Upskilling and Upscaling for Quality Open, Flexible and Distance Learning. Introduction to Selected Contributions from the 2021 ICDE Virtual Global Conference Week

OPEN — PRAXIS

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ABSTRACT

This *Open Praxis* special issue compiles six selected papers derived from contributions presented at the 2021 ICDE Virtual Global Conference Week that took place online in October, including two articles that received the Best Paper Awards in the two conference tracks: innovation and open education, respectively. The issue includes three more research papers and one innovative practice article from the conference. Finally, the issue includes one book review.

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This *Open Praxis* special issue collects a selection of full papers developed from six contributions to the academic papers section at the 2021 ICDE Virtual Global Conference Week that took place online from 25 to 29 of October 2021. It includes five research articles and one innovative practice article that were specially valued by the scientific committee and thus were invited to submit full papers to *Open Praxis*. The issue is completed with a book review related to the topic of the conference, as well.

A total of 17 authors from six different countries (Ireland, Germany, Sri Lanka, United Kingdom, United States of America and India) have contributed to this issue.

The academic papers section of the 2021 ICDE Virtual Global Conference Week was divided into two thematic tracks: one about innovation in education, and one about open education & OER. The scientific committee that reviewed the contributions consisted of the following international members:

- Inés Gil-Jaurena, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), Spain, Editor of *Open Praxis* (Chair)

- Jane-Frances Obiageli Agbu, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), Nigeria

- Cengiz Hakan Aydin, Anadolu University, Turkey

- Rosa Leonor Ulloa Cazarez, Guadalajara University, Mexico

- Cristine Gusmão, Federal University of Pernambuco, Brazil

- Mpine Makoe, The University of South Africa (UNISA), South Africa

- Carlos Alberto P. De Oliveira, State University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

- Ebba Ossiannilsson, Swedish Association of Distance Education, Sweden

- Xiangyang Zhang, Open University of Jiangsu, China

Each academic contribution to the conference was reviewed by two members of the Scientific Committee, who considered the following criteria:

- Quality of Content

- Significance for theory or practice

- Originality and level of innovativeness

- Thematic Relevance for the "Call for Papers"

One paper per track received the Best Paper Award, and other contributions that had received good reviews were invited to submit the full paper to be published in this special *Open Praxis* issue.

The first two research papers in this issue received the Best Paper Award, one for each of the thematic tracks.

The award for the Best Paper related to the conference theme *Upskilling and Upscaling for innovation in education through new technologies and practices* was awarded to the Irish team composed by Gerard Peter Creaner, Sinead Patricia Creaner and Colm Fiachra Creaner, for their contribution: *Innovative Application & Enrollment Processes for More Informed Students: Reflections on the benefits of this innovative process through the analytical lens of Behavioural Science*. The Scientific Committee highlighted that this contribution covers a not so explored topic, presenting an innovative process for enrolling and engaging students in educational offerings.

The Best Paper award for the paper related to the conference theme *Upskilling and Upscaling for Open Education and OER: Evolutions for Open Education and Open Learning Ecosystems* was awarded to the German author Daniel Otto for his contribution: *How to promote the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) in Higher Education. A Parley with OER Experienced Teachers*. The Scientific Committee highlighted that this paper focuses on the findings from the teachers who are already using OER in higher education, and it will contribute immensely to research in OER and OEP.

These two awards were announced at the Conference Closing Ceremony in October 29th, and the full papers open the special issue.

The third research paper is also related to the conference track about OER, open education and open learning ecosystems. Authored by a team from the Open University of Sri Lanka led by Shironica P. Karunanayaka along with W.M.S. Weerakoon, H. D. Wijesekera, N.M.R.K. Nawarathna, P. Ramathaas and M.D.B.P. Weerasinghe, the paper *Towards digital thinking and practices: Experiences of Sri Lankan teachers and students* reports on the implementation of the Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) programme to foster digital education in Sri Lankan secondary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The fourth and fifth research papers are related to the conference track about innovation in education through new technologies and practices, particularly to the topic of online assessment.

A team composed by Linda Amrane-Cooper, Stylianos Hatzipanagos and Alan Tait, from the United Kingdom, present the paper *Developing Student Behaviours that Support Academic Integrity in Distance Learning*, where they analyze the experience of transition to online assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic with a focus on academic integrity as a relevant concern. The research builds upon the testimonies of a large sample of students and examiners from the University of London.

In the fifth paper –*A formative assessment design suitable for online learning environments and its impact on students' learning*– Prasad Senadheera and Geetha Udayangani Kulasekara, from the University of Sri Lanka, present a case study about the transition to online assessment in a specific course during the COVID-19 pandemic. They explain the process of constructive alignment between the intended learning outcomes and the online assessment methods, and they report on the students' perceptions about the experience.

In the innovative practice papers section, Thomas Patrick Mackey and Sheila Marie Aird from SUNY Empire State College (USA) present the paper *Integrating Metaliteracy into the Design of a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) Course in Digital Storytelling*. They report on the re-design of a course that is developed by a team of teachers in the USA and the Czech Republic. The authors describe the process and highlight lessons learned and implications derived from the international collaborative online experience.

Finally, Ramesh Chander Sharma from India presents a review of the book *Reimagining Digital Learning for Sustainable Development. How Upskilling, Data Analytics, and Educational Technologies Close the Skills*, published in 2021 and edited by Sheila Jagannathan.

With apologies for the delay of the publication of this *Open Praxis* issue, we specially thank the authors and members of the 2021 ICDE Virtual Global Conference Week Scientific Committee that have contributed specially to this issue, and we hope the different contributions will be of interest to our readers.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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