



Sam C. Y. (2021). *Teaching higher education to lead: Strategies for the digital age*. Business Expert Press

Begüm Burak<sup>A</sup>

A

Independent researcher

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2022.5.1.15>

We live in an age of information overload and technological innovations are changing our world at breakneck speed. The use of digital tools has begun to play a key role in higher education. Dr. Sam Choon-Yin's book *Teaching higher education to lead: Strategies for the digital age* which was first published in December 2021 is a very timely, relevant and insightful book. Sam Choon-Yin is the Dean (Academic Partnerships) at Kaplan Singapore. His book is addressed at everybody with an interest in higher education and provides an intriguing perspective. It links technological development to demand for education, credentials of higher education, and jobs while touching on issues of strategies and higher education policies for the digital age. By drawing attention to the changing structure of teaching and learning in universities and various emerging challenges, the author sheds light on how education can be effectively carried out in the digital age to serve the needs of students and hiring companies and ultimately the institutions of higher education.

*Teaching higher education to lead: Strategies for the digital age* has eight chapters and a rich bibliography. The other parts of the book include testimonials, preface, epilogue, a section about the author and a detailed index. In the beginning, the book provides the readers with a precise description of some of the key concepts: higher education; leadership and digitalization. A key research question of the author is how universities may remain competitive and relevant in the age of digitalization.

Chapter 1 is entitled "University education—then, now, and the future". It provides significant insights regarding the history of higher education in Europe, Asia and the United States. In addition, it covers the purposes of education, from the training of clerics to maintain order to the training of students to enter the workforce. With reference to classical thinkers such as Adam Smith, the author explains what education has to offer, including the aim to lay a foundation for a decent society. The author argues that higher education institutions were deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and he provides some ideas on the role of education in the post-pandemic world.

Chapter 2 addresses the topic of credentials and qualifications in higher education. The author begins the chapter with a thought-provoking question: Who could be against higher education? Sam writes that the "notion that attainment of academic qualification does not automatically lead to higher payoff, especially for qualifications that are not entirely helpful in one's career, has been elevated as the hard truth of today's complex and competitive society" (p. 19). He gives examples from transnational corporations with global reputations to support his argument: Alphabet does not hire people because of their educational credentials, but looks for the candidate's learning ability. An important insight in this chapter is that it is the drive for commercial objectives that is partially responsible for the weakening of higher education credentials. The author concludes that educational leaders play a vital role in combating perceived failures of higher education institutions as they are among the people who have the capability to strike the right balance between commercial and educational interests.

The issue of jobs and technology is addressed in chapter 3. In this chapter, Sam focuses on how technology is taking over our jobs. He covers the history of the fear of automation creating massive unemployment. We are reminded of a number of thoughts about the fear of workers being displaced by technology. According to Bill Gates, "job replacement is coming too fast to the extent the technological disruption ought to be controlled and even slowed down" (p. 37). At the same time, chapter 3 argues that technology also has a positive impact on creating new job opportunities.

Chapter 4 is entitled "Staying relevant in the digital age". Sam contends that despite the many criticisms that question the relevance of universities, people's lives continue to be transformed through higher education. The author also sheds light on the ways of how universities can stay relevant in the digital age. For one, universities should offer the courses that employers need. In addition, universities need to impart digital skills that students need, teach students metacognitive abilities how to learn and help them develop soft skills and adapt to the pedagogy of online teaching.

Chapter 5 highlights the passion for learning. According to the author, a “passionate learner asks tons of questions, and (like Socrates) is more willing to admit that he or she does not know everything” (p. 71). In this chapter, we are reminded that with passion, the learning progress can be extremely enjoyable. Education is conceptualized as self-actualization (the highest need in Maslow’s hierarchy) where learners go through a demanding period of preparation in order to realize their potential.

Issues of learning in the digital age are dealt with in chapter 6. Like in previous chapters, critical highlights are presented. One of them is about how the human brain works. Others include how people learn and how the internet affects our ability to learn. The author provides some statistical data showing the prevalence of technology and internet usage around the world. For example, in Singapore, a person spends a shocking average of 12 hours 42 minutes a day on their digital devices such as mobile phones, tablets, and computers. The author concludes that the internet can be a powerful tool to supplement traditional learning if used in a meaningful way.

Chapter 7, entitled “Good to great teachers”, discusses what teachers do. The author focuses on the question of ‘what makes a good teacher great?’ and argues that a great teacher refrains from labeling students as lazy and employs a variety of teaching methods while teaching students how to learn. In this chapter, important insights are presented about measuring teaching effectiveness. One of them is to consider teachers’ contributions to student achievement. The author also provides some useful models in table form that conceptualize educational effectiveness and a framework for teaching.

“Leadership in higher education” is the focus of the final chapter. It begins with a significant assessment: “Balancing the business and educational goals of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the private sector is one of the greatest challenges for HEI leaders” (p.125). The author sheds light on some improper practices in higher education and notes that in Chile and Mexico, the expansion of the private education sector has not led to improved quality. One of the arguments presented notes that when commercial goals constitute a major part of the business, there is a risk that the commercial goals may override educational interests. The author argues that it is important for HEI leaders to understand what it takes to be responsible leaders. A responsible higher education leader strives to balance commercial and educational demands, giving neither more emphasis than the other.

*Teaching higher education to lead: Strategies for the digital age* is a very significant book that provides major contributions to our understanding of higher education. One of the contributions is the sharing of the author’s experience and insights about the challenges of education, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic that led to major changes in the delivery of higher education through online teaching. The pace of digitalization of teaching and learning requires administrators, educators, and students to adapt to the new ways of delivering education. Sam Choon-Yin’s book provides a strategic perspective addressing the most recent issues of higher education. I highly recommend reading this fabulous book for a unique view on our lifelong educational journey.