

Contrasting and Diverse Global E-Learning Initiatives: An Examination of the African Virtual University, the National University System, and Vietnam's TOPICA Project

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• I. INTRODUCTION

○ First Phase of Global E-Learning

- Institutions of Higher Education in Industrial Countries (Canada, Europe, Sweden and United States)

- Had benefit of economic conditions compatible to internet usage and high-tech learning

○ World Bank Development program (*infoDev*) 2001-03

- Major funder of e-readiness assessment—measure of country's ability to use information & communication technologies (ICT) to develop economy and foster welfare—grants to developing countries to form infrastructure for e-learning

- Grants intended to assist developing countries to meet their own unique needs

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• I. INTRODUCTION cont.

○ Badrul Khan (2003)

- With advent of e-learning methodologies and technologies many educational institutions beginning to view world as their market
- Question: What does it take to provide best open, flexible and distributed e-learning environments for diverse learner across the globe?
- Successful e-learning system is one in which learning actively fostered and supported, meaningful to all stakeholder groups
- Foundation requires systematic process of planning, design, development, evaluation and implementation in order to be easily accessible, learner-centered, affordable, flexible & have a facilitated learning environment

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- I. INTRODUCTION cont.

- Brown, Anderson & Murray (2007)

- Examined development of e-learning policy in Australia, Canada, Finland, Iceland, Korea, Japan, Sweden, United Kingdom & United States and found 3-stage pattern
- Stage 1 - Governmental Institutions act to make e-learning possible
- Stage 2 - They effectively mainstream e-learning by working to integrate it into educational systems
- State 3 - Transformation role for e-learning observed through changes to how learning is viewed and through changes to the nature and operation of post-secondary educational systems and institutions

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 - Ert, Winkler & Mandle (2007)
 - High expectations have surrounded e-learning initiatives in companies, universities and schools, but optimism has often given way to disillusionment - three central proposals to counteract "process of disillusionment"
 - (a) New technology be applied to learning only when its use reflects "new culture of learning"
 - (b) Academic and training programs must integrate e-learning into their existing training culture
 - (c) Important: - Implementation of e-learning programs should focus on the learner rather than on the technology {Khan (2003) e-learning systems to be learner-centered} and extent to which they fail to do so may explain the degree of disillusionment

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National University System

- 2nd largest private university in California
- Online Education Database (Oedb) 2011 report ranked NU's online program as being ranked first in U.S.
- Selection by APQC (non-profit organization specializing in benchmarking, knowledge management, measurement, and process improvement) to participate as best-practice partner in consortium benchmarking study
- Recently developed MA program in International Education which integrates educational philosophy, theory and practice with collaborative projects and field activities, and provides global perspectives and development of global competencies

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- NU began "distance learning" program in Sept 1996 consisting of lectures recorded on CDs which were mailed along with textbooks to 51 US and international students
- April 1998 signed contract with eCollege and offered first 2 e-learning courses to 39 students
- December 2001 averaging 100 e-learning courses each month to >1,500 students
- By 2007 >24,000 students enrolled in nearly 3,000 online courses each month and 90% of NU's active students took at least one or more courses online while > 2/3 enrolled online for majority of their course
- Within span of 10 yrs NU's entire academic programs and learning delivery systems evolved from exclusively on-site learning setting to a majority e-learning paradigm

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- 2004 NU President's Commission on Online Education tasked with examining "state of the art" in online education and then providing guidelines for creating a framework for e-learning program
- Spectrum Pacific Learning (SPL) established within NU System to develop and administer the e-learning system
 - Began total restructuring of course content, formats, and delivery systems under auspices of Premier E-learning Project (PEP)
 - PEP approach drew in part from Gagne's (1965) "Nine Events of Instruction"

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- Hazel & Mitchell (2006) cited two major factors for expansion of US institutions of higher education into global markets
 - US population growth has slowed due to decreased birth rates and only immigration provides noted increases in population
 - Increased demand for higher education in China and Pacific Rim countries
- NU entering global e-learning market with establishment of National University International (NUI)
 - Represents NU in Europe, Middle East, Pacific Rim, South America, and South East Asia establishing dialogue between international students and NUS academic program administrators

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Viet Nam's TOPICA Project

- World Bank *infoDev* grant provided “seed” funds for creation of nation-wide online system
 - Collaboratively utilizes both internal and external educational resources
 - Operates through cooperative efforts of Vietnamese higher education institutions who maintain their own individual online programs and identities
- CRC-TOPIC seeded with 2004 World Bank *infoDev* grant started programs to accelerate development of entrepreneurial companies (business incubation)

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- CRC-TOPIC cont.
- Creation of Viet Nam Young Entrepreneur Association and e-learning centers in each of Viet Nam's 64 provinces
 - Since 2005 approximately 87,000 students completed vocational ICT training at the 64 regional e-learning centers
 - 1,000 entrepreneur lectures delivered professional skills training for >10,000 students at 35 universities and colleges in combination with Viet Nam Young Entrepreneur Association and Thanh Giong.vn components
 - April 2006 funding and resources provided by Microsoft, Qualcomm, Hewlett-Packard corporations and the USAID program and newly expanded program became TOPICA64 project
- In 2008 Bachelor degree programs in Business, Accounting, and Information Communication Technology (ICT) in part with grant from Vietnam Foundation and became TOPICA Project

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- TOPICA Project newer developments
 - Bachelor degree program for Banking
 - TOPICA Amazing English online English-language learning social network for children 6 to 14 utilizing multi-player game format (Hawkins, 2004)
- Three of the four Vietnamese universities comprising TOPICA Project's Bachelor's degree e-learning efforts (Hanoi Open University, Duy Tan University, and Nguyen Tri University) have onsite Masters and Doctorate degree programs
 - An additional five university currently under negotiation to join TOPICA Project

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- TOPICA Project education group e-learning programs include:
 - Bachelor degree programs at training centers in the north, middle, and southern regions of Viet Nam
 - TOPICA Pro-Banker program provides professional skill training for banking industry
 - TOPICA Accelerator program which fosters development of entrepreneurial companies
 - TOPICA Amazing English language social network program for children
- Enrollment in four BA degree program areas at beginning of 2011 >4,000 students in hybrid configuration
 - First BA graduating class in 2011 - March 2009 initial enrollment
- Per-capita income in 2010 was \$1,168

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The African Virtual University

- World Bank *infoDev* grant provided for development of the African Virtual University (AVU) currently comprised of 53 partner institutions in 27 of the 54 countries in Africa
 - Stated mission is to “facilitate effective open distance and e-learning methodologies in African postsecondary education institutions”
- 1995 study by World Bank noted that higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa faced obstacles unique to geographical context
 - Student lack of access to programs and quality of programs offered
 - Inadequate facilities with recurring power outages
 - Declining budgets
 - Internal and external inefficiency

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- AVU initially begun by World Bank in Washington, DC in 1997 with goal of increasing access to education throughout the African continent
 - Looked to develop alternative modes of delivering educational programs that would complement existing higher learning institutions
- AVU transferred to Nairobi, Kenya in 2002
 - Kenya, Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, and Cote d'Ivoire signed charter establishing AVU as an Inter-Governmental Organization with diplomatic status in participating countries
 - Regional office added in Dakar, Senegal to serve partner institutions in West Africa
 - AVU developed an open distance and e-learning model (ODeL) that includes both low and high-end delivery technologies

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- AVU initially focused on delivering science and technology through establishment of learning centers intended to bridge digital gap between developed and developing nations
 - Proved too expensive and rigid due to limited ICT infrastructures and lack of trained technical personnel
 - Additional problems posed by frequent power outages, digital illiteracy, lack of internet/phone/computer access and “unfavorable ICT policies”
- AVU refocused strategy to include mixed mode of delivery
 - CDs, video and audio cassettes, printed materials, and mobile learning units, and in some instance video conferencing
 - By 2007 installed more than 53 distance learning programs in 27 countries

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- AVU distance learning centers act as physical hubs for creation, organization, and sharing of knowledge
 - Established at AVU partner institutions in Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Senegal, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe
 - AVU provides equipment, internet access and training for its use
 - Partner institutions provide facilities to conduct online courses, day-to-day operations, and equipment maintenance
- Funding provided by African Development Bank and United Nations Development Program (UNDP)
 - Typical AVU remote class consists of 25 to 50 students who meet at the different learning centers working online or viewing lectures on a large screen

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- Since establishment in 1997, AVU has focused heavily on e-learning, managing an e-library, and building a consortium of African educational institutions serving students in French, English, and Portuguese languages
 - Recently initiated Multinational E-Learning Project (2010) whose goal is to develop teacher education programs in math and science
- AVU developed local technological infrastructure and trained local partner university members to use the system and develop content in their regional language
 - Goal is to improve education at all levels throughout Africa by strengthening teacher pool
 - In addition to degree program, 2 certificate programs for existing teachers - >300 graduates

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- AVU also began a "Capacity Enhancement Program (CEP)" to build capacity of African postsecondary institutions to increase access to higher education through e-learning
 - Since 2009 training provided to more than 132 university staff from 24 universities in 17 countries
- AVU initiatives in Somalia intended to enhance the competence and knowledge of Somali labor force
 - Scholarships provided for Somali women
 - AVU assists United Nations Development Fund (UNDF) Somali institutional development programs
 - More than 4,000 students graduated
 - 30% female graduates

Quote: Lola May
"Teaching:

- (a) Know your stuff
- (b) Know who you are stuffing
- (c) Then stuff them elegantly