

Book Review

Models for Improving and Optimizing Online and Blended Learning in Higher Education

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Models for Improving and Optimizing Online and Blended Learning in Higher Education

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to enhance the effectiveness of both online and face-to-face learning and teaching environments across disciplines in higher educational institutions. The title appears to be clear and congruent with the content of each chapter written. One quick suggestion could be that either improving or optimizing might be discounted from the titled, for when used together, they might look redundant. Both words are similar—although not identical—in meaning; however, keeping them together in the same title would also do the book a service, because it could give an emphatic meaning to the title.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Throughout the book, it is possible to see the very linear, rational organization of each chapter. For instance, as for instructional design models, the reader can view chapters lined up pertinent to that area, while they can also see chapters regarding the social constructivist approach that pave the way for positive student learning outcomes. In another instance, the reader can easily look through chapters that particularly concentrate on and examine the influence of technology-rich, online, and blended learning settings that may not only lead to student retention and improved academic performances, but also allow for faculty's more innovative practices in their own fields.

STRENGTHS

The predominantly addressed learning approach, social constructivism, bolsters the concerted efforts of scholars and practitioners who desire to raise the effectiveness and efficiency of the learner-centered delivery of the content they design and deliver. The learner-centric approach consistently emphasized in the book not only proves to be present in nontraditional modes of thinking, learning, and teaching, but manifests itself as rather an outside-the-box approach to knowledge-building, disseminating, and innovating yesterday's conventional instructional methods. The distinction between online and blended learning appears to be quite clear throughout the book. Moreover, other pertinent terms regarding the duo of faculty-to-student, student-to-student—or peer-to-peer—interactions are continuously addressed and are prevalent in a way that concepts such as creating knowledge-building and sharing communities, a digital culture constructing and disseminating knowledge, or learners' autonomy that lead them to direct their own knowledge and learning are emphasized throughout with instances of courses wherein distance learning, flipped classroom, and web-based, digitally rich learning and teaching practices are implemented. A plethora of instructional design (ID) models, systems, and principles seem to be unequivocally novel and pragmatic for students, instructors, and administrators in higher educational institutions. Most importantly, these ID models comprise the design, delivery, implementation, and assessment of faculty practices and/or student communication and learning processes with a highly learner-centered approach, lending itself to student retention, improved academic performances, guaranteed self-directed learning, higher order critical thinking skills, more promising technology-rich faculty practices in which the technology component is incorporated into curricula, and finally school administrations' support on these innovative instructional design models, principles, and practices. Focus on the student-centered learning approach stands out as the driving force behind the impact of educational technologies integrated into the content on both student learning, in addition to being a leverage to faculty's instructional practices. The positive outcomes on these learning and teaching activities can be easily derived from the faculty's field experiences, communication reports on blog postings written by students, case studies, and other web-based, online, and blended modalities of learning and instructing, all of which lend themselves to an exceptional compilation of chapters organized in a quite logical and linear manner in one resource.

WEAKNESSES

One weakness in terms of the book's content and organization could be that the language, especially grammar, used in some of the chapter abstracts appears to leave the reader with ambiguous meanings (see Chapters 12 & 13). Thus, those sections needed more rigorous proofreading and editing by either the authors themselves or other experts.

Another weakness of the book is that instructional technology was used as the predominant terminology in order to lead the reader to an understanding of and appreciation for the impact and influence of technological, web-based, digitally rich learning/teaching environments on both online and blended classrooms. However, the term instructional technology is slightly different from educational technology, and since the book does not solely focus on improving and optimizing faculty's instructional practices, but rather both student learning outcomes, retention, academic performances and faculty's further innovative, better practices, a more generic term, educational technology could have been a much better choice for the purposes of eliminating ambiguity throughout the book.

TARGET READERSHIP

Faculty members, students, and school administrators at higher educational institutions, instructional/curriculum designers, educational/instructional technologists, educators/trainers, digital learning

specialists, content experts, assessment specialists evaluating both online and blended educational programs (e.g., LMSs/CMSs, technology-based ID models, other online and blended educational modules, programs, etc.), professionals engaged in online, blended, or distance learning environments or other digitally rich, web-based learning and teaching settings.

Seda Khadimally specializes in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and second language acquisition, with a focus on teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) to speakers of other languages. She has designed, delivered, and evaluated instruction, by continuous use of educational technologies (both online and blended learning) as she has taught her diverse groups of learners for more than 16 years. She enjoys working with nontraditional groups of ESL students, those that are diverse populations with various educational, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. Seda earned her Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) certificate in Boston, MA, from Action in English (AIE) at the Olin Center Teacher Training Program. She also holds an international diploma in Business Administration at University of California at Berkeley, University Extension. She additionally earned a certificate on successful completion of the English WIDE World online program developed at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE), with specialization in Differentiating Instruction: Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners. Her other academic degrees include a BA in English Language & Literature at Istanbul University, an MEd in Educational Management & Control at Yeditepe University, and an ALM in Educational Technologies at Harvard University. She has currently been working on the completion of her doctoral studies in Educational Leadership with Specialization in Educational Technology at School of Advanced Studies (SAS) of University of Phoenix.