educational goals and the means used to attain them. In addition to a diversified student population in terms of ethnicity, social status, and expectation, the proportion of nontraditional older students is increasing significantly. In this environment, higher education has a mission to provide adult learners with reeducation or retraining such that they are able to remain competitive in the workforce of the increasingly technologically sophisticated society. The mission of higher education is changing in its relationship with mature-age students.

**Lifelong Learning and Online Education**

Although *lifelong learning* continues to be a somewhat diffuse term, it is obvious that people learn their whole lifelong, experiencing new things, and acquiring new knowledge and new skills through conversations, from watching television and reading books, and through surfing on the Internet (Alheit & Dausien, 2002): “like breathing, this kind of learning occurs without their being aware of it” (p. 3). Lifelong learning, in essence, is the concept that refers to activities people perform throughout their lives to improve their knowledge, skills, and competencies in a particular field, given some personal, societal, or employment related motives (Field, cited in Koper, Giesbers, Rosmalen, et al., 2005). As Dodds (2003) maintains, universities can help individuals to become lifelong learners, recognizing that educational/learning opportunities are available throughout the individuals’ lives. Dodds also emphasizes the startling growth of new technologies and of the popularity, and of open and distance learning delivery approaches. Online distance learning does provide answers to both the problem of availability (accessibility and cost) and the demand for flexibility (time, place, and pace) of higher learning; consequently, technology-mediated learning and distance learning are both becoming major vehicles for fulfilling the needs of lifelong learning in the knowledge age of today (Beller, 1998).
The confluence of the need for continuous learning and unprecedented technological innovations in communications has pushed distance education approaches to the forefront of contemporary educational practices (Garrison, 2000). As mentioned earlier, online distance education is a growing force in lifelong learning; in particular, “due to the rapid development of Web-based technologies, increasing bandwidth, decreasing costs, and widening access, online versions of distance education programs are becoming increasingly popular teaching strategies for colleges and universities to adopt” (Townsend & Wheeler, 2004, p. 127). Linn (1998), nevertheless, asks the following intriguing question: Can modern technologies allow instructors to design distance-learning environments with all the features of traditional courses? Currently, “changes are taking place very rapidly with little time to develop or analyze trends and relationships in the use of new and emerging information technology for enhancing learning” (Havice, Havice, Isbell, Grimes, & Wilson, 2004, p. 111).

### Purpose of the Book

*Online Education for Lifelong Learning* provides a critical discussion of changing roles of college and university faculty members in terms of online learning delivery approaches and technological innovations, focusing on the appropriate use of technologies to make education and learning more productive and personal. Distance learning, online lifelong learning, and educational technology are all inseparable today. Three principal objectives of the book are:

1. As an adage goes, experience is the best teacher. Chapter authors are international and are eager to discuss and share their professional experiences and observations to make a positive impact on online lifelong learning. Their diverse experiences, practices, discoveries, and perspectives can be applied to any other settings or institutions of higher learning in the world.

2. This book discusses roles of today’s universities particularly in terms of open and distance learning delivery approaches and technological innovations. These approaches and innovations empower universities to become genuinely “lifelong learning” institutions.

3. Focusing on practical applications of technologies (such as the Internet, and asynchronous communication tools), this book describes a new model for designing distance education for lifelong learning that would assist the readers in the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of their own online teaching-learning environments.
Organization of the Book

This book, consisting of 14 chapters, is divided into five sections: Introduction; Development and Implementation of Online Lifelong Learning; Learning Theories and Online Applications for Lifelong Learning; Tech-Knowledge and Communication Technologies for Lifelong Learning; and Case Studies in Online Education for Lifelong Learning. Specifically:

- **Chapter I** provides an overview of the current literature to inform the shared understanding of the concept of online education for lifelong learning based on the theorized notion that the term *lifelong learning* is increasingly important for college graduates to be able to take their place in the changing world and to be adaptable within the organization that employs them. This overview is represented in the following six themes: (1) lifelong learning; (2) self-directed learning; (3) technology and globalization; (4) open and distance learning; (5) online learning assessment; and (6) higher and adult education.

- **Chapter II** examines two key factors that influence the efficacy of online learning: student and teacher interaction and rapport. These two factors are heavily influenced by the stance that the learner takes. Online learning is opening up more possibilities for lifelong learning. This chapter provides a critical discussion of online education, the theories that ground this delivery system, and the challenges that one university faculty had in creating a community of learners in a technology-mediated learning environment.

- **Chapter III** explores ways in which information and communication technologies (ICT) might transform the learning experience through online delivery. After presenting a conceptualization of ICT use by educators in terms of *inaction, investigation, application, integration* and *transformation*, two diverse learning settings are examined to develop insights into the implications of online learning for lifelong learning: (1) the delivery of educational services to preschool children through to students (aged 15 years old) in Australia, and (2) the dimensions required for designing online learning for adult learners in higher education.

- **Chapter IV** presents a method for foreign language (FL) teachers to implement currently available technologies as instructional tools in a FL language classroom using the memory efficient approach (MEA) to enhance instruction, and help students to become lifelong FL learners. Introducing currently emerging technologies that can be utilized for instruction in a FL, the chapter will demonstrate a method to implement technologies in an advanced Japanese course as well as in an elementary Japanese course, using MEA.

- **Chapter V** investigates perceptions of teaching and learning in online instruction guided by the Vygotskian perspective of constructivist theory. The use of
constructivist approaches in online learning reflects agreement with educators who stress that good teaching is both a collaborative and a highly individual process. The chapter focuses on current research studies of online constructivist-based course developments and applications and then proceeds to the authors’ practical inquiry project, which examined both instructor perspectives on creating and facilitating online learning communities and students’ perceptions of their online constructivist experiences.

- **Chapter VI** introduces a new model for designing instruction using the state-of-the-art venue, that is, an archetype for effective instructional design for lifelong learning. The escalating infusion of online education to promote lifelong learning has triggered a re-examination of teaching and learning not witnessed since perhaps the advent of the printed textbook. Today, distance education, in all its manifestations from programmed instruction to Web-based courses, requires instructors to employ new strategies in course design and delivery in order to engage students and promote learner-centered activities.

- **Chapter VII** illustrates theoretical issues and practical challenges to support lifelong learning, namely the development and use of self-regulation within online learning environments. This chapter proposes that a Vygotskian view of self-regulation may be more applicable to investigating self-regulation within the social and cultural context of online teaching and learning. Case studies, personal essays, and contemporary research focusing on self-regulation in face-to-face and online environments are utilized to examine, discuss, and illustrate key challenges and strategies to support lifelong learning within online environments.

- **Chapter VIII** is an attempt to build a framework based on the constructivist online synchronous communications approach to improve the learners’ communication styles and abilities related with real-world problems. Individuals can become active participants in their knowledge constructions rather than passive receptacles. The authors also develop a framework according to the strategies of media richness theory, which declares that there must be a fit between information technologies and communication structures to reduce task-related ambiguity.

- **Chapter IX** describes how early childhood teachers can support the development of young children’s love for learning through educational technology, and how one early childhood education program promoted college students’ learning through online video conferencing technology. Useful suggestions for educational software for children as well as Web sites for both children and teachers are included.

- **Chapter X** talks about how to build online knowledge networks between universities and communities for lifelong learning. Online learners indicate that diverse resources, multicultural experiences, and egalitarian opportunities open their minds and broaden their perspectives via new communication
technologies. The chapter, therefore, discusses the main characteristics of the university-community partnerships for lifelong learning to build online communities with new communication technologies.

- **Chapter XI** focuses on practical applications of emerging technologies in the delivery of professional development programs. The introduction of computers and new technology applications has changed the learning landscape, especially in higher education. From traditional university classroom learning to community-based adult continuing education programs, it is common to see the delivery of instruction that is now supported by online or distance learning technologies. Online learning has become a common strategy to deliver instruction, enhance access to educational resources, and achieve success in higher education.

- **Chapter XII** uses the importation of an American institution of information—“the library”—into the Pacific region of Micronesia as an example of a contextual-less, cross-cultural information transference that suggests the autonomous impact of distance education technology and protocols on indigenous and other interpretative communities. Such an impact negates the innate values of these communities as they pertain to concepts of knowledge and information derived from tenacious cultural and social values.

- **Chapter XIII** assesses the perceptions of adult learners in online distance learning programs regarding the instructional quality of Web-based courses via WebCT. The visual appeal of Web site and appropriateness of the course materials received the highest rating. The results were closely correlated to students’ responses regarding the important aspects of instructional quality of online courses. The results also indicated other perceived aspects that affect students’ views of the instructional quality of an online course, including interaction, design, convenience, feedback, and usability.

- **Chapter XIV** examines the effects of lifelong learning and online education in the role of an educator and a trainer, with a focus on the new capabilities and challenges that organizations, learners, and educators face in contemporary times. This chapter further describes a framework of competencies necessary for educators or trainers who practice their profession within new learning environments that already exist or that are going to appear in organizations, as needs for learning and knowledge managements are continuously increasing. For this particular purpose, a case study is presented regarding the way an online training system can be designed and implemented to support learning within a banking organization.

In summary, the goal of this book is to appeal to researchers, faculty members, and practitioners with a professional interest in distance, open, and lifelong learning
environments or strategies using new and emerging technologies. Anyone working with online learners or anyone engaged in distance learning activities will also find this book useful.

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References


