



Book Review of *Reimagining Digital Learning for Sustainable Development*

BOOK REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Sheila Jagannathan (Editor). (2021). *Reimagining Digital Learning for Sustainable Development. How Upskilling, Data Analytics, and Educational Technologies Close the Skills Gap*. Routledge (1st Ed.). 379 pages. ISBN: 978-1-003-08969-8 (eBook).

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REIMAGINING DIGITAL LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

How Upskilling, Data Analytics, and
Educational Technologies Close the Skills Gap



EDITED BY SHEILA JAGANNATHAN

INTRODUCTION

“Reimagining Digital Learning For Sustainable Development: How Upskilling, Data Analytics, and Educational Technologies Close the Skills Gap” brings to prominence the essential predicament of the century. The book opens with an acknowledgement of disruptive digital technologies. While it cites the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the contours of the educational landscape seem to be the central concern of the book. It seems promising with the mention of strategies and systems to make education more sustainable and safe as well. And of course, the global perspectives and experiences from India, China, Ghana, Nigeria, Malaysia, South Pacific and Latin America and the US offer an appealing reading. The SDGs, as listed by the UN, and the market-driven demands of the educational arena have confirmed the everlasting significance of Upskilling, Data Analytics, and Educational Technologies. As we know the path to sustainability can be conquered by bridging the terrible skill gap, this collection can strengthen our preparations. There is an objective stated in the book – design an integrated educational

approach, evaluate global cases and good practices and adapt these to local contexts. A sincere intervention in terms of facilitating mindset change for educational leaders and stakeholders is the first thing to launch any such change.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

With 26 chapters organised under 8 themes and a last (27) chapter as Conclusion, this book opens with a detailed focus on the crucial role of capacity development and the inherent concerns, keeping an eye on the post-COVID scenario in the world. A prominent term used – learning poverty – instantly highlights the primary predicament of the modern world. With global support and available exposure, if there is a slowdown in terms of digital learning's comprehensive integration into education, that is indeed something about the 'poverty' or the lack of something. The editor states in the very first chapter about the scale of the challenge we have at hand:

Children in fragile, conflict-affected countries are more than twice as likely to be out of school than those in countries not affected by conflict.

The aspect of 'inclusiveness' in education, at the global scale, is what modern education needs to embrace immediately to fight the post-COVID challenges. The SDGs have a great say in the book. While the editor states that Capacity Development is an institutional process and the SDGs have a great impact on that, she has also related it with the disruptions caused by the Fourth Industrial Revolution. It showcases a contradictory picture as on one side we are asking for an enhanced role of technology and on the other, we see that automation has led to the loss of jobs for millions. The smartness of the writer comes to the forefront for the reader when this complexity leads to the offering of 'Capacity Building, Skill Development and Upskilling' of the workers. It is in here that the relevance of the book and the goals come to the limelight.

The theme 'Learning in the 21st Century', while focusing on Climate Change, Employability Enhancement and the Ed-Tech Integration, gives a slogan: Skills Are the New Currency. This leads to the discussion towards LifeLong Learning for Careers, Opportunities in the Digital Learning domain and the Digital Transformation of learning in the modern era. The chapter on LifeLong Learning for Careers that Don't Exist is one of the foundations and rationale for this book. As the objectives and introduction by the editor also speaks of an emerging change, we could get some more new ideas and aspects in this chapter, which has a limited scope after reading the first two chapters. Decision Pathways presented are well crafted and shall be tested on the upcoming articles.

The theme 'Innovative Pedagogies to Advance Reach, Relevance and Quality Learning Outcomes' opens with interactions of the editor with Dr. Tony Bates, a renowned expert on Digital Learning. The subtle realisation that the whole world shifted to the online mode, not to leverage the huge potential of digital learning but to just manage a crisis, is quite apt. It does seem "old wine in a new bottle" because the people delivering education are still of the orthodox mindset about technology. Dr. Bates highlighted it quite rightfully that the campuses around the world need to allow flexibility for interpersonal collaboration. This idea is very much valid in terms of the digital transformation we are envisioning in this work.

There is a continuous scarcity of the mention of inclusiveness in the works. That does not seem wrongdoing on the part of the writers because they do have ideas that may lead to holistic educational inclusiveness, on a global level. But, apart from the cases and references to SDGs, we see a scope of relating to inclusiveness, beyond what the 21st century digital education speaks of. One must appreciate the mention of some emerging terms like Pedagogical Choreographies. The book, through chapter 8, provides a manifesto that tries to establish online teaching as a dedicated vertical in itself and also discusses the need for capacity building. A healthy perspective of inclusiveness is initiated by this part. The words "Perspective of localization that fattens hierarchies and promotes horizontal rather than vertical knowledge flows" is very much the most significant part of the book itself.

From the changes that are coming by the way of MOOCs, AI and VR, Gamification, OER to the future of learning as an immersive domain are a good read for all. The characteristics (figure 22.3) is a very good insertion in this regard. There can be a simple yet comprehensive rubric on this.

OVERALL IMPRESSION AND RELEVANCE TO THE FIELD OF DISTANCE EDUCATION AND E-LEARNING

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COVID-19 has been rightfully called a silver lining for the domain of digital learning. The New Normal that emerged as a household term has been a trademark of the Blended Learning now. The reader shall appreciate the presentation of Shifts in Learning and the list of EdTech Enablers. The 'third world' is positive about collaboration, but there are closed doors when it comes to developed countries. We see the global village turning hostile to each other when it comes to educational tourism, particularly in the case of the US or the UK. In such cases, how the countries, either from the South Pacific or even from Asia, can leverage the digital renaissance that has to come as the point of deliberations after reading this book. However, we do see a scope to list various collaborative and e-content creation (especially audio as podcasts) Enablers, in addition to the list in the book. This book also lists Digital Learning Approaches in the form of Blended Learning, Active Learning, Connected Learning, and so on, but there is still a need to present heutagogy as the rationale of these enablers. The mention of heutagogy is found in this book while we read about Game Mechanics and Connectivism.

As Sheila Jagannathan opened with some pertinent questions and concerns, the book concludes with equally strong assertions in the form of questions to the readers. A framework to refer for the targeted change has been provided with the possible role Edu-Leaders, Learners, Teachers and Community can play. This is a suggestion as well as an observation that the rise of educational podcasting (PodMOOCs or Audio MOOCs) can be leveraged immediately. As the book opens with Alvin Toffler's words, let's witness one more quote from The Future Shock, which puts it in clear words that 'Capacity Building with Lifelong Learning' by an individual, shall be our saviour:

We can begin our battle to prevent future shock at the most personal level.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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